

The Common Application

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Source: [CA Application Guide](#)

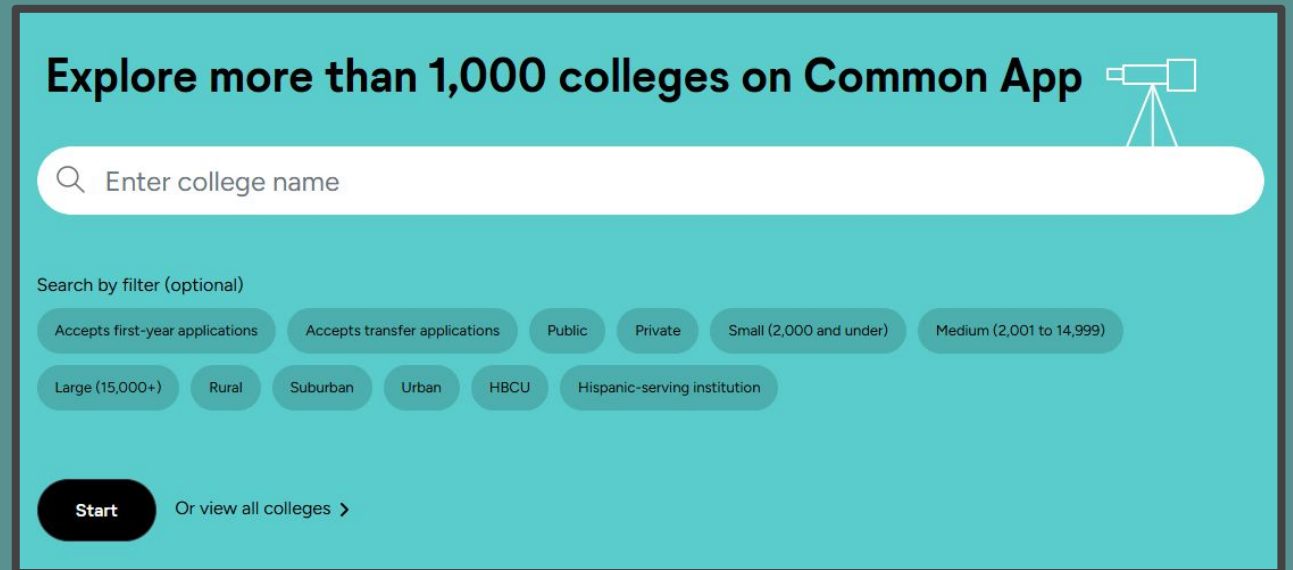
What is Common App?

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

Create an account: <https://apply.commonapp.org/createaccount>

Steps to the Common App:

1. Gather materials
2. Create an account
3. Add colleges
4. Engage supporters
5. Understanding requirements
6. Plan essays
7. Submit your application



Step One: Gather Materials

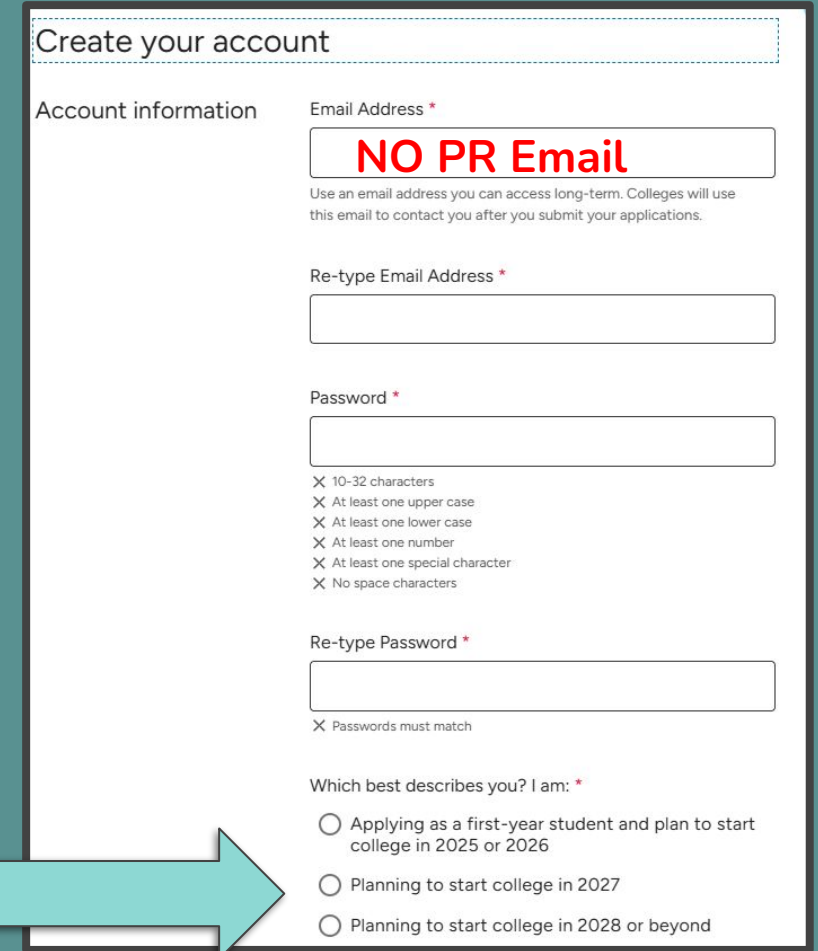
Gather the information you'll need to complete your applications. Filling out your application takes time. And if you have to keep interrupting your progress to find information, like a certificate for a continuing education course or the address of your last internship, it can take even longer. Get a head start by collecting this information before you begin.

- A copy of your high school transcript. Unofficial available mid-June (Sapphire).
 - All apps require your senior year schedule. Available mid-August (Sapphire).
- A list of your activities, work, and family responsibilities (Naviance or Canva).
- Test scores and dates from your college entrance exams (SAT's, ACT's)
- Parent/Legal guardian information.
- Academic honors and achievements.

Step Two: Create An Account

Create an account: <https://apply.commonapp.org/createaccount>

- Choose your registration type.
- If you are applying to college for the first time you'll select the "First Year Student" button.
- Provide your login credentials.
 - Make sure you use an email address you check often. This is the email the Common App and colleges will use to get in touch with you. **DO NOT USE YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT EMAIL.**
- Complete your registration information.
- The CA 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" to complete your account.



Create your account

Account information

Email Address *

NO PR Email

Use an email address you can access long-term. Colleges will use this email to contact you after you submit your applications.

Re-type Email Address *

Password *

× 10-32 characters
× At least one upper case
× At least one lower case
× At least one number
× At least one special character
× No space characters

Re-type Password *

× Passwords must match

Which best describes you? I am: *

Applying as a first-year student and plan to start college in 2025 or 2026

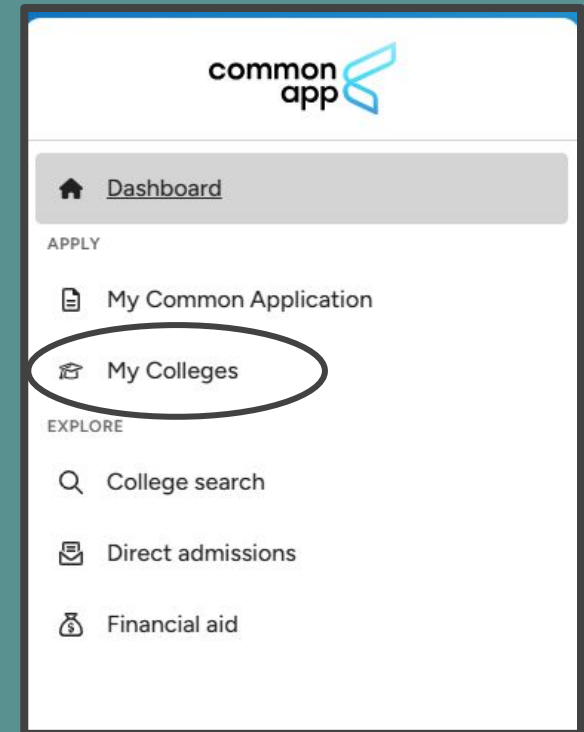
Planning to start college in 2027

Planning to start college in 2028 or beyond

Step Three: Add Colleges

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.



Dashboard, Colleges, Common App

The screenshot shows the Common App dashboard for a practice account. The interface is divided into three main sections: a left sidebar, a central main content area, and a right-hand help sidebar.

Left Sidebar:

- common app logo
- Dashboard (selected)
- APPLY
 - My Common Application
 - My Colleges
- EXPLORE
 - College search
 - Direct admissions
 - Financial aid
- Settings
- Sign out
- User profile: Jean Whalen

Top Banner:

- Warning: This is a practice account. It cannot submit applications to colleges. If you'd like to change your account type, please review our [practice account FAQ](#) for more information.
- Greeting: Good morning, Jean!

Main Content Area:

- Dashboard**
- My Common Application**
 - 1/7 sections complete
 - Progress bar: 1/7 sections complete
 - Sections: Profile, Family, Education, Testing (checked), Activities, Writing, Courses & Grades
- My Colleges**
 - 18 colleges on my list
 - Progress bar: 18 in progress
 - Show colleges
- Deadlines**
 - 1/18 deadlines added
 - Select a start term and admission plan for each college to add their deadlines to your dashboard.
 - Finish selecting your start terms and admission plans

Right-hand Help Sidebar:

- Help & support
- Search FAQs
- Search takes you to the student solution center
- How can I add a college to My colleges?
 - To add a college to your account:
 - Select **College search** from...
 - Read full answer
- 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 My Common...
 - Read full answer
- How many colleges can I add to My colleges list?
 - You may add and apply to up to 20 colleges. You may add and remove a college at any...
 - Read full answer
- When is the deadline for my application submission?

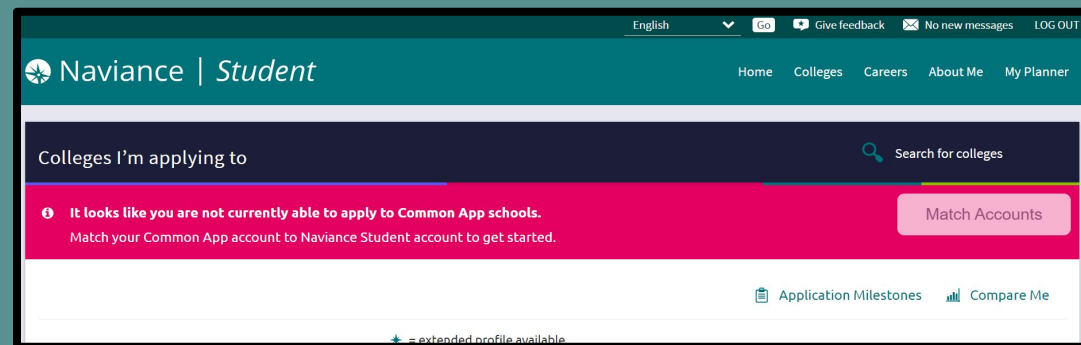
Matching Common App and Naviance

After creating your Common App account:

- Complete the Education section under Common App
- Add a college to your list using College Search
- Complete the FERPA under My Colleges

Naviance: Fall 2026

- Select “Match Accounts” under Colleges I’m Applying To
- Enter the email used in creating your Common App account and your date of birth
- Click on Match



Step Four: Engage Supporters

All colleges need things like official school forms. Many colleges will also ask for letters of recommendation. Every college gets to choose their own recommendation requirements. You can find more details on each college's "College Information" page.

- Counselors, teachers, and recommenders will submit these kinds of forms on your behalf. PRHS uses **Naviance** to send counselor and teacher letters of recommendation to college. **DO NOT invite your counselor or teacher through the Common App!**
- Counselors: Counselors share their perspective using the context of the entire graduating class. They also submit the School Report and transcripts. PRHS uses Naviance. Please follow our directions.
- Parents: Parents will only need to submit a form if you apply using a college's early decision deadline. They will fill out part of your early decision agreement.
- Teachers: Teachers give a firsthand account of your intellectual curiosity and creative thought.
- Other Recommenders: Other recommenders are usually non academic recommenders like coaches, employers, and peers. They give insight into your interests and activities outside of the classroom. Invite other recommenders through the Common App.

Step Five: Understanding Requirements

Each college needs you to complete common questions. 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
 - School counselor and [teacher recommendation](#) forms are in Naviance
 - Exceptions are possible: Grove City College, Georgetown, MIT, UC California System

Step Six: Plan Essays

Organize and plan for your writing prompts. Sometimes writing essays can feel like the biggest part of your application. With a little bit of planning, organizing, and drafting, CA 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: Colleges can either make the personal essay optional or required. In the writing section of your Common App tab, you will see a table that lists each college's requirements.
- College-specific questions: Many colleges include short answer questions or essay prompts within this section. You can find specific information about each college's individual writing prompts [here](#).
- Writing supplements: Some colleges use a separate writing supplement. Not all colleges have a writing supplement. Some colleges only request this supplement based on how you answer other questions. You can find more information about writing supplements on the Dashboard or your My Colleges tab.

Common App Essay Prompts 26-27

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.
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?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
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?
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

Step Seven: Submit Your Application

Review and submit your application.

- Submission is a three-step process:
 - Reviewing your application.
 - Paying the application fee.*
 - Submitting your application.

Helpful Hints

- **Do not use school district email**
- Proof read your application
- Print out a copy
- Watch for different deadline dates for applications and scholarships
- Not every school will require the personal essay
- Most schools will require additional specific info
- You have to submit to each individual school in Common App
- Mobile friendly
- Schools will not know the other schools you have applied to
 - If you apply ED and renege they can share that information with your other schools!
- Schools will not have access to your full info until you submit
- Schools do not read teacher letters until YOU have submitted your CA
- Don't procrastinate!
 - College admissions can tell when you procrastinate.
 - You might make a mistake.

Resources

- Common App Help:
 - What are the hours for student chat?
 - You are able to chat with CA Help - Monday-Friday, 12pm-8pm Eastern Time* (excluding holidays) from October - January.
 - Common App Family Resources: <https://www.commonapp.org/family>
- Collegewise Guide to Common App
- Common App Help Sheet: Mrs. Whalen will email it to you
- College and/or school counselor
- College admission representative
- Ms. Duffy and/or Mrs. Erlain

