Common Application Guide

Careers Counselor & Teachers

What is the Common Application?

The Common Application is used by over 500 American universities. It saves time by allowing the applicant to complete information and essays that can be submitted to multiple universities. However, bear in mind that approximately two-thirds of universities ask for supplemental information and/or essays.

Completing the Required Documents

1. The student will register you as a counselor (in Australia, known as the careers counselor) or teacher within the School Forms section of their application. Be sure to give all students the same email address so that you can manage forms from one login.

2. The student can choose two teachers and one guidance/careers counselor per university. Most students would use the same three individuals for each university. Note the teacher and careers counselor cannot be the same person. They will have access to different forms. It is important that the student knows which school official will serve in which capacity.

Careers Counselor: is responsible for the school profile, school report, transcript, optional report, mid-year report and final report.
**Teacher References:** Two teachers complete the teacher reference. Teachers will submit a more specific recommendation letter about the students’ academic and extracurricular potential than the careers counsellor whose evaluation will provide the overall picture of the student.

Ideally, the student should also waive the right to see their reference to maintain credibility of the letter in the eyes of the university.

3. **You will receive an email as soon as the student adds you to their School Forms section.** This email will ask what action you would like to take next—submit your recommendation form online, by post or if you would like to decline as a recommender. In the email (as noted by the circle in the example email below) it will say whether the student chose you to be their “counsellor” or their “teacher” recommender.
4. If you click on “Access the Common Application online system” under the “Submitting Online” option in the email, you will be prompted to create an account with the Common Application website.

5. After you have created a password, you will be taken to the Common Application homepage. Sign in using your new password under the “Recommenders” tab.
6. You will then see a screen which asks which role you would like to fill. You will want to make sure you are in agreement with your student. If they thought you should be a “counselor” but you feel you should be a teacher recommender or vice versa, talk to them about switching so they know to find a replacement recommender.

![Role Selection](image)

- Why am I seeing this screen?
  - You have been invited to act as a student recommender in more than one capacity.
  - You may access the students who have invited you in each differing capacity by choosing a ‘Role’ above.
  - Each Role provides you access to the forms you need to complete for each student based on the responsibilities of the Role.
  - You need to choose the Role you would like to use each time you log in, but you may also change your role by clicking the Role selection icon at the top of the screen.

We have provided guidance for (section A) Careers Counselors and (section B) Teacher Recommenders below.

A. The Counselor Forms

- **School Profile**
- **School Report**
- **Written Evaluation** (Recommendation Letter)
- **Transcript**
- **Optional, Mid-Year and Final Reports**
1. First you will be asked to fill in your details, name, contact information, etc. You will then be asked to fill in the school’s details. This involves looking up the school on their online database.

If your school is not on the list, you can select “I don’t see my high school on this list.” If your school would like to be added in future, you should follow the advice in the “Helpdesk” button on the right of the screen.
You will then fill in the school’s name and contact information. **Note**, in the US “public school” is equivalent to “state school,” and a “charter school” would be most similar to an “academy” or “free school” in Australia.

2. You will then be able to **fill in questions about the school**.
   - Graduating class size is the number of students in the pupil’s year group.
   - Note the percentage of students from your school who complete (Bachelor’s) degrees or TAFE Certificates.
   - Australian schools do not tend to offer AP (Advanced Placement) courses, so enter 0.
   - Note whether you provide students with a Class Rank or GPA. It is **OK** to leave these blank if your school does not normally provide these to students.
   - Australian schools are not on block schedule. (Block scheduling in the US means pupils take 3 – 4 subjects in the autumn semester and sit exams and then take 3 – 4 new subjects in the spring, as opposed to 5 – 6 subjects throughout the year.)
   - Be sure to select that you are an international school as you will be prompted to answer additional questions based on this response.
3. You will also be asked to upload a school profile. The school profile provides contextual information about the school the student attends. Unlike the transcript (see below), the school profile is not student specific, but instead school specific.

**Purpose of the School Profile:**
- To supply important contact and other basic information for the school to US universities
- To provide information on the school curriculum options available to the student (IB, HSC).
- To provide context about the school the student attends

**Important Components of the School Profile:**
- School contact information, important personnel contact information and School Mission Statement
- Description of the school and community
- **Type of School (state, independent/private, etc.):** Note “public” means state-funded in the US. Is there anything unusual about your school or program (i.e. serves mostly low income and minority students, has a high percentage who attend university, etc.)
- School’s Curriculum Options and Student Academic Information
- Grading Scale and Distribution
- Admissions Process (if applicable)
- **Typical Student Results:** What qualifications do most students at your school complete? How do students tend to perform on these? Where do your pupils tend to go to university? What type of university do your pupils typically attend?
- The School Profile should use official school letterhead at the top

4. After you have finished with the school profile section of the website. You can then move on to completing the components needed for each student.
School Report

1. You will be asked to fill in information about the student and further questions about the grading and ranking system of the school. **Class Rank, GPA and Curriculum:** Note whether you provide students with a Class Rank or GPA. It is OK to answer no.

2. **Curriculum:** US universities want to see applicants working hard in their final year of high school / college, and the most competitive universities will want to see students have selected the most rigorous options available to them, so be sure to answer this question. An important factor for US universities is the difficulty of a pupil’s chosen qualification/curriculum relative to other students at your school.

3. **Rating students:** If you are assisting several students from your school, try to differentiate ratings between applicants to maintain your credibility as a recommender (i.e., do not list all applicants as one of the top few you’ve encountered, **unless** this is really the case). If your student body is particularly competitive, rank applicants accurately within the options but note the nature of your student body, any admission criteria and achievements/post HSC/IB plans of school leavers in your school profile.
5. **Disciplinary History**: Note that disciplinary action can come into play in the admissions decision. However, it is important to be upfront about this information.
Written evaluation:

1. In the written evaluation, explain how well you know the student and why you are well-placed to comment on their academic and extracurricular achievements and potential.

2. Describe the applicant: Be strategic in which words you choose, considering what US universities are looking for in applicants.

3. Upload an evaluation letter. We recommend submitting an evaluation, as a third recommendation (point of view) alongside the two teacher recommendation letters. US guidance counselors would assist many students applying to university and would therefore be able to make broader statements on students’ potential relative to peers and to comment on their overall performance and extracurricular involvement. Note that if you enter your response into the text box, the word limit is 1,000. Print preview your submission to ensure your text was not cut off before submitting. If you upload the written evaluation, your text will not be cut. This only happens when typing directly into the online form.
Transcript:

1. Upload a transcript.
Note, “Junior Year” refers to a US student’s penultimate year of high school. This would roughly be equivalent to Year 11 in Australia.

We have heard from several universities, that what you necessarily check in the question “Please indicate the most recent grades included on the transcript accompanying this form” does not matter, since it is not an exact translation between educational systems.

2. Once you have reviewed the information fully, click “submit”. At this point you will be shown a pdf version of the school report.

Note: If after submitting the forms you realise you made a mistake, Common Application’s Helpdesk has provided the following information.

“The Common Application Support Team is not permitted to make updates to any submitted forms.

The Common Application organization evaluated the issue of counsellors and teachers who want to retrieve or edit previously submitted online forms because they addressed their recommendations to specific institutions without realizing it (despite the instructions). They also evaluated the issue of counsellors submitting updated or incorrect documents. Unfortunately, in these cases, the Common Application organization must reiterate the policy that documents cannot be retrieved or edited once submitted. Schools are aware that mistakes happen and students are not penalized.
Teacher Recommenders: You may mail corrected versions of the forms directly to the schools in order to submit changes. You can find a list of addresses by clicking the name of the school on this page:
https://schoolforms.commonapp.org/CommonApp/MemberRequirements.aspx

Counsellors: You may mail corrected versions of the forms to submit changes or use the Optional Report online. The Optional Report may be used at any point in the academic year to submit updated grades and/or transcripts, as well as to correct errors previously submitted on any report, but it should not be used as a substitute for the Mid Year or Final Report.

Keep in mind that this form can only be submitted once during the school season. If mistakes are made at a later date, forms will need to be mailed to the schools."

Note: The International Supplement. Previously, counsellors at international schools were required to submit an additional separate International Supplement. However, this supplement is being discontinued with the new version of the Common Application that was launched on 1 August 2013. Therefore, it important in the school profile to indicate you are an international school. Instead, you will be asked to fill in additional “International School” questions as part of the school report.

For the “International School” section – it asks “Has the applicant already taken leaving exams?” From the university perspective, they would likely consider the HSC/IB to be the official leaving exams. If the student is on a gap year, and would have the exam results available, then tick “yes” and upload those results. Check with the university if you are unsure how to respond.

Note about the Optional Report:
There is an option to submit an additional grade report, but it is not required. This is for schools that wish to send updated grades at a point in the year other than Mid and Final Reports (ie for Early Decision and Early Action students). You may also report any changes to the original school report and have the option to update your evaluation. It is unlikely you will need to complete this unless there has been a significant change in the student’s performance or circumstances. Please note that this form can only be submitted once throughout the school year.
Complete the Mid-Year Report:
This form is based on the US semester system, by which American students would likely have grades and an updated GPA/class rank to report in January. Additionally, those on block scheduling would have 3 - 4 classes in the first semester and a new set of classes to report for the second semester.

Please note you will have to submit a transcript. If there are no updates to what you submitted for the School Report, that is OK. If possible, in the evaluation, comment on the students’ academic performance and extracurricular involvement during the autumn and any achievements or improvements the student has made.

Note: US universities have asked us to suggest not to submit all of the school forms at once. They may delete your forms, assuming you submitted them early in error. The exception is gap year/mature students – if you are not regularly in touch and will not have updates, note this in the School Report. In this instance, you may want to ask the university if you can skip sending the Mid-Year and Final Reports.

In order to submit a Final Report in the Common Application system, you need to submit a Mid-Year Report.

Complete the Final Report:
Again, this form is based on the US semester system, by which American students would likely have grades and an updated GPA/class rank to report in early summer (June).

The questions are very similar to the School and Mid-Year Reports. You should submit the Final Report in December/January when students get their HSC/IB (or equivalent) results.

If possible, in the evaluation, comment on the students’ academic performance and extracurricular involvement during the academic year.

Please note you will have to submit a final transcript including the student’s actual results.

B. Teacher Recommendation

1. After you have logged into your Common Application account, fill in your information such as name, job title, contact information, etc.
2. You will then be asked to fill in the school’s details. This involves looking up the school on their online database.

If your school is not on the list, you can select “I don’t see my high school on this list.” If your school would like to be added in future, you should follow the advice in the “Helpdesk” button on the right of the screen.
3. You can now move on to completing the evaluation for each student who has indicated you as a recommender. As noted in the counsellor section, ideally, the student should also waive the right to see your reference to maintain credibility of the letter in the eyes of the university.

Rating students:

1. If you are assisting several students from your school, try to differentiate ratings between applicants to maintain your credibility as a recommender (ie do not list all applicants as one of the top few you’ve encountered, unless this is really the case).
Written evaluation:
1. Be strategic in which words you choose to describe the applicant, considering what US universities are looking for.

2. Note, the Common App Online School Forms system does not permit counsellors or teachers to customize recommendations for individual colleges.

Note: If the student would like to submit an extra reference letter (example: from a work experience or extracurricular activity) in addition to the guidance/careers counselor and two teacher letters, you may wish to first confirm with the university how they would like it submitted. Typically the referee can mail the additional letter directly to the university undergraduate admissions office.

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With thanks

Annette Brush
EducationUSA Sydney
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