

Extra-curricular activities and the Common Application

What does “extra-curricular activities” mean? The definition is very broad and covers **everything that you do outside of your academic classes 9th – 12th grade: how you spend your time when you are not in school, both during the school year and summers.**

Most colleges do not ask you to submit a separate résumé, though it’s a good idea to make one to have ready for applying for outside scholarships, internships, and jobs. Extra-curricular activities show up in three places on the Common Application, and colleges are used to looking at them in this format. These three places amount to your résumé.

1. ACTIVITIES SECTION

The menu:

- Academic
- Art
- Athletics: JV/Varsity
- Athletics: Club
- Career Oriented
- Community Service (Volunteer)
- Computer/Technology
- Cultural
- Dance
- Debate/Speech
- Environmental
- Family Responsibilities
- Foreign Exchange
- Foreign Language
- Journalism/Publication
- Junior R.O.T.C
- LGBT
- Music: Instrumental
- Music: Vocal
- Religious
- Research
- Robotics
- School Spirit
- Science/Math
- School Government/Politics
- Theater/Drama
- Work (paid)
- Other

There is room for up to 10 activities. For each, first select the corresponding menu item. The menu covers a huge range, including family responsibilities (e.g. baby-sitting for younger siblings), paid work (e.g. bagging groceries), LGBT (e.g. GayStraight Alliance).

There are only 50 characters including spaces to identify each activity and 150 characters including spaces to describe each activity. Give as much descriptive information as you can within the character count allowed.

Use lively descriptions of the activities rather than a boring list. After you have completed the activities, use the arrows to move the items up or down and make the list appear in the order of importance to you. Click the “Preview” button at the top right of the page frequently to see how they appear.

Here are some examples:

Example 1:

Position/Leadership description and organization name, if applicable:

Poetry, silver medal national Scholastic competition

Please describe this activity, including what you accomplished and any recognition you received.

I've composed poetry & spoken word since I was four. Scholastic competition: won gold in New York, silver in national. Poetry in Performance at high school. Spoken Word Saturday program.

Example 2:

Position/Leadership description and organization name, if applicable

Introduction to engineering 3-wk class, Cornell U

Details, honors won, and accomplishments

Selected by faculty to participate in free summer program. Learned about different branches of engineering— civic, mechanical, biomedical, electrical - through hands-on projects.

For each activity: also check which grades 9-12 you did this activity, whether it was summer or school year, the number of hours per week and weeks per year. It's okay to be approximate. The school year is roughly 36 weeks.

Where is this section? on the Common App tab, fifth item down: Activities.

Is it optional? Not really. Colleges need to know about your interests outside school.

2. HONORS SECTION

There are spaces for up to 5 honors related to your **academic** achievement beginning 9th grade. “Academic” in this context means science and math, but also art, music, speech/debate, writing, poetry, *and programs you are selected for* (rather than just paying to participate in).

There are 100 characters allocated to identify and describe each Honors title. Take full advantage of the space, describing the honor in as much detail as you can within the brief limit. For each item check the box for the level: school, regional, national, international.

Some examples of National level honors:

- Regeneron Science Talent Competition, Finalist or Semi-finalist
- National Merit Commended or Semifinalist
- National AP Scholar
- Young Arts competition winner
- Selected participant in a special summer academic program, such Telluride (for rising juniors and seniors) at Cornell, Indiana University and University of Michigan.

Some examples of State/Regional level honors:

- Mock Trial, debate or speech competition winner in NYC or NYS
- Math Olympiad regional level award winner
- Scholastic Arts competition, state award winner
- National History Day Essay selected at local level and went to State level

Some examples of School level honors:

- Academic Honor Roll
- Award winner, school departmental academic award (if several departments or years, identify as one honor but list all departments and years)

It's fine not to put anything in the Honors section. But when it comes to deciding what could go there, you have some freedom. It's not always clear: if you were chosen by the principal to serve as the student rep on a school recycling committee, that could definitely be an “honor.”

Important note: *don't* include nominations for programs like the National Youth Leadership Forum, National Student Leadership Conference, Student Ambassador Programs, or National Society of High School Scholars. **These are organizations that contact you claiming to be selective, but are really just after your money!** College officials will not be impressed.

Where is this section? On the Common App tab -> Education menu item -> Honors
Is it optional? Yes

3. SECTION FOR ANY COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY COURSES TAKEN

Colleges really like to see kids learning outside of school! If you have taken a college class of any kind, there's a place to show this. It could be summer pre-college class taken on a sleep-away campus, an online course, a CUNY college class taken through College Now, etc.

You can enter up to 5 courses. For each one, select the name of the college or university first. There's no place to name or describe the course, however, which is a little weird, so for a summer program that isn't going to show up on your high school transcript, for example, you may want to also include it on your activities list. Enrichment classes taken once a week on a college campus, often Saturday mornings for art or music, belong on the activities list rather than here.

Dual enrollment classes like College Now will be on your high school transcript. But you can also list them here, showing that you got college credit. If the class is happening in the 12th grade, list it here AND under Current or Most Recent Classes section on the Common App and click Dual Enrollment.

Check as many of these apply:

- Course taught online
- Course taught on college campus
- Course taught on secondary/high school campus (excluding AP/IB)
- College credit awarded
- Transcript available

CUNY College Now

Offers several credit-bearing college classes as "dual enrollment" for high school students. (I.e. they are enrolled both in HS and in a college class.) They are offered at all the CUNY campuses in the spring and fall and usually meet after school or on Saturdays. Here's the list: collegenow.cuny.edu/college-credit-courses/

Online college classes

MOOC ("Massive Open Online Courses")

These classes are free and sometimes have a grade or "pass" (but not college credit) attached to them. All subjects under the sun. The most well-known platforms are:

Coursera.org and EdX.org. For example, take free online math courses from MIT and Caltech.

Where is this section? Common App tab -> Education -> Colleges & Universities
Is it optional? Yes