

Application guide for first-year students

Get tips and best practices to give yourself the best chance at success.

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What is Common App?

Each year, more than 1 million students apply to more than 1,000 Common App member colleges worldwide through our online college application platform. Learn more about applying through our first-year application by following our step-by-step guide below.

Create a Common App account

1. Gather materials
2. Create an account
3. Add colleges
4. Engage supporters
5. Understanding requirements

1. Gather materials

The information you'll need to complete your applications

Filling out your application takes time.

And if you have to keep interrupting your progress to find information, like a certificate for a continuing education course or the address of your last internship, it can take even longer. Get a head start by collecting this information before you begin.

A copy of your high school transcript

A list of your activities, work, and family responsibilities

Test scores and dates from your college entrance exams (SATs, ACTs, etc.)

Parent/Legal guardian information

Academic honors and achievements

2. Create an account

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Creating a Common App account is easy and should only take a few minutes.

You can create a Common App account even if you don't plan on applying for another few months or another few years. You can answer questions in the Common App tab and build a college list at any time.

- [Create your account](#) and choose your student type
 - If you haven't yet attended college, select "first-year student"
 - If you have college credits from dual enrollment high school courses, you should still select "first-year student"
 - If you have already attended 1 or more colleges after graduating high school, select "transfer student". We also have a separate [transfer student guide](#) to help you out.
- Create new login credentials. Colleges may need to get in touch with you during the application process, so be mindful of which email address you choose. Sometimes your high school address may filter out these emails, so consider using a personal email address.
When choosing an email address, be sure to use one that:
 - You check regularly
 - Does not use inappropriate language
 - You will have access to after you graduate from high school
- Complete your registration information
 - We will need some basic information about you like your name, home address, phone number, and date of birth.
 - Be sure to use your legal name as it appears on official school documents and standardized tests. This will make sure colleges can match documents to the correct person.
 - At the end, you will adjust your communication preferences and accept the Common App privacy policy.
- Select "create account" and you're done!

ACCOUNT ROLLOVER

Common App accounts can roll over from year to year!

With account rollover, you can start exploring Common App and save answers to questions in the Common App tab at any time.

3. Add colleges

Start building your My Colleges list

Once you've created your account and explored the colleges that accept the Common

App, you're ready to start adding colleges.

Writing Supplement Submission

You are ready to submit your Writing Supplement to UMBC: University of Maryland, Baltimore County! The submission process includes the following steps:

- 1 Review your Writing Supplement
- 2 Submit your Writing Supplement

Review and Submit

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The College Search tab is where you will search for and add the colleges you want to apply to. If you have a school in mind you can search by name. If you want to keep exploring, you can use the more filters button. Some filters include:

- State or country
- Distance from a zip code
- Enrollment term
- Application deadline
- Application fees*
- Writing requirements
- Standardized testing policy
- Recommendation requirement

Adding a college is easy! You may add a college using the add button in the search results list. You can also select a college and add them using the "Add to My Colleges" button from their info screen.

Once you've added colleges, you can see them on your Dashboard and in your My Colleges tab. Keep in mind you may only add up to 20 colleges. You may adjust your list of colleges at any time. Once you've submitted, you will not be able to remove those schools from your My Colleges list.

* While some colleges may charge an application fee, others have no fee to apply. And, many will offer fee waivers under certain circumstances, including financial need, veteran status, and more.

Fee Waiver A request to the college to remove the application fee. Using either the Common App fee waiver, which your counselor must confirm, or a college-specific fee waiver, you will not be required to pay the fee to submit your application.

4. Engage supporters

Collaborate with counselors, teachers, and more

All colleges need things like official school forms. Many colleges will also ask for letters of recommendation.

Counselors, teachers, and recommenders will submit these kinds of forms on your behalf. Here are the types of recommenders you can invite in the Common App.

Counselors

Parents

Teachers

Other Recommenders

Advisors

Every college gets to choose their own recommendation requirements. You can find more details on each college's "College Information" page.

If you're planning to apply this school year, you can start inviting recommenders. If you don't plan on applying until next school year or later, skip this step for now.

How to invite and assign recommenders:

1. From the My Colleges tab select a college and open their "Recommenders and FERPA" section.
2. If you have not done so already, you will need to complete the [FERPA Release Authorization](#).
3. Invite recommenders using the invite button from each section. You may also use the "Invite Recommenders" button at the top.
4. Select the type of invitation you would like to send. For each invitation you will need information like their name and email address.
5. After you add a recommender, you can view their info using the Manage Recommenders button.
6. Note that teachers, parents, and other recommenders will not receive an email invitation until you assign them to a college. To assign these recommenders, go to their section within this screen. Select their name from the dropdown and use the assign button.
7. If your high school uses Naviance or another partner software, you will not invite your counselor or teachers here. There will be instructional text on this page explaining what to do next. You will still add other recommenders and advisors using the steps above.

In general, each college has their own recommendation requirements. For example, one college may need two teacher recommendations. Some colleges may not want any teacher recommendations. Colleges can also determine what kinds of other

Keep track of each college's unique application requirements

It's important to stay organized as you work on your applications.

Each college needs you to complete common questions and add counselor. Beyond that their applications vary. Each college can determine their unique requirements for:

- Deadlines
- Application Fees
- Personal Essay
- Courses & Grades
- Test Policy
- Portfolio
- Writing Supplements
- Recommendations

Here are some places where you can find each college's specific requirements:

Explore Colleges

My Colleges

Requirements Grid

Writing Requirements by College

ACCOUNT ROLLOVER

You can save answers to Common App tab questions year over year. So you can get started on things like your personal essay or the activities section at any time.

Responses to questions in your My Colleges do not stay year over year. Only get started on things like college-specific questions, writing supplements, or portfolios if you intend to apply this school year. For more info, check out our account rollover FAQ.

Sometimes writings essays can feel like the biggest part of your application. With a little bit of planning, organizing, and drafting, we can help you make this task more manageable.

As you work on your applications you can find essays or short answer questions in three sections:

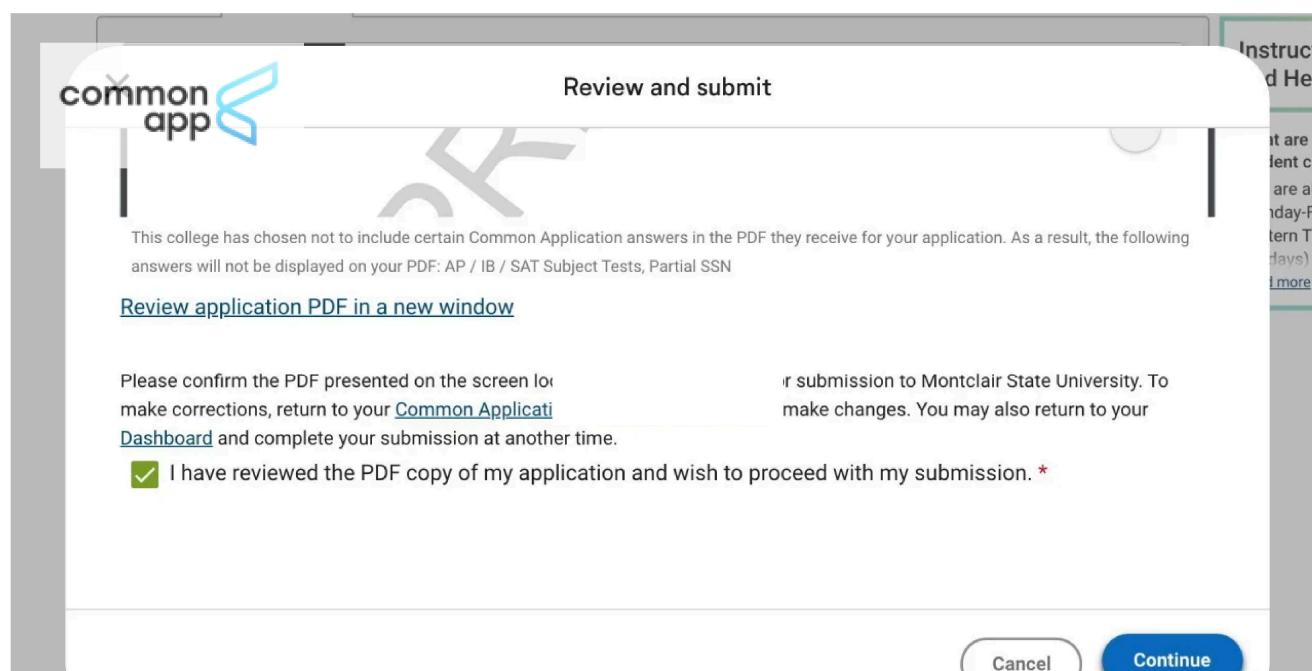
Common App Personal Essay

College-specific questions

Writing supplements

7. Submit your application

Review and submit your application



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Submission is a three-step process:

- 1) Reviewing your application.
- 2) Paying the application fee (if applicable).
- 3) Submitting your application.

The screenshot shows a video player interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: Dashboard, My Colleges, Common App, College Search, and Financial Aid Resources. Below this is a large blue header with the text "Common App" and "walkthrough" in white. A green banner below the header says "for first-year students". On the right side of the screen, there's a "Need help?" section with a search icon. A message in this section says: "I already submitted, can I change some of my answers? You can return at any time and change your answer to any question in the Common App tab for future Read more". In the center of the video frame, a young man with a beard and a cap is smiling. A play button icon is overlaid on the video area. At the bottom left of the video frame, the duration "4:52" is displayed.

Get ready to begin your journey

Walk through the application with us before you apply.



Need help? Contact our Solutions Center.

[Request support](#)