
Guide to the
common
app



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What is the Common App? Why is it important?

The common app is a website and portal that is used to submit your applications to colleges at the same time in the same place. This is why it is called the “common app”.

It is designed to make applying for college easier.

How do I get to the Common App?

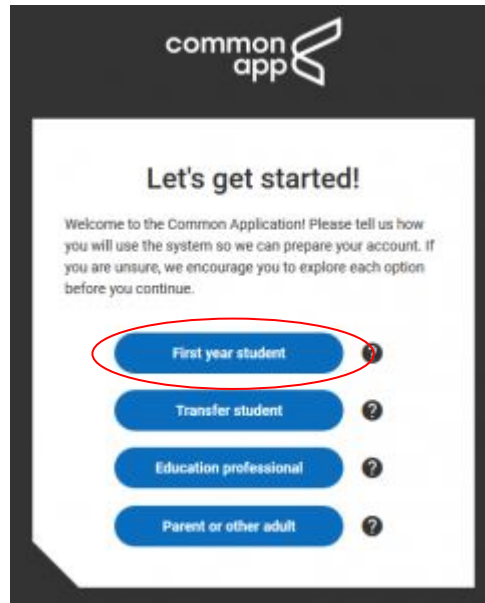
Start the college application process at:

www.commonapp.org

Step 1: Create your account

Create your account using the button in the top right corner

Choose your account type



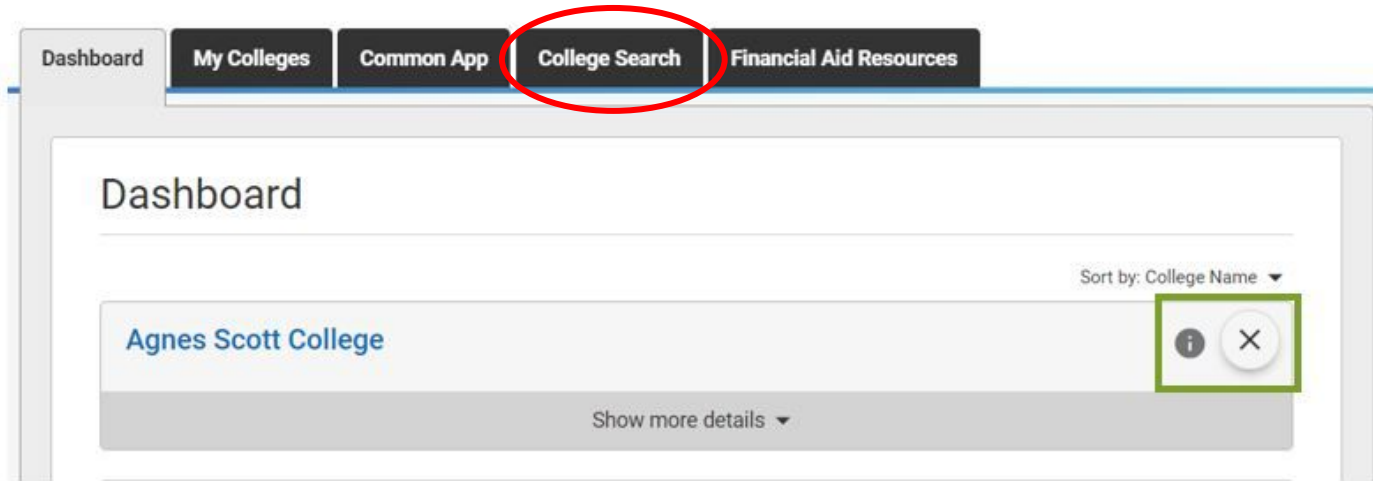
Step 1: Create your account

In order to create your account you will need to enter:

- Email address that you will remember to check often
- Password that you will remember ***write it down***
- Legal first and last name
- Phone number
- Date of birth
- Address

Step 2: Adding Colleges

Once you have created your account, you will see a welcome message and new tabs will appear. Click the “College Search” tab to find the colleges you want to apply to and add them to your “My Colleges” tab.



Step 3: Complete the My Profile Section

This section is found under the “common app” tab.

Here, you will fill our basic information about yourself including:

- **Name**
- **Address**
- **Contact information**
- **Demographics**
- **Location**
- **Language**
- **Citizenship**
- **Common App Fee Waiver***

Step 4: Complete Family Section

They want to find out what college, if any, that your parent(s) and sibling(s) attended or are attending.

They also want to know how many people are living in your house and whether your parents are together or not (similar to FAFSA questions).

The screenshot shows the 'Family' section of a Common Application. On the left is a navigation menu with the following items: 'Common Application' (highlighted), 'Profile', 'Family' (highlighted), 'Education', 'Testing', 'Activities', 'Writing', and 'Courses & Grades' (with a sub-note '0 college(s) require'). The main content area is titled 'Family' and includes a 'Video Tutorials' button. Below the title are three expandable sections: 'Household', 'Parent 1', and 'Parent 2' (which is currently expanded). The 'Parent 2' section contains a dropdown menu labeled 'Parent 2 type*' with the following options: 'I do not have another parent to list', 'Mother', 'Father', 'I have limited information about this parent', and 'I do not have another parent to list' (highlighted in green).

Family Section

Family

Video Tutorials

Household

Parents' marital status (relative to each other)*

Choose an option

With whom do you make your permanent home?*

Choose an option

Do you have any children?

Yes

No

Clear Answer

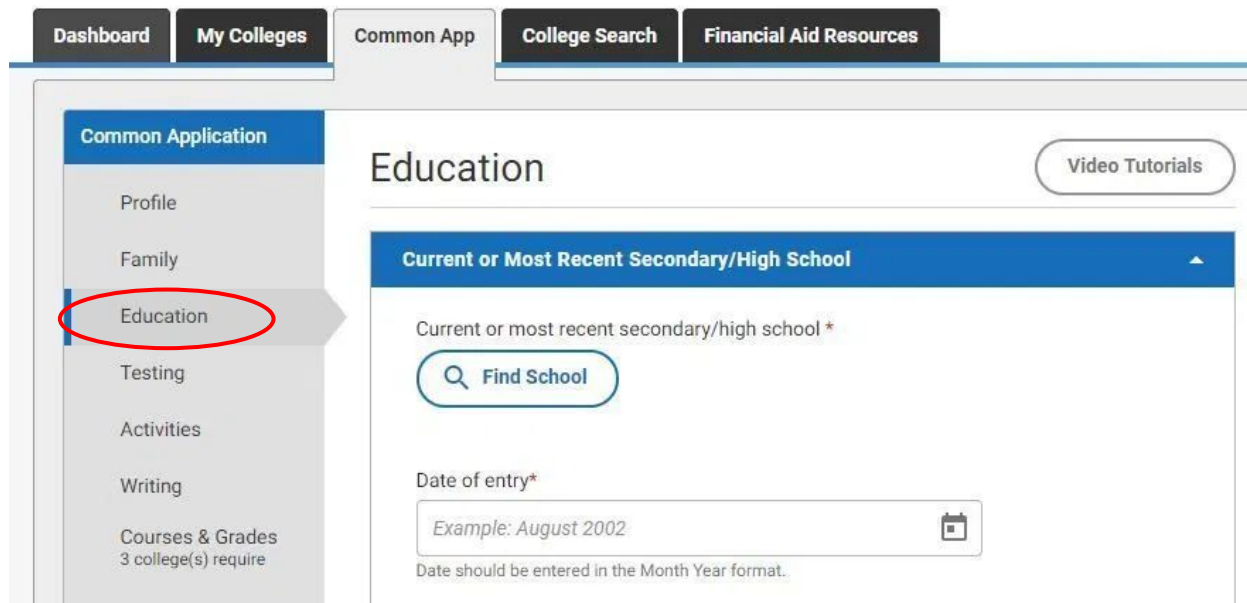
Continue

Parent 1	▼
Parent 2	▼
Sibling	▼

Step 5: Complete Education Section

Here you will add information about your high school:

- when you attended
- guidance counselor info
- your grades
- class ranking
- GPA
- course information
- honors and awards
- future plans
- career interests



The screenshot shows the Common App interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Dashboard, My Colleges, Common App, College Search, and Financial Aid Resources. Below these is a sidebar menu for the Common Application, with options: Profile, Family, Education (highlighted with a red circle), Testing, Activities, Writing, and Courses & Grades (3 college(s) require). The main content area is titled 'Education' and features a 'Video Tutorials' button. Below the title is a section for 'Current or Most Recent Secondary/High School'. It includes a search bar with a magnifying glass icon and the text 'Find School'. Below the search bar is a 'Date of entry*' field with a calendar icon and the example text 'Example: August 2002'. A note below the date field states 'Date should be entered in the Month Year format.'

Step 6: Complete Testing Section

This section asks about any standardized tests you have taken, such as SAT and ACT tests.

Testing Video Tutorials

Tests Taken

In addition to sending official score reports as required by colleges, do you wish to self-report scores or future test dates for any of the following standardized tests: ACT, SAT/SAT Subject, AP, IB, TOEFL, PTE Academic, and IELTS?*

Yes
 No

[Clear Answer](#)

Indicate all tests you wish to report. Be sure to include tests you expect to take in addition to tests you have already taken.*

[Click here for options](#)

International applicants: Is promotion within your educational system based upon standard leaving examinations given at the end of lower and/or senior secondary school by a state or national leaving examinations board? (Students studying in the US typically answer no to this question.)

Yes
 No

[Clear Answer](#)

[Continue](#)

Senior Secondary Leaving Examinations

Step 7: Complete the Activities Section



Tip: Put the most meaningful and impactful activities in this section.

It's not about doing the most activities.

If you only participated in something once or twice, or started something and didn't finish, don't include it here.

Activities

Reporting activities can help colleges better understand your life outside of the classroom. Examples of activities might include:

- Arts or music
- Clubs
- Community engagement
- Family responsibilities
- Hobbies
- Sports
- Work or volunteering
- Other experiences that have been meaningful to you

Do you have any activities that you wish to report?*

Yes

No

[Clear Answer](#)

Please list your activities in the order of their importance to you:

Activity 1

Activity type*

Choose an option

Position/Leadership description and organization name, if applicable*

Please describe this activity, including what you accomplished and any recognition you received, etc. (Max characters: 150)*

Participation grade levels*

9

10

11

12

Post-graduate

Step 8: Complete the Writing Section

This section is an opportunity for you to explain something about yourself that is not captured via your grades or the questions they ask on the common app.

Don't get hung up on this part

The questions they ask are purposely broad and vague.

Some colleges will require an additional personal essay.

Personal Essay

Some colleges require submission of the personal essay with your Common Application. You may submit a personal essay to any college, even if it is not required by that college. If not required by a college, you will be given the option during submission to include your essay or not for that college.*

I understand

Here is the current list of colleges on your Dashboard and whether they require the Personal Essay.

Required	Not Required
• Harvard University	

The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma—anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Essay Prompts (2020)

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Essay Prompts

2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Essay Prompts

3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

Essays Prompts

4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

Essay Prompts

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Essay Prompts

6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more.

Essay Prompts

7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Tips on the Writing Section

- Be specific about what you choose to write about. Do not answer the prompt in broad and vague language.
- Don't try to cram your life story in 650 words.
- Be genuine

Additional Tips

- **Pay attention to deadlines.**
- You can only apply to 20 colleges at a time.
- Some colleges will have additional writing requirements, and some will not have any at all. **Be mindful of this.**
- You can only apply to one college Early Decision. That means if you get accepted, you **HAVE** to go to that school. It's a binding contract.

Common App Fee Waiver

Any of the following indicators of economic need can qualify you for a Common App fee waiver:

- You have received or are eligible to receive an ACT or SAT testing fee waiver
- You are enrolled in or eligible to participate in the federal free or reduced price lunch program (FRPL)
- Your annual family income falls within the Income eligibility guidelines set by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service
- You are enrolled in a federal, state, or local program that aids students from low-income families (e.g., TRIO programs such as Upward Bound)
- Your family receives public assistance
- You live in a federally subsidized public housing, a foster home or are homeless
- You are a ward of the state or an orphan
- You can provide a supporting statement from a school official, college access counselor, financial aid officer, or community leader

Your counselor will be asked to complete a fee waiver form to affirm your request for a fee waiver.

Common App Fee Waiver

You can find the Common App Fee Waiver in the **Profile section** of the Common App tab. To apply for this fee waiver:
1. Answer “Yes” to the fee waiver statement.

Common App Fee Waiver

Our member colleges want to make sure that application fees do not pose a barrier for any student who wishes to apply for admission. Do you feel that your financial circumstances might qualify you for an application fee waiver?

[Learn more*](#)

Yes

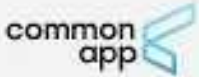
No

Clear Answer

Continue



Letters of Recommendation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4qXDmfuR3A>



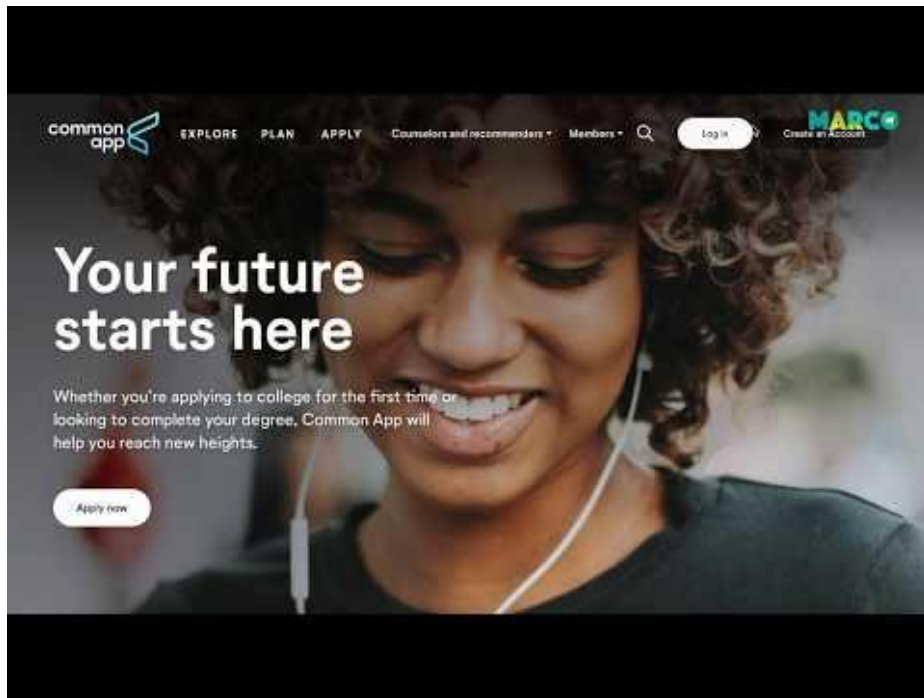
Inviting Recommenders

First-Year Applicants



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Helpful Video Guide



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JyKt-vyZf4