

## Common Application Tips and Pointers

As with all parts of the college application process, filling out the common application takes time. Dedicate some chunks of time to doing each part - starting an account, filling out the fields, writing a first essay draft, etc. Below find some action items and important information.

### Action Items

#### ***Check your email accounts***

Before you start your Common Application, make sure you have or create an email account that is dedicated to applying to and receiving information from colleges. Your school email is already used a lot and it will stop working in July after you graduate. A new email will help provide continual contact with the college at which you enroll.

If you don't yet have an alternate email, I recommend [setting up a Gmail account](#) using your first and last name or your chosen name. Keep it simple so colleges can recognize you and you have a professional sounding email like "firstlast@gmail.com" and not "kooldude007@email.com". Make sure you check this email! Add it to your phone.

#### ***Create your Common App Account***

The [First Time Common App User Tutorial](#) includes step-by-step instructions to opening your account with videos and screenshots for direction. Again, time consuming but helpful! See Mrs. Terni or your counselor for help/advice if you're unsure what to put in these fields. It's all about you :)

#### ***Link your Common App and Xello accounts***

In the Common App, make sure you add all the colleges you're applying to (or the ones you know right now) using the "College Search" tab and the "+" sign to add them. Under one school on the left menu of My Colleges, click FERPA and Recommnders to sign the FERPA AUTHORIZATION RELEASE. Also from **My Colleges** complete the **Questions** asking **preferred start term** and **admission plan**. Then, when you link to Xello, all colleges will then show up in Xello.

Once you have gone through the steps of filling out your profile and adding colleges in Common App, watch this [VIDEO ON LINKING COMMON APP AND Xello](#). Link your accounts (let me know if you need help in Xello. Linking will help the counseling office help you apply and we thank you.

#### ***The Personal Essay***

Write your essay(s) in Google Docs or another platform and save them. Do not just write them in the Common App box in case it gets lost. Mrs. Terni has read lots of college essays - ask for help! When ready, you can copy and paste or upload. [See Bonus section](#) below for more tips.

### ***Add Additional Information if desired***

This section has an option for this year to write about how the pandemic has affected students. Use this section to describe any important events or projects that might have been postponed or cancelled, or if you or your family were affected significantly medically, financially or otherwise. Use this space to add to your personalized application!

### **Important Info**

Our School CEEB Code is 070205 - Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village, CT

We do not rank students.

GPA is on a weighted 4.0 scale.

There are 95 students in the class of 2022.

You can search colleges on the “College Search” tab and hit the plus sign (+) to add them to the “My Colleges” tab. The “My Colleges” tab will allow you to track all requirements for each school to which you are applying. Some schools require specific questions or extra essays beyond the Common Application Personal Essay.

Although over 900 schools take the Common Application, other colleges may take their own application, the Coalition Application, the Universal application, or another one entirely. CT Community Colleges have a standard form, but you have to submit one per each college applied to. Always check the website of the school(s) to which you are applying to double check.

JUNIORS! You can create your Common Application now and the information will rollover year to year (as of August 1). You don't have to, but feel free to start it and start exploring....

Khan Academy has a free resource on the [College Admission Process](#) which has good information.

### **Biggest tips**

Follow instructions

Give yourself time

Edit as much as you want before submitting the application

Do not expect to write your essay in only one sitting

Attend college visits to HVRHS to inform your search

Ask for help

Google things. Chances are if you are trying to find the answer to a college application piece or how to fill something out, someone has tried before you and wrote about it.

## Bonus section for essay tips

- **Biggest tip:** Pay attention to the question and make sure you answer it all. Some essay questions have multiple parts to them.
- Second biggest tip: Write your essay yourself, in your own voice and with your own words. Do not have someone else take over your essay; there's also no need to use the thesaurus for every other word
- Organize your writing; create an outline if helpful to you.
- Show your essay to someone (family member, friend, teacher, counselor) to ensure it conveys what you want and to proof for grammar
- Typically 650 words or less
- See the College Essay Guy site for [examples](#) if you'd like to read some.
  - See also [Colleges That Change Lives article on supplemental essays](#)
- Pay attention to schools that require any additional essays (short answer or otherwise) in the college supplement of the common app.
- No topic to avoid, but do make sure that it's relevant to you and you can relate it back to yourself. If there's an event in the news you feel passionate about but only as an observer, it's less impactful than if you were taking action to get involved. Pick a topic that shows how you are part of something
- Common essay topics:
  - Sports essays
  - Volunteer experiences
  - Parent or guardian as role model
  - You don't have to avoid these, but do relate the topic back to you. Colleges are not admitting your role model.
- Things to avoid in your essay
  - Swear words; schools are trying to get a sense of your academic fit; swearing is not appropriate
  - Pointed political views; fine to summarize something you have done, but preaching or imposing your thoughts on others can be taken the wrong way. Politics are especially polarizing right now

### Sample essay questions:

- [Common App Essay Prompts](#)
- Universal App: Please write an essay that demonstrates your ability to develop and communicate your thoughts. Some ideas include: a person you admire; a life-changing experience; or your viewpoint on a particular current event.
- Common App: 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.
- Common App: Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma—anything that is of

personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

- Coalition app: Describe a time when you made a meaningful contribution to others in which the greater good was your focus. Discuss the challenges and rewards of making your contribution.
- Coalition app: What is the hardest part of being a teenager now? What's the best part? What advice would you give a younger sibling or friend (assuming they would listen to you)?
- Topic of your choice