



Common Application FAQs 2023

How long can my Personal Statement be?

The guidelines specify 250 to 650 words. You will not be able to submit your application if your essay exceeds 650 words or is shorter than 250 words. The word count will appear on the screen and indicate how many words need to be added or deleted to meet the requirements.

Should I list my AP or IB courses under Education – Colleges and Universities?

No.

What is FERPA?

FERPA is the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act, a law that gives students the right to read confidential letters of recommendation under certain circumstances. You will be asked if you want to waive this right on the Common Application in the Recommenders and FERPA section. We recommend that students waive their FERPA right so the colleges who read them are reassured that these letters were written candidly by their teachers.

Can I assign different recommenders to different colleges?

Yes. This is especially helpful if one college you are applying to allows up to three letters of recommendation, but another allows only one; you can decide which letter goes to each college.

Should I create tailored Personal Essays for each college by making multiple versions of my Common Application?

You may find it helpful to use different Personal Essays for different colleges depending on what information you share with them in their supplemental essays. You should not tailor your Personal Essay for each college to which you apply.

How do I find the supplements for the colleges I am applying to?

When you add a college to your list, their specific Questions and Writing Supplement will appear in the My Colleges section of the application. Depending on the college, the required essays may appear in either the Questions section or the Writing Supplement section.

How do I find the Early Decision Agreement?

When you add a college to My Colleges and then move into its supplemental questions, you will be asked to indicate under which admissions program you are applying, which will vary from college to college. If you indicate that you are applying Early Decision, the Early Decision Agreement will be made available to you on that same page. (This is also true for Early Decision 2 applications.)

Once you sign your FERPA waiver, you will be able to send an ED agreement to your parent(s) from the Recommenders page.

Where do I find the arts supplements?

When you add a college to My Colleges and then move into their Questions section, you are asked if you are going to submit an arts supplement or portfolio, if that college accepts them. If you indicate yes, then a link to either the college's own supplement or to Slideroom.com will appear. Many colleges use Slideroom.com to accept arts documentation, including the performing arts. If you indicate no, then that option will no longer be available to you.

Do I have to self-report my courses and grades?

Some colleges do require students to self-report their courses and grades in the Common Application for grades 9 through 12. You do not have to fill out the section if you are not applying to a college or university with this requirement.

Some other colleges require students to self-report the courses and grades through another platform such as SRAR.

What happens if I make a mistake on the self-reported Courses and Grades section or on the Testing Page?

Once a college has accepted you and you have made a deposit, your high school will forward your final transcript. If there is a discrepancy between your self-reporting and the official grades or test scores, your college will assess whether the discrepancy is small enough to appear innocent (e.g., you reported a B+ instead of a B) or large enough to suggest deliberate deception (e.g., you reported an A+ instead of C). In the event that they conclude the discrepancy was deliberate, they may revoke your admission. Proofread carefully, and if you discover an error, you can always contact specific colleges by email or phone to apologize and to ask how they would like to handle a correction.

The application only lets me enter my best scores from the subsections of the ACT and SAT. Does that mean that colleges are going to “superscore” my ACT results?

Most colleges already combine your highest scores from different test dates on the sections of the SAT to create your “superscore.” However, fewer colleges superscore the ACT. The Common Application asks you to enter your highest scores by each section and to indicate the specific date on which you earned that score. However, this does NOT mean that every college will superscore your testing or calculate a new composite score based on your highest scores on the subsections.

Most colleges require official score reports from the testing agency for verification, although many accept self-reporting until you matriculate. Check the requirements for each college on your list.

Do I have to report my ACT and SAT test scores to colleges?

Test score reporting requirements can vary from college to college and many have remained “test optional” since Covid-19. On the flip side, some require you to submit all test scores, some require all from either the ACT or SAT, and some allow you to decide what you want to send. It is your responsibility to know the requirements for each college you apply to.

You do not need to self-report your scores on the Common Application or send an official score report to colleges that don’t require scores. However, test optional colleges may have other requirements if you don’t submit scores, such as an evaluative interview or the submission of a graded paper. Be sure to check with each college about their requirements.

You may also report scores from Advanced Placement (AP) exams. We typically recommend reporting scores of 4 or 5.

Can I change my application (for example, if I want to submit scores to some colleges but not to others, or if I change my essay)?

You cannot change an application to a college once it has been submitted to that college, but you can change it before you submit it to another college. This is particularly helpful if you intend to submit test scores to some colleges but not others. Once you fill in your test scores, your application “remembers” them so even if you suppress them by selecting “No” when asked if you wish to self-report any test scores for a college where you are applying without test scores, they will reappear if you change your response to “Yes” for the next college.

Deadlines?

Each college has a designated deadline date. Once that deadline has passed, you will no longer be able to submit your forms. (You can find deadlines in the My Colleges section and your specific deadline will appear on your Dashboard once you select an admissions plan in the supplement or visit the college’s website.)

All time stamps and deadlines are based on Eastern Standard Time, and colleges will accept applications submitted up until 11:59 pm on the deadline in the student’s time zone. We do not recommend cutting your time close enough to put the time stamp deadline to the test!