

Activities

The Activities section causes the most confusion with students. There is no one accepted way to list your activities here, which is intentional on the part of the Common App. They want to give kids a little bit of flexibility. But here's how we tell our students to approach this section, and it's worked very well for us and for them.

- Don't plan to cut and paste a résumé into the Additional Information or send one to any college, unless that college specifically asks you to do it in their supplement. Admissions officers spend a lot of time constructing the applications so that they can collect all the information they need to learn about students. If you send a résumé without being asked, it's like telling them that you didn't like the way they put their application together. That might annoy them, which is never a good idea.
- We encourage students to list your activities in order of their importance to you. Start with the one activity that you could never imagine your high school career without and work your way down from there. After you enter the first one, you can always move the order around using the "Up/Down" arrows within each activity.
- Space can be limited in this section, so it's fine to abbreviate if the abbreviation is universally understood. It would be hard to find an admissions officer who doesn't know what an MVP or NHS is, but there are many other abbreviations that mean something only to the people involved in the group that uses it. As we said in the Honors section above, some acronyms need to be spelled out, especially if they are unique to your school or your state. In addition, you'll find you can save space by using numbers and abbreviations in the right place, i.e., "Senior Class Vice President" can be also be "Class VP: 12," or "First Place in Conference Championship as a Sophomore and Junior" can be "1st in Conf. Championship: 10, 11."

But be cautious. If you find yourself so desperate to squeeze in information here, and if your abbreviations start making this section look like a series of awkward text messages, then you may want to consider carefully using the Additional Information section to give yourself some breathing room.

- Don't feel that you need to fill up all ten lines. The applicant with the longest list of activities is not necessarily the one who's going to get in. In fact, many of the Collegewise counselors who previously worked in admissions at highly selective universities note that many of the students they admitted only had six or seven of the lines completed. Admissions officers want to learn about the *significant* ways you spent

your time outside class. If you were in the Spanish Club in the 9th grade and never went back after that, does it really help your application to list it? Leave the space blank or use that spot to share something else more important to you. Remember, this isn't a contest to see how much you can list; it's your chance to describe what you really enjoyed doing in high school.

- **Activity type** Start by selecting the activity from the drop-down menu. It's important to let this menu do the work for you. Look carefully and try to find a category that works before you select "Other Club/Activity." There are a lot of categories you might not expect to find, like "Family Responsibilities," "Cultural," "Academic," etc.
- **Position/Leadership description and organization name, if applicable** This space is limited to only 50 characters. You can use this space to list what this activity actually is if you weren't able to do so with the drop-down menu. For example, there's no combination of drop-down selections that will explain "Red Cross Club" or "Rock Climbing Club." Think of this section as your spot to list your titles, roles, or recognitions or the name of the place you work. For example, if you work as a camp counselor, that's your role. Put "Camp Counselor" here. If you were the Editorial Page Editor for the school newspaper, that's a title—put that here. If you were the captain, MVP, and first-team all-state in volleyball, those are recognitions. Put those here. Roles, titles, and recognitions are short and punchy, like "Varsity," "Eagle Scout," "Coach's Award," "Counselor," "Volunteer," "Founder," "Sports Editor," "Violinist," "Treasurer," "Photographer," "Graphic Artist," "Tutor," or "Captain." Anything that takes more space to explain should be put in Details and Accomplishments.
- **Please describe this activity, including what you accomplished and any recognition you received, etc.** Here are three questions to consider asking yourself for this section: 1) "Is it possible that whoever is reading this application might not understand what this activity really was, according to the information I provided above?" 2) "Did the organization or I accomplish anything that can't be summed up with a simple recognition that I listed above?" 3) "Can I provide greater depth to my experience by elaborating on my responsibilities or the value of my involvement?" Those are the types of information that can be listed in this section.
- For example, let's say you listed your camp counselor work under "Work (Paid)." But what if the camp were specifically for children with physical and mental disabilities? That's something interesting the admissions officer wouldn't know just from the previous two sections. So, here's where you could put the camp's name—if it's not already included—and description, like "Special Camp for

Special Kids: Camp for children with physical and mental disabilities.”

- What if your school paper won a statewide award during your junior year? That’s a cool accomplishment that can’t be summed up in the previous two sections. Here’s where you could say, “February 2017 issue won the statewide journalism award, ‘Excellence in Student Press.’”
- If you’ve won a lot of awards for one activity, it’s fine to summarize them here, such as, “six first-place awards, three honorable-mention ribbons.”

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• What about hobbies?

- Collegewise has some non-traditional advice about listing a hobby on the Common App.
- Do you have a hobby that you care about, something that’s not an official activity, but one that you put time into? Maybe you’ve taught yourself to play guitar in a garage band with your friends. Maybe you enjoy drawing, writing, or composing music, even though you aren’t publishing or performing any of it. Or, maybe you and your friends are Beatles fanatics who gather on Wednesdays and listen to your favorite songs together. If you have something you care about, we suggest that you list it in the Activities section for two reasons. First, real interest makes you interesting. Admissions officers really are trying to get to know the applicants. Thus, if you have a hobby you really enjoy, that’s an important part of your life that they should know about.

Second, when you share something a little personal like a hobby, it breaks up the tedium for an admissions officer who is reading app after app after app, day after day after day.

List a hobby only if it’s important to you. A good way to gauge this is to imagine a college interviewer asking you about it. Would you have something to say? Could you tell a good story about the time you put into this or what you’ve learned how to do? If you made an origami swan one time, you’re not going to have much to say about origami. However, if you’ve read books about origami and have taught yourself how to make 20 different advanced origami creations, you’ve got something to talk about.

Don’t include a hobby you started last week just to list it on your Common App. And don’t get too cute and start listing things like, “Petting my dog” or “Sleep.” It’s probably better to not include those interests in these cases.

- **Participation grade levels** This is pretty straightforward. The exception might be where to place summer activities. The correct answer is that

you check the box that would represent the grade you entered in the fall following it. As for PG, unless you're in post-graduate year, that is left blank. And we can assure you that you indeed know if you are doing a PG year.

- **Timing of participation** Again, this is pretty straightforward as you'll check one box that best represents the time frame of the activity.
- **Hours spent per week/Weeks spent per year** Be as accurate as you can here. Colleges aren't so nitpicky that they'll question if one hour of Spanish Club per week is more accurate than two hours per week. However, if you tell them that your involvement in the Spanish Club is 30 hours per week, that doesn't add up (unless Spanish Club has become your full-time job). But don't underestimate, either. If you say that you play football six hours a week, that's probably selling yourself short, considering that one game alone is at least three hours. Again, just be as accurate as you can. Also, some students who are very involved in an activity automatically enter "52 weeks per year." But you should do that only if you are honestly
 - swimming in the pool, working at the hamburger stand, or running the Key Club every single week of the year (including winter holiday, spring break, and summer months). There's no need to exaggerate here and no reason to give an admissions officer pause.
 - One way you can double-check your numbers is to take the number you put in "Hours spent per week" and multiply them by "Weeks spent per year." If you look at that resulting number and say, "Great! Sounds about right," then you can go with it. If you look at that resulting number and say, "Whoa. Something's off there," then you will want take another look at your original numbers in those two sections.
 - Finally, admission officers know that there's an ebb and flow to how much time you might spend with an activity. Sometimes it may be three hours a week, and sometimes it may be 15. If you do an honest job guesstimating, you'll be just fine. If you do feel the need to explain further, don't forget you always have space in Additional Information.
 - **I intend to participate in a similar activity in college.**
 - Your response here is used for two main purposes. One, if you check "Yes" and you are admitted to the school, it allows them to share with you
 - more information about similar activities at their school. Two, as they are building a class, it gives them a sense of what you'll engage with on campus
 - Don't feel compelled to check off every single box with a "Yes" but checking off "No" to every box probably won't leave the impression you want
 - either.

