Guide to Filling Out the Common Application

To Begin

- Go to www.commonapp.org and click on "Create an Account."
- Register with an email address that is professional—your colleges will be able to see it.
- Use an account that you check often—this is where you'll receive updates, submission confirmation, and instructions for setting up an applicant portal to check that all elements of your application have been received by a college.

The Profile Section

Personal Information

- If you want to add information to the gender identity section but are unsure of how best to respond, talk about this with your Marks Education counselor.

Address

- If you are at a boarding school and have an alternate mailing address to include, make sure you know the exact dates that you will be there, so that the colleges you are applying to know where and when to send you mail.

Contact Details

- This is where schools will look when they need to get in touch with you, so ensure that all your contact details are accurate and complete, especially your cell phone number.

Demographics

- Filling out the demographics section is optional—whether and how you want to identify your background on your application is completely up to you!

Geography

- If your birthday is in the fall, consider that when indicating the number of years you've lived in the US or another country.

Language

- The Common Application measures language proficiency by how comfortable you are using another language as a form of communication, i.e. whether you can communicate effectively and converse comfortably. If you found yourself on an unfamiliar street corner in the country where the language is spoken, would you be able to find your way home by reading signs or talking to locals?

Citizenship

- If you are applying for financial aid/scholarships, you must include your Social Security Number. If not, this is optional. Colleges keep this information confidential, so there is no risk in including it.

The Family Section

Household

- Answer questions about your household truthfully and to the best of your knowledge.

Parent 1/Parent2

- If your parents attended multiple universities, enter their degrees in chronological order, beginning from oldest to most recent. This makes their educational history easier to read.

Siblings

- Designating your sibling's relationship to you is optional, so feel free to leave that question blank if you choose. If you are including multiple siblings, list them from oldest to youngest.

The Education Section

Current or Most Recent Secondary/High School

- When asked for your "Date of Entry," indicate the month and the year in which you began 9th grade, even if you attended the same school prior to high school.
- If you've taken time off before college, keep your response to this section factual and positive with regard to the lessons you learned over the course of your time off.
- Refer to your counselor's email signature to find their accurate job title and contact information. If a college admissions officer has questions or concerns during the admissions process, you want him/her to be able to reach your counselor easily, so double check that these details are accurate!

Other Secondary/High Schools

- Once you indicate that you attended another high school, you'll be asked to complete a 250-word statement on why you changed schools. We recommend focusing on the positive impact the school change had on you in this section. Be specific—why was the new school a better opportunity for you?

Share your draft with your counselor via GuidedPath, just the way you would with any other essay you're submitting to colleges.

Colleges & Universities

- If you have taken any courses through a college or university, including summer enrichment programs held on college campuses that do not award college credits, note those courses in this section.
- If you indicate that a transcript is available, colleges will expect you to send this transcript as a part of your application.

Grades

- High schools have different approaches to this section, and you want to be sure that you are consistent with your classmates, so get your high school counselor's recommendations for how to complete this section before you begin.
- Many high schools don't rank—if that is the case for your high school, select "None" for this question. If your high school does rank, check your official transcript (from the end of Junior year) and then select the appropriate rank here.
- List your approximate graduating class size if you aren't sure of the exact number.
- List your cumulative GPA as it is shown on your official transcript through the end of your junior year.
- The GPA scale refers to the scale on which you are graded. The 4.0 scale is used by most high schools. If you are unsure of which scale your high school uses, either check with your counselor or look on your transcript (which might indicate whether your GPA is "weighted" or "unweighted" with a "W" or a "U").

Current or Most Recent Year Courses

- Input all of the courses you will be taking for your senior year in this section. Enter your core academic courses first, (English, math, science, social studies, and world languages) with the titles exactly as they appear on your transcript.
- If you have not used the "Preview" function in the top right corner of the application, this is a good time to do so. Clicking this button shows you exactly how your application will look to college admissions officers.
- If you are taking a class that is not designated AP, but in fact prepares you for the AP exam, list the title of the course (for example, English 12), then put "(AP Prep)" after the title. If you are taking a post-AP course, such as Multivariable Calculus, include "(Post-AP)" after the course title.

Honors

- You have only 100 characters (not words, but characters) to describe each honor. These could include Honor Roll, Dean's List, National language exam medals, AP Scholar designations, among many others. Whatever your accolades, this is not a place to be modest!
- Check with your Marks Education counselor if you are unsure of the level of recognition for an honor. For example, National Merit Semifinalist is a state/regional distinction, while National Honor Society is a high school distinction.
- Any honors awarded during the summer should be listed as earned during the rising grade. So if you are named an AP Scholar in the summer between 11th and 12th grades, please note this as a 12th grade honor.
- If you have any additional questions about how to list your honors, please ask your Marks Education counselor.

Future Plans

- Colleges are hoping to get a sense of your interests, goals, and intentions in order to build a picture of who you are. For your career interest, select something that goes along with your major. The Common App gives you a number of options, but if nothing looks right, you can always scroll down and select "other."
- Identify some kind of higher degree you intend to earn. It shows ambition and you can always change your mind! No one ever is going to hold you to what you put in this section.

The Testing Section

- This section is optional, but we recommend completing it!
- Enter the highest scores you want to report. If you aren't sure which scores are the highest, ask your Marks Education counselor, especially if you are applying test-optional.

The Activities Section

- This is one of the most important sections of the Common App. It is also the most time-consuming, so make sure to set aside enough time to complete it and use Marks Education's Common Application Activities Sheet to help you brainstorm [ADD LINK]. The admissions committee is eager to learn what is important to you and will refer to this information as they consider your potential contributions to their campus community.

- You are allowed to enter up to 10 activities. These include in-school and out-of-school commitments such as clubs, athletics, jobs, enrichment programs, community service, and family responsibilities, among others.
- Before you begin filling this section out, organize your activities in their order of importance to YOU. You should start with your most important activity, then add your second-most important activity, and so on.
- You get 50 characters to describe your "Position/Leadership" role for each activity. This could include being a President, member, midfielder, features editor, lead fundraiser, or actor. You'll have another 100 characters to provide the name of the organization, club, team or employer.
- You're allowed 150 characters to more fully describe this activity. In this field, you should provide information that helps the reader understand both your commitment and your contributions. For example, did your team win any championships? Did you build houses on a habitat service project? Did you pitch a business plan to CEOs in your summer program? Was your main responsibility to provide customer service at your afterschool job? Include information here that helps the admissions committee understand what you did, and why it was important to you
- For the participation grade levels, "post-graduate" applies only to students taking a post-graduate year after high school. As with honors, activities pursued during summer should be listed for the rising grade. If you are a camp counselor in the summer between 11th and 12th grade, note this as a 12th grade activity.
- When you indicate the timing of your participation in each activity, "during school year" means you ONLY participate in this activity during the school year. "During school break" means you only participate in this activity during the summer, spring, or winter breaks. And "all year" means you participate year round.
- For "hours spent per week" and "weeks spent per year," make an estimate. You do not need to be exact.
- No college will hold you to how you answer whether you intend to participate in a similar activity when you get to college, but saying "yes" here shows that you plan to be engaged outside of the classroom.
- For all of your activities, make sure that you use the same format. Given the character limit, we do not recommend using full sentences. You will find that you have more space if you use less formal fragments to describe your activities.
- Speak to your Marks Education counselor about how best to represent activities that should have taken place during Spring and Summer 2020 but were canceled due to COVID-19.

- Once you have completed your activities brainstorming, complete Marks Education's Common Application Activities Sheet and upload it to GuidedPath for your counselor's review.

The Writing Section

- You will work on the writing section with your Marks Education counselor. Once your personal essay is edited, you will paste your final version here.

Additional Information

- You can answer "no" to leave this section blank, but if you feel you need to use this section, discuss the best approach with your Marks Education counselor. You can use this space for a number of reasons:
    - To continue your list of activities
    - To provide a more detailed description of activities that require a longer explanation
    - To include a short résumé (check with your Marks Education counselor to see if this is necessary)
    - To provide an explanation of grades, if necessary
    - To speak to details, circumstances, or qualifications not reflected in the application
- Once you have filled out the entire application, you should contact your Marks Education counselor for an initial review. After reviewing your application, we will provide you with a list of edits that we suggest. You should implement these edits and then have a trusted adult, such as a parent, review your application a final time. Remember, consistency, proper grammar, and punctuation are important!

The My Colleges Tab, School-Specific Questions, and Submitting

- Before you can submit your completed Common App to a school, you must complete the school-specific questions and assign the appropriate number of recommenders. These items are found on the My Colleges tab.
- When you click "My Colleges," you will see a list of the schools that you have added using the college search tab (check out the first video here for a tutorial on searching and adding colleges to your list, and this one about navigating the My Colleges tab). Click on the school that you are applying to. For example, let's say you are applying to Amherst College. Click "Amherst College," then, in the center of the screen, you will see general information, as well as application requirements.

Questions

- On the left menu bar, click "Questions" to access Amherst's school-specific questions. These questions differ from school to school. You will also find some schools' writing supplements here. If you have any

questions on how to complete this section, don't hesitate to contact your Marks Ed counselor. Green checkmarks will appear next to each section here after it is complete. You can also check your progress on questions and writing supplements for a particular schools on the Common App Dashboard (check out this video for a few more tips on using the Dashboard).

Recommendations and FERPA

- Underneath the school-specific "Questions" sidebar you will find the "Recommenders and FERPA" field. You must complete the Education Section of the Common Application before you can move on to this section. You must also sign the FERPA agreement before you can view the remaining information in this section. Read through the agreement, and click the box indicating that you have read and understood the agreement, and then click "continue."
- On the second page, click the top box authorizing your high school to send your records and recommendations to the colleges to which you are applying. Then click the box waiving your right to see these records, and the box indicating that you understand that your waiver applies to all colleges to which you are applying. Finally, sign and date the agreement.
- If you are applying to an early decision program, you must also invite and assign a parent or legal guardian to complete a simple form indicating that they understand that you are entering a binding agreement.
- This section also lets you know how many recommendations the individual colleges will require. Amherst College requires two teacher recommendations and allows for one additional recommendation. If you are planning to send any supplemental recommendations, please check with your Marks Education counselor about the best way to do this.
- If you have any challenges with this section, check out these Common Apps video tutorials on how to complete the FERPA Release Authorization and invite recommenders.
- Once all of this is complete and you have had a Marks Education counselor AND another trusted adult review and sign off on it, click the third section on the sidebar, "Review and Submit - Common App."

Review and Submit - Common App

- A preview PDF is generated automatically once you click the "review and submit" button here. After you complete your final review of the application, click "continue" and "make payment" to pay the application fee—have a credit card handy! You will need to sign once again before officially submitting the application.

A Few Final Submission Tips

- The Common Application is completely paperless. While this means that you cannot mail a copy of the application to an institution, you may choose to print a copy for yourself and/or save a PDF for your records on the Dashboard.
- Remember, you can edit your Common App after submission to one college and before submission to another in order to correct any errors or update information. There is no limit to application versions; you can make unlimited edits to the application, including your essays. However, you should not customize the main essay for a particular college.
- College-specific essays will appear on the writing supplement, if required. If we go back to Amherst College, you will see that they require a writing supplement. Once this section is complete, a green checkmark will appear and you will be able to preview and submit your writing supplement, just as you did with the Common Application. Make sure Marks Education AND another trusted adult have reviewed and signed off on your supplement(s) before submission. After your submission to the college has been successful, you will see green check marks under “Application” and “Writing Supplement” for that school.

Finally, If you have any trouble submitting your application, review this video provided by the Common Application about submission.