

Tip Sheet: How to Handle the Common App

GOAL

To present your best self in the Common App. [Road2College is here to guide you.](#)

1. Know Your Deadlines

The Common Application opens on Aug. 1 each year. Early decision applications are due Nov. 1, and regular decision applications are due in January. Start early to give yourself time to reflect and present your best self.

2. Choose Your Colleges Strategically

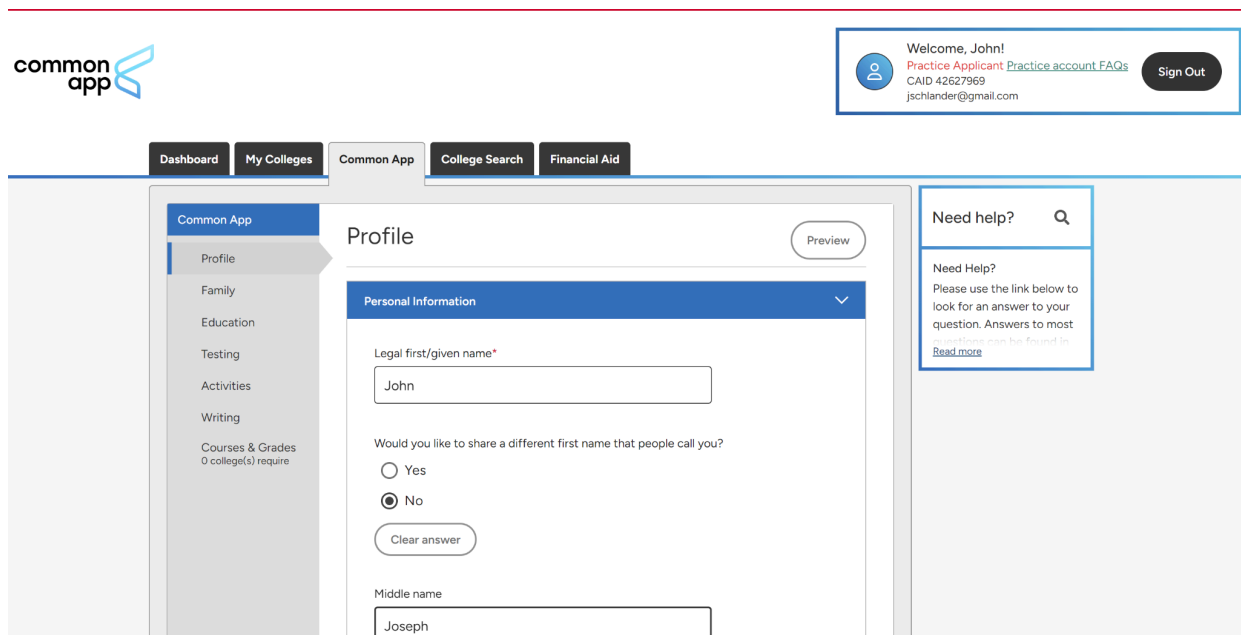
Before doing your application, research and select up to 20 colleges you want to apply to through the Common App. Road2College recommends [selecting a balanced list of reach, target and safety schools](#). Use self-service resources like Road2College's [R2C Insights](#) comparison tool, or talk with a pro with our [1-1 college list coaching](#). Note the application deadlines and requirements for each college.

3. Gather All Necessary Information

Collect all the information you'll need before starting the application. This includes your transcript, activities and honors, SAT/ACT scores, your parents' educational and employment information, and [letters of recommendation](#). Request letters at least a month in advance.

4. Log in and Begin Your Common App

As shown on the screen below, the [Common App](#) includes tabs on top and sections at the left. You can skip around. Double-check all your information after you enter it.



The screenshot displays the Common App user interface. At the top left is the 'common app' logo. On the right, a user profile box shows 'Welcome, John!' with a 'Do' icon, 'Practice Applicant', 'Practice account FAQs', 'CAID: 42627969', 'jschlender@gmail.com', and a 'Sign Out' button. Below the logo is a navigation bar with tabs: 'Dashboard', 'My Colleges', 'Common App', 'College Search', and 'Financial Aid'. The main content area is titled 'Profile' and includes a 'Preview' button. A left sidebar lists navigation options: 'Profile', 'Family', 'Education', 'Testing', 'Activities', 'Writing', and 'Courses & Grades' (with a sub-note '0 college(s) require'). The 'Personal Information' section is active, showing a text input for 'Legal first/given name*' with the value 'John', a radio button selection for 'Would you like to share a different first name that people call you?' (with 'No' selected), a 'Clear answer' button, and a text input for 'Middle name' with the value 'Joseph'. On the right, a 'Need help?' section contains a search icon and a message: 'Need Help? Please use the link below to look for an answer to your question. Answers to most questions can be found in Read more'.

4. Use Your Application to Create a Narrative

To create a strong narrative, identify key themes that reflect your unique strengths and interests, and weave these themes throughout your application. Use examples.

5. Craft a Strong Personal Statement

Your personal statement is your chance to showcase who you are beyond your grades and test scores. Choose a prompt that resonates with you, and write an essay that tells a story about your passions, challenges, or personal growth. Want help? Purchase Road2College's [1-1 essay coaching](#) or [Common App/essay coaching bundle](#).

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[How to Write a College Essay That Works](#)

6. Make Your Application Skimmable

Admissions officers read hundreds of applications. Help them out by making the most important information easy to find. Use bold type in a similar manner to this tip sheet – to help guide readers through your items.

7. Highlight Your Extracurricular Activities

In the Activities section, list your extracurriculars in order of importance. Focus on depth over breadth. Colleges want to see sustained involvement rather than a long list of activities.

8. Tailor the Additional Information Section

Use the Additional Information section to explain any circumstances that have impacted your academic record, such as health issues or family responsibilities. This section is optional, so only include relevant information.

10. Pay Attention to College-Specific Questions

Some colleges have their own supplemental questions or essays. They will show up in your Common App if you select them and go only to that school. Common questions include "Why this college?" and "Why this major?" Be specific in your answers.

11. Proofread Everything

Create a PDF of your Common App to carefully proofread every section of your application before submitting it. Spelling and grammar mistakes can leave a negative impression. To create a PDF, go to the 'My Colleges' tab, select a college, and navigate to the 'Review and Submit' section. Click 'Preview' to generate a PDF of your application, which you can save and review. Ensure you repeat this process for each college, as the PDF will reflect application details specific to that institution.

12. Submit Early

Submit your application a few days before the deadline to avoid any last-minute technical issues. Early submission also gives you peace of mind knowing that everything is complete.

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Article: [Common App Guide: How it Works, How to Use it, and Tips for Success](#)
Video: [Mastering the Common App](#)