

US UNIVERSITIES APPLICATION INFORMATION SHEET

Wanted to know more about US university applications but don't know where to begin? This information sheet will provide you with the necessary knowledge needed to get started.

Acknowledgement: A very huge portion of this Information Sheet has been taken from Chua Ke Lun's thread "FAQ about TOEFL, SAT 1, SAT 2 and US UNIVERSITY APPLICATION", which can be found at the forums in www.recom.org under the Education section. A note of thanks also goes out to Adrian Lim, Vincent Ang, Mei Yueh, Sabrina Lim, Eu Win, Timothy Tam, Claire Chin, Dickson Ngai, Chen Chow and Ern Sheong for contributing in one way or another.

Types of Universities in USA

A. Public Universities

Examples:

- University of California system
 - University of Michigan
 - University of Virginia
- and many others.

B. Private Universities

Examples:

- Ivy League Universities (Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania and Yale.)
 - Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
 - Stanford University
 - Duke University
 - Carnegie Mellon University (CMU)
 - California Institute of Technology (Caltech)
 - University of Chicago
 - The John Hopkins University
- and many others.

C. Liberal Arts Colleges

Liberal arts colleges are institutions of higher education offering programs in the liberal arts at the post-secondary level. Liberal arts offers a wide range of fields in the arts and sciences to gain general knowledge and develop intellectual skills.

Generally, liberal arts colleges are small and thus have smaller class sizes and smaller enrollment than universities. They usually offer a liberal arts curriculum. Liberal arts colleges focus primarily on tertiary education, and tend to emphasize interactive instruction rather than research. Full-time professors teach almost all the courses, rather than graduate student teaching assistants.

Generally, a full-time, four-year course of study at a liberal arts college leads students to a bachelor's degree. Several colleges offer postgraduate programs; however, their postgraduate enrollments remain small compared to their undergraduate enrollments and postgraduate

enrollments at research universities.

Liberal arts colleges are often private institutions, although a number of state-supported institutions also operate on Liberal Arts College models. The private dominance is particularly pronounced among the leading liberal arts colleges:

- Smith College
 - Williams College
 - Swarthmore College
 - Wellesley College
 - Middlebury College
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Financial Aid/Scholarships

Most public universities in the US do not provide financial aid. On the other hand, most private universities in the US do provide financial aid or scholarships. These private universities have different policies when it comes to admission of international applicants who apply for financial aid. These are:

A. Need-Blind Admission

Want a university that will cater to YOUR financial needs? Dream of a university that will not look at your financial status when reviewing your application? Or a university that will pay for you should you gain admission? APPLY NEED BLIND!

Currently, there are only 8 schools which practice this policy. They are Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dartmouth, Williams, Middlebury and Amherst. Your chances of admission to these schools will not be jeopardized if you apply for financial aid. Besides that, these schools will provide sufficient financial aid for you to enroll.

B. Admission Blind

Application to certain schools is independent of your need for financial aid. This includes Cornell University. Cornell can admit you without providing you any financial award even though you have indicated that you require financial aid to attend.

C. Need-Aware/ Need-Based Admission

For need-aware admission, your application to certain universities will have a lower chance of success if you apply for financial aid. These include Stanford University and the University of Pennsylvania.

Admission Policies

A. Regular Decision (RD)

This is the normal application policy by all universities. Regular Decision deadlines are usually at the end of December or early January (varies from university to university). Under Regular Decision, applicants are under no obligation to enroll even if they have been admitted. They are welcome to apply to as many Colleges as possible without any binding clauses.

B. Early Decision (ED)

Early Decision plans allow you to apply early (usually in early November) and get an admission decision from the college well in advance of the usual notification date (around middle of December). However, Early Decision plans are binding; if you apply as an Early Decision candidate, you agree to attend the college if it accepts you and offers an adequate financial aid package. Although you can apply to only one college for Early Decision, you may apply to other colleges through the regular admissions process. If you're accepted by your first-choice college early, you must withdraw all other applications. Usually, colleges insist on a nonrefundable deposit well before May 1.

C. Early Action (EA)

Early Action plans are similar to Early Decision plans in that you can apply early in the admission cycle (usually in December, January or February) whether or not a college has accepted you. But unlike Early Decision, most Early Action plans are not binding, i.e. you do not have to commit to a college to which you've applied for Early Action. Under these plans, you may still apply to other colleges. Usually, you can let the college know of your decision in late spring or whenever you've decided.

D. Single-Choice/Restrictive Early Action (SCEA)

Some colleges notably Yale and Stanford have begun offering a new admissions option called Single-Choice Early Action (usually in October). This plan works the same way as other Early Action plans, but with Single-Choice, and candidates may not apply early (either Early Action or Early Decision) to any other school.

You can still apply to other school's Regular Decision and are not required to give your final answer of acceptance until the Regular Decision deadline. This allows you to compare offers of financial aid in the spring before making a commitment.

– Adapted from Collegeboard.com

E. Rolling Admissions

It is an admission policy where no specific deadline is fixed. Under rolling admissions, applications are reviewed as they come in until all spots are filled.

Application Procedures

Each university in the USA has its own requirements for undergraduate application. Please check with the universities you intend to apply (their websites are the best resource) to confirm what documents and information they require.

The Standard Requirements for university application in the USA are:

- Personal Information

- Academic qualifications and achievements
- Co-curricular activities
- Essays and/or personal statements
- Teacher recommendations (normally 2)
- Standardized test scores (e.g. SAT 1 , SAT 2 , TOEFL)
- Counselor's report

In some cases, the universities may provide interviews through the local alumni associations.

Application dates differ depending on whether you are applying for: Early Decision or Regular Decision. Both applications start in early October. However, Early Decision normally ends by early November while Regular Decision normally ends by early January of the following year.

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SAT 1 and SAT 2

General Information regarding SAT 1

The SAT Reasoning Test is a measure of the critical thinking skills you'll need for academic success in college. The SAT assesses how well you analyze and solve problems—skills you learned in school that you'll need in college. The SAT is typically taken by high school juniors and seniors. Each section of the SAT is scored on a scale of 200—800, with two writing sub scores for multiple-choice and the essay. The test is about 4 hours long and is administered seven times a year in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and U.S. Territories, and six times a year overseas. Colleges usually take the highest scores of the math, verbal and writing sections (which can be from two different test dates) although they always receive your entire College Board testing history.

General Information regarding SAT 2

Subject Tests (formerly SAT II: Subject Tests) are designed to measure your knowledge and skills in particular subject areas, as well as your ability to apply that knowledge. Students take the Subject Tests to demonstrate to colleges their mastery of specific subjects like English, history, mathematics, science, and language. The tests are independent of any particular textbook or method of instruction. The tests' content evolves to reflect current trends in high school curricula, but the types of questions change little from year to year. Many colleges use the Subject Tests for admission, for course placement, and to advise students about course selection. Used in combination with other background information (your high school record, scores from other tests like the SAT Reasoning Test, teacher recommendations, etc.), they provide a dependable measure of your academic achievement and are a good predictor of future performance. Some colleges specify the Subject Tests they require for admission or placement; others allow applicants to choose which tests to take. Colleges usually take the highest scores of each subject (which can be from two different test dates)

Both sections are quoted directly from Collegeboard.com

Test Dates

The SAT is tested on the following months outside USA, Puerto Rico and U.S. Territories (6

times a year):

January
May
June
October
November
December

Registration

To register for the SAT 1 and SAT 2, you would need to register at www.collegeboard.com or through the Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange (MACEE).

TOEFL

General Information

The Test of English as a Foreign Language™ (TOEFL®) measures the ability of nonnative speakers of English to use and understand English as it is spoken, written, and heard in college and university settings. The TOEFL test is offered in different formats depending on a test taker's location.

The Internet-based TOEFL Test

The TOEFL Internet-based Test (TOEFL iBT) tests all four language skills that are important for effective communication: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The test helps students demonstrate that they have the English skills needed for success. Each section has 30 marks with the highest score being 30 for each section. Maximum score is 120. Only the TOEFL iBT test is offered in Malaysia. Registration is through **ETS**. The test dates varies with the test venues. Once you register for TOEFL, it would ask you to fill in the location for the test. Only then would you know which date is available.

– Quoted directly from ETS TOEFL website: www.ets.org/toefl

A. Writing part

You would have to write two essays. One of them is to write a summary of the information provided to you and the other is to write your response to a question posed to you. The two tasks are rated from 0 to 5, and the average of these scores is converted to a scaled score of 0 to 30. Human scorers rate the responses.

Scorers evaluate the integrated writing task on the overall quality of the writing (development, organization, appropriate and precise use of grammar and vocabulary) and the completeness and accuracy of the content. Scorers rate the independent writing essay on the overall quality of the writing:

- o Development
- o Organization
- o Appropriate and precise use of grammar and vocabulary.

B. Reading part

This test is similar to the critical reading section of the SAT. However, it is much easier compared to the SAT.

C. Listening part

You would have to listen to a few conversations and answer them based on the conversations. It is advisable to write down the key points of the conversations so that answering it would be easier.

D. Speaking part

You would be asked to give your comment on an issue or present the ideas given in a recorded conversation. Each of the six tasks is rated from 0 to 4, and the average of these scores is converted to a scaled score of 0 to 30. Human scorers rate the responses. They evaluate the test-taker's ability in topic development, delivery, and language use.

Exemption from TOEFL Test

If you have been attending an English-medium school for at least 2 years and have achieved a decent SAT 1 score, you can apply to the individual universities for exemption from taking the TOEFL. There is no guarantee that the universities would allow such exemptions. Please take the initiative to ask the universities you are applying to.

Important Information

If you intend to take the TOEFL, please register as early as possible as the test venues have limited places unlike the SAT 1 and SAT 2. The delivery of the test scores by ETS is also not as fast as College Board's. Your scores may not arrive on time for admission consideration.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Can I send my teacher recommendations and my school counselor report together instead of sending them separately?

You can do that provided that each individual envelope is sealed before being sent in bulk.

2. What if my essays exceed the word limit? Would the admission officer count every single word?

Since there will be hundreds if not thousands of essays coming in, admission officers won't possibly be counting all of them. However, after reading many essays, they would probably have a good idea of the ideal length of an essay. Essays should be edited if possible to fit into the word limit. Please note that many online application forms have character limits and limited space for the essay, anything exceeding the limit in the final PDF format may be truncated.

3. The Common Application asks me what would be my possible major and career path, would it affect my application if I am not sure?

Yes and no. Some admission officers do take note of the choice when looking through your whole application (essays, recommendations). In other cases, admission officers ignore this choice.

4. Should I waive my right to the recommendation letters? Would it affect my application?

You probably should waive your right to these letters. Some teachers feel more at ease, not because they want to write bad stuff about you. Sometimes, it is more about privacy. Anyway, since most people waive the right, it won't really hurt if you follow everybody else.

5. How heavily does the SAT weigh in the overall application?

Your application is made up of the SAT, essays, academic scores, co-curricular records, teacher recommendation, alumni interview and counselor report. A high SAT score can make your application even better. However, if you only have a high SAT score but mediocre academic scores and so on, you would be significantly disadvantaged compared to one who has an average SAT score but good recommendations and so on. The conclusion is that the SAT plays a part in your application. As to what percentage it occupies, it really depends on the quality of the whole application pool.

6. Should I send in my application as soon as possible?

If you send your application in before the deadline it will not be read sooner, you will not receive your decision sooner, and you will not be more likely to get in. Just a view of what would happen to your application. When applications reach the admissions office, it takes a small army of people to open all that mail (or print out all the electronic submissions), sort it, file it, respond to all those little postcards people put in to confirm their applications were received, enter the data into the computer database, make folders containing the application with color coded stickers with your name/region/home state identifiers, then organize the folders according to admissions reader (usually based on geography) and present this final product in a uniform, readable manner so that the admissions officer can start reading applications.

– Quoted directly from <http://gettingin.wordpress.com>

7. Besides my Pre-University and upper secondary academic results, should I send my lower secondary results?

This totally depends on you. Giving the lower secondary school results can give the admission officers a good view of your consistent work. In other cases, you may just appear to be too eager to show your academic results. In the end, it's your call.

8. Which university or college should I apply to? Should I just focus on the Ivy League Universities?

This question can be answered in many ways. First of all, ask yourself whether you really want to go to the US for studies or is it just one of your choices other than UK, Singapore or Malaysia. If you really intend to go to the US, one of the methods you can use is to choose 3 groups of universities to apply. One group would be universities that you know you would surely get into. The other two groups would be universities that you have a realistic chance of getting in and some chance of getting in (dream schools). Others would prefer to choose a list of universities that are good in one major and apply to those universities.

Do take into consideration your needs:

- weather
- lifestyle
- rural/urban setting
- academic style
- requirements

- strong departments
- fellow Malaysians
- reputation
- location
- student body
- athletics
- whether you think you could fit in
- Greek life

9. I am from a government high school and my school doesn't have a school counselor. Who should I approach to fill in the secondary school report?

You can normally approach your principal or vice-principal for help or your class teacher or “penolong kanan”.

10. The Advance Placement (AP) test is available to me. Should I take it?

AP is an exam that allows you to receive some freshman credits (provided that you get higher than a specific score, which different universities have different scores as their benchmark). If you are taking STPM, A-Level or IB, you probably need not take it as these pre-university courses are considered sufficient for admission. If you intend to apply after SPM, you are highly recommended to take the AP tests.

11. I just finished SPM can I apply to US universities?

In most cases, you can. You would still need to take the SAT 1, SAT 2 and TOEFL. Please check the respective university websites to find out the minimum academic qualification. The University of California system only allows STPM or A level standard pre-university courses.

12. What is the difference between college and university?

The two mentioned above are interchangeable terms. Universities and Colleges teach undergraduate studies and function pretty much in the same manner.

The US government defines college: “College: An institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate programs, usually of a four-year duration, that lead to the bachelor's degree in the arts or sciences (B.A. or B.S.). The term "college" is also used in a general sense to refer to a postsecondary institution. A college may also be a part of the organizational structure of a university.”

University is defined as: “University: An educational institution that usually maintains one or more four-year undergraduate colleges (or schools) with programs leading to a bachelor's degree, a graduate school of arts and sciences awarding master's degrees and doctorates (Ph.D.s), and graduate professional schools.”

Source: <http://educationusa.state.gov/graduate/glossary.htm>

13. Can I refuse to go to my Early Decision school?

Basically, no. If you back out of an ED commitment, you will be blacklisted from other schools as soon as they find out. Universities take ED violations very much to heart. The only way you can turn down a university is if it doesn't offer sufficient financial aid for you to attend it. If you need financial assistance in order to finish your course of study, you need to request financial

aid with your ED application. We were not aware of how much this bothered universities last year, but we now know that they see it as insincere to send an ED application while saying that you will only attend if you get a scholarship. The reason is that ED is understood as a whole-hearted promise that you really want to attend and are trying to give the university every opportunity to help you attend. If you do receive the scholarship later, you can immediately withdraw your request for financial aid at the universities where it will reduce your chances of admission.

Quoted directly from RJC US application website

14. I am taking STPM/A-Level now, do I need to take SAT 2?

You would still have to take SAT 2 unless the college you are applying to specifically tells you that SAT 2 is not compulsory.

15. How many SAT 2 subjects should I take?

This depends on the university you are applying to. Most universities require only 2. Some universities require 3.

16. Which subjects should I take in secondary school?

This depends on what course you intend to take in University. If you intend to apply to an engineering or business school, schools will advise you to take Math with Chemistry or Physics being the addition if you are applying to an engineering school.

17. What is the difference between Math 1 and Math 2?

The Math 2 is more difficult than Math 1. With sufficient knowledge of your STPM/A-Level Syllabus, Math 2 should be alright. Most competitive universities recommend or accept Math 2 only.

18. Can I take both SAT 1 and SAT 2 on the same test date?

You cannot take the SAT 1 and SAT 2 on the same test date. Both tests take place at the same time.

19. Do I have to send the scores to the college by myself?

No, College Board will send the scores directly to the universities that you have applied to. Your first 4 college recipients are free; any additional college will cost USD 9.50. Note that you will have to list down your first 4 college recipients when you register for the test or 1 week after the test.

20. I am taking 3 SAT 2 subjects for this coming test. What is the order of the subjects?

Basically, you get to choose the order in which you take the test.

21. My SAT scores are not good enough, should I retake?

The best bet is that you should take the SAT again only if you have confidence in getting a higher score.

22. What score should I achieve in the SAT?

Ideally, the higher the better. Other than that, you could see the range of SAT scores of the respective schools to have an idea of whether your scores are safe enough.

For more specific questions regarding the SAT, please visit www.collegeboard.com

If you want to take a look at how Thailand scholars achieve in their SAT and their corresponding university admitted, do refer to <http://www.ts48.org/college/> . There is no guarantee of admission to any university, even with full score of SAT. It is just for reference. SAT is just one of the many factors the admission office considers for your applications.

23. When should I apply for financial aid?

Ideally, this should be done while you are preparing your admission documents (Recommendation letters, Essays, and so on). The reason being that these forms require quite an effort to fill in as it involves taxes, property, income and so on. Most of the time, you would need to download 2 forms and filled them up. They are the International Student Financial Aid Application and International Student Certification of Finance Form. The International Student Certification of Finance Form requires a banker to certify the amount of money in a bank account that will be used to pay for your undergraduate education.

Note that some universities require financial aid forms from their own universities.

24. How should I ask for waiver from a particular university?

This depends on the university in which you are applying to. Some universities allow you to ask for waiver while applying online to their universities. In other cases, you are required to submit a written paper application to apply for waiver. Check the university websites to have a clear idea of the correct procedure to apply.

25. Will my application to one Ivy League school affect application to another?

No.

26. TRANSCRIPTS: Secondary School Report, Mid year Report and Final Report.

Kindly refer to Common Application FAQ below, No. 2. The same policy applies for forms other than the Common Application forms.

27. When should I start applying?

If you would like to enroll the following year (2009), you'll have to apply by the end of this year (end of 2008). Although different universities have different application deadlines and intakes, most of the competitive universities have only one intake (which is the fall intake in August) and the application datelines are some time from November to January, varying among universities.

28. What do I need to prepare for my application?

- a. Essays/Personal Statement
- b. Teacher Recommendations
- c. Interviews with alumni (if required or offered)
- d. Tests: SAT, SAT1, SAT2, TOEFL
- e. Supplementary material (drawing, composition, research project etc) if you have them
- f. Counselor's Report
- g. All necessary forms which will require you to fill in your personal information, achievements, co-curricular activities, etc.

- h. Optional: Certified true copies of certificates of significant achievement (Olympiads, National Competitions), letters and testimonials, and other important documents. (Note: DO NOT send them every single certificate you have collected in school.)
- i. any additional materials required by the particular university

Common Application FAQ

This FAQ attempts to address the most popular questions Malaysian applicants ask about the Common Application. It is by no means an exhaustive guide. Kindly refer to the FAQ in commonapp.org or log-in to the Common App portal to gain access to very comprehensive instructions.

1. What is the Common Application? Why use it?

“The Common Application is a not-for-profit organization that serves students and member institutions by providing an admission application – online and in print – that students may submit to any of our nearly 300 members.

Once completed online or in print, copies of the Application for Undergraduate Admission can be sent to any number of participating colleges. The same is true of the School Report, Midyear Report, and Teacher Evaluation forms. This allows you to spend less time on the busywork of applying for admission, and more time on what's really important: college research, visits, essay writing, and senior year coursework.”

– Quoted directly from Common App website FAQ

Basically, through Common App, one can simultaneously apply to multiple member colleges or universities by completing the application once. The aspects covered in the application process include personal biodata, academics, standardized tests, activities, essays etc. However, there are competitive schools which require a “Supplement” form where applicants have to fill in additional information (in many cases, additional essays)

2. I’m doing my Pre-U studies now. What should I put under the Educational Data section “secondary school you now attend (or from which you graduated)”?

Firstly, it is essential for you to know the difference between the number of years we attend school in Malaysia and the number of years Americans attend school. In our education system, from Standard 1 till Form 5, we only have 11 years of schooling. On the other hand, the Americans have 12 years of schooling (Grade 1-12). Thus, you should regard your STPM/Pre-University studies as your 12th year of secondary school (i.e. fill in your STPM/Pre-University school as the secondary school you now attend) and NOT College. In the US, there are no Pre-University Colleges; colleges are the equivalent of universities and they are also where you do your undergraduate studies. As for your former secondary school (Form 1-5), type it under the column “List of all other secondary schools...”

On the other hand, you may elect to fill in your Secondary School (Form 1-5) in the “secondary school you now attend column” and insert your Pre-University institution in the “List all colleges/universities...for credit” column. This applies to applicants from INTEC or other Pre-University Institutions which do not have Counsellors, or their Counsellors are unwilling to write recommendations. However, unless applicants have such a situation, the majority of applicants would go with the first approach.

3. TRANSCRIPTS: Secondary School Report, Mid year Report and Final Report.

Secondary school report: Get your secondary school (SMK...) to fill them up. Request a letter of recommendation from your school counsellor and attach it together as well. (This is for the "Evaluation" part) Attach it with your Form 4 and 5 (internal exams) and SPM results. Form 1-3 internal exams are optional.

Mid year report: Your current Pre-University midterm results. Get your counsellor from the "college" you're attending to help you to fill it up.

Final Report: Your final results of your Pre-University Institution. It'll only be sent up to the particular university you've been admitted and have chosen to attend.

(For STPM students or ASEAN Scholars who studied in Singapore, you may get your Form 6 or Junior College Counselor to fill up all the above forms instead of going back to your former Malaysian Secondary School where you took SPM.)

4. I've composed music. I've painted pictures. How do I send them?

In the Common Application webpage, you will find a link for you to download all the forms you need. Look for "Art Supplement" and download the form. Fill in the form and have an instructor who is familiar with your work send in a recommendation letter (e.g. Art tuition teacher, music instructor, drama teacher). Then, together with the form, send in a 10-minute CD or DVD of your artwork. You should also attach a résumé that summarizes your experience, giving years studied, names of teachers, repertoire and awards/honors received.

5. May I submit multiple versions of the Common Application form to tailor to the needs of each university that I am applying to?

Once you submit your application to the institution (or institutions) on your 'My Colleges' list, you will not be able to change answers for that application. However, you may create a second version of your original Common Application and then modify that application to be sent to a different institution (or institutions). Source: commonapp.org

Hence you are advised to send in your Common App forms one by one, creating duplicates of the original which are then edited for sending to different institutions.

6. Which universities accept the Common Application? Where can you get this list?

Point your browser to <https://www.commonapp.org/CommonApp/Members.aspx> to see the complete list of universities that accept the Common App.

7. "Is there any difference between the Common Application and the application forms provided by the university? Which one will put me at a/an disadvantage/advantage?"

Some schools accept the Common Application form as well as their own application forms. Both will be weighed equally and there would be no distinction made between one and the other. If you are applying to many schools, it is advisable that you apply using the Common App to refrain from filling in personal details multiple times. Some schools only accept the Common App forms and do not have their own forms (eg. Stanford).

"Our college and university members have worked together over the past 30 years to develop the application. All members fully support its use, and all give equal consideration to the Common Application and the college's own form. Many of our members use the Common

Application as their only undergraduate admission application.” – Quoted directly from Common App website FAQ.

8. Does the Common Application require additional information besides the main forms? Any supplements involved?

The Common App is a very general university application form. Therefore, many universities that wish to learn more about certain characteristics of a prospective student will require applicants to fill in supplementary forms from Common App. This is to help the university ascertain that the applying student meets the needs and requirements of the university. To see the supplementary information requirements for a specific university, go to <https://www.commonapp.org/CommonApp/CollegeInfo.aspx>.

9. I find that the Common Application does not have the sufficient space to allow me to list all my achievements and co-curricular activities. What do I do about this?

This is a perpetual problem that applicants face while applying. Ideally, do try to maximize the limited space given by economizing the words and phrases used. Omit unnecessary phrases like “of the”, “I also ...” etc that would lead to wastage of space. You can use abbreviated words such as “c’ship” that clearly portrays the word championship. However, use it at your own discretion as excessive abbreviations can cause confusion. Full sentences are not required. As long as the statement carries the intended meaning across, it should suffice. Alternatively, if you feel that there is still lacking of space or there is a longer list of activities/honors to fill, you can resort to the additional information section where you can upload the extended list. Please however, limit the section to just one page. It is important to be concise.

You are advised to focus on the main activities and achievements instead of trying to list all of them in the Common App form. Universities are more interested in the depth of commitment and achievement rather than in the sheer quantity of the activities. Hence do try to capture your KEY selling points within the limited space available. Anything else which is noteworthy but is of secondary importance should be listed under the Additional Information section. Trying to fit it all in and listing many activities without depth might give the impression that you are not really committed, and this reflects badly on you. The same can be said for non-Common App forms.

For more information on the Common Application kindly visit <http://www.commonapp.org>

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAY

By Gregory Lloyd

From <http://www.back2college.com/admissionessay.htm>

You’re about to write one of the most important essays of your life. Don’t panic. The subject is one you know very well—yourself. You’re an interesting person and it’s time you show those college admissions officers just how interesting and unique you are.

After all, that’s what they’re looking for. They want to know something about you that’s not indicated by your resume, your SAT score, your grade-point average, academic awards, or any other document you include elsewhere in your application package. They want a focused,

well-organized essay that helps them get to know a bit about your character and personality, what drives you, and what excites you. Make them like you.

Of course, you have only a limited amount of words to do all this, which is good and bad. Good because you need to write only a few hundred words; bad because you've got to get your point across in just those few words.

It's important to view the essay as an opportunity rather than a chore. It's really not so hard once you know what's expected of you. To make an impression, your essay must stand out from the crowd and elicit an emotional response from the reader. Here are some tips that will help you prepare a memorable essay that will get read.

Write as you speak.

The purpose of the essay is to show the admissions committee the real you, why you think and act the way you do, and what motivates you. So don't write as if you are someone else, use stilted language, or gloss over how you really feel. Be authentic, not superficial. Use a relaxed, conversational style.

Be original.

Too many essays use the same tired themes. For example, instead of showing yourself as a victim, focus on how you overcame the situation. You're not running for Miss America, so avoid presenting your solutions to world peace and hunger. Remember that what bores you pretty much bores others. As you're writing and revising, continually ask yourself if you would be interested in reading your essay.

Show genuine enthusiasm.

Nothing draws a reader more than writing that's invigorating. When choosing your topics, pick what genuinely excites you. Your enthusiasm will show through.

Create some mystery.

Begin with an introduction that surprises your readers and makes them want to read past the first paragraph. For example, if you're an avid volunteer for the Appalachian Trail Club and you've chosen to talk about your latest trip, you could start with a description of the sights and sounds as you move about the forest clearing trails.

Focus.

Rather than describing everything you've done with your life, give a full description of one or two items or events. The magic is in the details.

Use active verbs.

Action verbs makes your essay much more lively than passive voice, which comes across as cold and detached. For example, "My Botany teacher recommended me for a semester of study at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania" is much better than "I was recommended for a semester of study at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, by my Botany teacher."

Use short sentences and simple words.

According to a recent study at Stanford University, individuals who use complicated language are viewed as less intelligent than individuals who use simpler, more concise language. You want your readers to understand your essay. If you use obscure terms needlessly, they won't be impressed.

Vary sentence structure.

Don't start every sentence with "The." Inter-mingle long sentences with shorter sentences to keep the reader from getting bored.

Don't brag.

No one wants to hear an endless description of how great you are. Let your actions speak for themselves.

Avoid acronyms and abbreviations.

Although our language is incorporating more and more acronyms and abbreviations, they have no place in your essay. For example, use "and others" instead of "et al.," "Pennsylvania" instead of "PA."

Avoid exclamation points and parentheses.

Using exclamation points—especially more than one in a sentence—is a big turnoff.

Avoid asking questions or setting off words and phrases with quotation marks.

These are generally considered inappropriate.

Be specific.

You need to include concrete details about your experiences. Elaborate on one or two of your activities or achievements, showing the reader why you made a particular decision or reacted a certain way. Remember, you're including a list of your accomplishments elsewhere in your application package; for the essay, use specific dates, locations, feelings, etc., to describe your experiences in accomplishing those achievements.

Don't tell them what they want to hear.

Colleges read plenty of essays about how wonderful their school is, the evils of war, and the drive and determination needed to become a lawyer. Tell them something new that they may not have heard before.

Avoid gimmicks.

Don't use puns, definitions, famous quotations, flowery descriptions, or overdone wordplay to get your point across.

Avoid controversy.

Strong opinions about what's wrong with the world, what kind of government we should have, or why your religion is the best are a no-no.

Be witty only if you can pull it off.

Don't go overboard with humor. Although admissions officers love essays that make them laugh, using humor for humor's sake or being silly or immature will get your essay thrown in the slush pile. It's more important to tell an interesting story and let any humor be inherent.

Avoid offensive tone or language.

Don't ever cuss or be confrontational when you write.

Don't try to sound like a sage.

Never begin or end an essay with a quotation, proverb, or other wise saying. Also don't try to be sophisticated by writing about the world's greatest mysteries. Many students try to philosophize or use clichés to prove their point. This is a surefire path to disaster. No one wants to read about your position on the validity of totalitarianism or read sayings that are all too familiar.

Avoid jargon.

Avoid computer-related words like "input," "interface," "parameter," and "feedback." Also avoid "actually," "basically," "arguably," and "virtually," and words commonly spoken by juveniles, such as "awesome" or "cool."

Avoid sexist language.

Substitute asexual words for sexist words. For example, use "chairperson" instead of "chairman" and "pioneers" instead of "founding fathers."

Write tight.

Choose nouns and verbs that are specific as possible. "I raced to the door" is much better than "I ran to the door quickly." Similarly, "The Chihuahua" is much better than "the little, brown dog."

Also, don't use 20 words where a few will do. For example, instead of writing...

"Throughout my years of growth from childhood to adulthood, family members, teachers, and others have always commented on the fact that I am a very diligent worker. And I think I would have to agree with them."

Use...

"I'm a workhorse."

Don't insult your reader.

Let the reader read between the lines to draw conclusions. Just tell the story. Let the reader figure out the moral.

Revise until it's perfect.

You'll need to rewrite and edit your essay several times before you consider it final. Keep in mind that the essay must be more than interesting—it must be captivating. Let your enthusiasm show through.

Adhere to the word limit.

If the school instructs you to write 500 words or less, don't write 600. And, if your essay runs a little short, don't feel obligated to fill the extra space.

Proofread your work.

Make sure you don't have any typographical errors. Don't rely on your computer's spell check. Although some software programs make grammatical changes for you, chances are you'll

need to read your essay word for word to make sure you haven't goofed, for example, by using "there" instead of "their" or "form" instead of "from." Also make sure your intended meaning is coming across.

Show the essay to someone who can be objective.

To produce the best possible essay, you have to find good editors. Don't give your essay to your husband, parents, or best friend for comments. Get someone who not only knows English well but can also give you constructive feedback on how your message is coming across. Remember: The college doesn't know you.

Writing a successful college admissions essay is not a simple task. You should plan to spend a lot of time writing, reviewing, and polishing so that it's just right. But, if you persevere, you'll end up with an outstanding essay that will capture the reader's attention, reach an emotional conclusion about you, and get you that letter of acceptance.

On a more local front, consider what Sugasini Kandiah, a Malaysian student who was accepted into Yale, UPenn, MIT and Stanford last year, has to share about writing outstanding and noticeable admissions essays:

"You could make your essay stand out by writing about something from your culture. That's really your biggest advantage in the whole admissions process. The last thing admissions officers want to do is have some international kid who thinks like an American. People here love diversity and you have so much of it to offer as a Malaysian.

Bits about you working hard should be something others say about you, like your teachers in their recommendations or your principal. Your main essay should be about something admissions officers won't know about you from your CV. And trust me, you don't want to waste it by telling them about how you've worked hard because that comes through in your achievements."

For more abundant resources on college essay writing, kindly Google "how to write a good admissions essay" and take the initiative to read up. But most importantly, start writing instead of just sourcing for tips! Get down to it and refine it along the way! **Be yourself and write the essay in your own personal style.** There is no ultimate right or wrong guide for essays. It's all pretty subjective. So do what you think is best and most importantly, be happy with yourself and your essay.

For additional resources on US University Admission and Applications, you can visit colleageconfidential.com, tinkosong.com and recom.org for more information.

All the best to you in your endeavor to enter your dream university in the United States!!!

P.S.: Please verify the information provided above with authoritative sources. We bear no responsibility of any misfortune caused by the use of the information above. The info above is compiled based on our best knowledge and some are with our own opinion.