

SSSI RESOURCE · APPLICATIONS

The Common App Checklist

Every section of the Common Application, in the order you should complete it.

Before you open the application

The Common App is used by more than 1,000 universities including most US institutions and a growing number in the UK, Canada, China, and Europe. Each section seems short, but mistakes compound. Work through them in this order:

Step 1 — Set up your account (Day 1)

- Create your account at **commonapp.org** using a permanent personal email (not a school address you may lose)
- Save your username and password in two places
- Indicate your intended year of entry — this controls which application cycle you see
- Add at least one university to your list to unlock the full dashboard

Step 2 — Profile section

- Legal name exactly as it appears on your passport
- Date of birth in the correct format (the system defaults to US style: MM/DD/YYYY)
- Gender, citizenship, languages spoken at home, religious preference (optional)
- Permanent address — use the address where you receive mail reliably, not a school dorm
- Phone number with country code (+211 for South Sudan, +254 for Kenya, etc.)

South Sudanese students with refugee or stateless status: select the most accurate citizenship option and use the Additional Information section to clarify.

Step 3 — Family section

- Parent / guardian education levels — be honest, including 'less than secondary' if accurate
- Parent occupations — list the actual work, not a polished version
- Siblings: names, ages, current schools
- Household details: who lives at home, languages spoken

This section is read carefully for first-generation and need-based scholarships. Accuracy matters more than presentation.

Step 4 — Education section

- Current secondary school: name, address, CEEB code if available (or 'Other' if not listed)
- Counselor or principal contact details — they will receive the school report request
- Grading scale at your school (a/b/c/d, 1–8, percentages, etc.)
- Class rank if reported by your school; leave blank if not
- All other secondary schools attended in the last 4 years
- Predicted or actual exam results: SSCE, KCSE, IGCSE, A-Levels, IB

Step 5 — Testing

- SAT / ACT scores: most US universities are test-optional; report scores only if 1350+ on SAT or 30+ on ACT
- Duolingo English Test, IELTS, or TOEFL: required for most international applicants
- AP / IB / A-Level scores if you have them
- Send official scores from the testing agency at least 4 weeks before your earliest deadline

Step 6 — Activities (10 slots)

You have 10 activity slots, 150 characters per description. Order them by importance, not chronology.

- Lead with verbs: *founded, led, organized, taught, raised, built, mentored*
- Quantify everything: number of students, hours per week, money raised, kilometres walked
- Include unpaid family responsibilities (caring for siblings, translating for parents) — this is legitimate work
- Do not pad with one-off events. Quality of detail beats quantity of entries

Step 7 — Honors (5 slots)

Academic and competitive recognitions only. National scholarship, regional debate placement, mathematics olympiad, science fair. Leadership and service belong in Activities, not Honors.

Step 8 — Personal Essay (650 words)

Choose one of seven prompts. Most strong essays answer prompts 1, 3, 5, or 7. Use the SSSI Personal Statement Guide as your structural reference. Submit your draft for mentor review at least three weeks before the deadline.

Step 9 — Writing supplements (per university)

- Each university adds its own supplemental questions: 'Why us?', short answer, optional essays
- Treat 'Why us?' as the highest-value question. It is where most international applicants under-perform
- Name specific courses, professors, research centres, student groups, traditions — never the campus or the weather

Step 10 — Recommenders

- Assign your counselor first — they upload the school report, transcript, and counselor letter
- Add 2 teacher recommenders (1 in a humanities subject, 1 in a STEM subject is the safe default)
- Optional: 1 additional recommender (coach, employer, mentor) — only if they add something the others cannot
- Send each recommender a brief: see the SSSI Recommender Brief template

Step 11 — Financial aid

- Mark 'will apply for need-based financial aid' if you cannot pay the full cost
- Complete the CSS Profile for universities that require it (most private US universities)
- Complete the university's own international financial aid form, if separate
- Apply only to universities that meet 100% of demonstrated need for international students if you have no other funding source

Step 12 — Final review before submit

- Spelling and grammar check on every essay
- Activity descriptions read aloud — no abbreviations the reader cannot decode
- Counselor and teachers confirmed they have submitted
- Test scores sent to the correct CEEB codes
- Application fee paid OR fee waiver approved

- Confirmation email saved in two places

Submit at least 48 hours before the deadline. The Common App slows down dramatically in the final hours of major deadlines.