

2026-2027 COMMON APP STUDENT GUIDE

A student-friendly, section-by-section guide for completing your application accurately and confidently.

GOLDEN RULE: If you are guessing about something on your school record, stop and ask your counselor.

BEFORE YOU START

Have these things nearby

- Your high school transcript
- Your current senior-year schedule
- Parent/guardian information
- SAT/ACT scores, if you plan to report them
- A list of activities, jobs, sports, clubs, volunteering, family responsibilities, and hobbies
- A list of academic honors or awards
- Approximate dates and time commitments for activities

SECTION 1: PROFILE

Personal Information

- Enter your legal name exactly as it appears on official records. Use the preferred-name field if you normally go by another name.
- Use a **professional email address** that you check regularly and will continue to have access to. Colleges may use this email to contact you throughout the application process.
- A good example is firstname.lastname@gmail.com. Avoid nicknames, gaming handles, jokes, or anything you would not want a college admissions office to see.
- Enter your current permanent home address and answer additional household/address questions honestly.

Demographics, Languages & Citizenship

- Read each question carefully. If a question is optional, you can decide whether to answer it.
- Only claim language proficiency that accurately reflects your ability.
- If you are unsure how to answer a citizenship or residency question, ask for help instead of guessing.

Common App Fee Waiver

- If you believe you may qualify, answer the questions honestly and ask your counselor if you are unsure.

SECTION 2: FAMILY

Parent/Guardian Information

- You may need names, occupations, employers, education levels, colleges attended, and degrees earned.
- Do not guess. Ask your parent or guardian when you do not know an answer.
- Enter parent education information accurately. Colleges may use their own definitions for first-generation status.

Siblings

- Enter the requested information accurately, including college attendance when applicable.

SECTION 3: EDUCATION

First-Time-in-College (FTIC)

All Nease seniors applying to college directly from high school should identify themselves as First-Time-in-College/Freshman applicants. This includes students who have earned college credits through Dual Enrollment. Dual Enrollment credits earned while you are still in high school do **not** make you a transfer applicant.

Your High School

- Search for and select the correct high school.
- Your date of entry is when you began attending this high school. If you transferred, this may not be the beginning of 9th grade.
- Enter your expected graduation date.

Other Schools & Dual Enrollment

- Report other high schools you attended when requested.
- If you took Dual Enrollment courses, you may need to list the college that awarded the credit. Ask your counselor if you are unsure.

Grades, GPA & Rank

- Use your official transcript.
- Do not calculate or convert your GPA yourself.
- Report GPA, GPA scale, weighting, class rank, and class size exactly as your school reports them.
- If your school does not rank, select the appropriate option rather than creating your own rank.

Current-Year Courses

- Enter your senior-year classes using official course names when possible.
- Select the actual course level: Regular, Honors, AP, IB, Dual Enrollment, etc.

HONORS: WHAT ACTUALLY COUNTS?

The Honors section is for **academic awards, achievements, or recognition received during high school.** Ask yourself: **Was I recognized for my academics, academic performance, or an academic competition?**

School-Based Academic Honors - Examples

- Honor Roll, Principal's Honor Roll, High Honor Roll, or A/B Honor Roll.
- Academic Excellence Award or an Outstanding Student award in a subject.
- A department award such as Outstanding Math Student or Excellence in Spanish.
- An official Top Student in a Course award.

Example entry: Principal's Honor Roll | Grades 9, 10, 11 | Recognition Level: School

AP / College Board Recognition - Examples

- AP Scholar.
- AP Scholar with Honor.
- AP Scholar with Distinction.
- An official College Board National Recognition Program award.

Example entry: AP Scholar with Distinction | Grade 11 | Recognition Level: National

Academic Honor Societies - Examples

- National Honor Society (NHS).
- National English Honor Society.
- Mu Alpha Theta.
- Science National Honor Society.
- Rho Kappa.
- Spanish or French Honor Society.
- Tri-M Music Honor Society.

Example: Selection or induction may be recognition. If you were NHS President and organized tutoring or service projects, that leadership/work may also belong in Activities.

Academic Competitions - Examples

- 1st Place - Regional Science Fair.
- 2nd Place - District Math Competition.
- Essay Contest Winner.
- Robotics competition award.
- Academic Team award.
- Research, coding, business, history, or other academic competition recognition.

Example entry: 1st Place, Regional Science Fair - Environmental Science Division | Grade 11 | State/Regional

National, State, Regional or International Recognition - Examples

- National Merit Commended Student or National Merit Semifinalist.
- State academic award.

- Regional academic competition award.
- National academic competition finalist.
- International academic competition recognition.

"I Don't Think I Have Any Honors" - Ask Yourself

- Did I ever make Honor Roll?
- Did my school recognize me for my GPA?
- Did I receive an academic certificate at an awards ceremony?
- Did I receive an award in one of my classes or from an academic department?
- Did College Board recognize me?
- Did I win or place in an academic competition?
- Was I inducted into an academic honor society?

You do **not** need a national award to have something appropriate to report.

Does This Count? Common Student Examples

- "I have a 4.3 GPA." - The GPA itself is not an honor; an official Academic Excellence Award based on that GPA may be.
- "I am captain of the soccer team." - Leadership belongs in Activities, not academic Honors.
- "I volunteered for 150 hours." - The hours belong in Activities. An official service award is different, though not every service award is an academic honor.
- "I am in National Honor Society." - Selection/induction may be recognition; meaningful participation or leadership can also be described in Activities.
- "I got an A in AP Biology." - A grade is not an honor. An official Outstanding AP Biology Student Award would be.
- "My teacher said I was one of the best students." - A compliment is not an official honor. A department-selected award is.

Honor or Activity?

Easy test: Was I **RECOGNIZED** for something? It may be an Honor. Did I **DO** something? It probably belongs in Activities.

Which Recognition Level Should I Choose?

- School: Recognition was primarily from your school. Example: Principal's Honor Roll.
- State/Regional: Students from multiple schools in a district, region, or state were eligible or competed.
- National: Students across the country were eligible. Example: National Merit recognition.
- International: The recognition involved students or competition across multiple countries.

Choose the level of the actual recognition - not how famous the organization sounds.

What If I Have Too Many Honors?

Prioritize your strongest and most meaningful recognition. Example order: **1. National Merit Commended Student, 2. AP Scholar with Distinction, 3. Regional Science Fair Champion, 4. Outstanding Chemistry Student, 5. Principal's Honor Roll.**

Never invent or exaggerate an honor to fill an empty space. It is okay to have fewer honors than the maximum allowed.

SECTION 4: TESTING

- Check the testing policy for every college. Policies can differ.
- Test optional generally means you decide whether scores are considered; it does not automatically mean you should or should not submit them.
- **Talk with your counselor to help decide if you should send your test-optional scores.** Your decision may be different for different colleges.
- Some colleges allow self-reported scores while others may require official scores.

SECTION 5: ACTIVITIES

What Counts?

- Sports, clubs, student government, band, theater, work, volunteering, religious activities, family responsibilities, caring for siblings, hobbies, independent projects, internships, research, and community involvement can all count.

Ordering & Descriptions

- Put your most meaningful or important activities toward the top.
- Use action words such as Led, Organized, Created, Managed, Designed, Mentored, Coordinated, Raised, Founded, Competed, or Trained.
- Use accurate numbers when they help show impact. Never invent accomplishments.
- Estimate hours per week and weeks per year honestly.

SECTION 6: WRITING

Common App Personal Essay

- Your essay should help an admissions reader understand who you are beyond your transcript and activity list.
- Your topic does not have to be dramatic. A normal experience can be strong if it reveals something meaningful about you.
- Reflect on why the experience mattered, what you learned, how you changed, or what it reveals about you.

Using AI

- AI can help brainstorm, organize ideas, check grammar, or identify unclear sections.
- Your submitted essay should reflect your own experiences and voice. Do not use AI to invent experiences.

Additional Information

- Use this area when admissions officers need important context to understand your application; it is not automatically a second essay.

SECTION 7: COURSES & GRADES

- Not every college requires this section.
- If required, use an accurate copy of your transcript when self-reporting your courses and grades.
- **Use Parchment or HAC to view your transcript** so you are entering the exact course names, levels, grades, and credits shown on your school record.
- Do not rely on memory when self-reporting.
- Do not round grades, improve grades, rename courses, or guess credits.

Why this matters: The information you self-report should match your official school record. If something looks different or you are unsure what to enter, ask your counselor before submitting.

MY COLLEGES

- Completing the main Common App does not mean every college application is finished.
- Check each college for deadlines, fees, testing, recommendations, supplemental essays, intended-major questions, residency questions, scholarships, and additional forms.

COMMON APP + XELLO: IMPORTANT SCHOOL PROCESS

Link Your Accounts

- Complete the FERPA Release Authorization in Common App.
- Log into Xello and follow the steps to link your Common App and Xello accounts.
- Make sure the connection is successful. Do not wait until your application deadline.

Add Your Assigned Counselor in Xello

- You must add/request YOUR assigned school counselor in Xello.
- Your counselor may send your transcript, school report, counselor recommendation when required, and other school documents.

If you do not know who your assigned counselor is, check the [Nease Guidance website](#), where counselors are listed by student last-name range.

Teacher Recommendations

- If the teacher works at our school, request the teacher through Xello.
- Do NOT add a teacher who works at our school directly through Common App.
- If a teacher or other recommender does NOT work at our school, they may need to be invited directly through Common App.

Easy rule: Works at our school = XELLO. Does not work at our school = COMMON APP.

Do not request the same recommender in both places. If you are unsure, ask your counselor first.

FERPA

- Read the FERPA explanation carefully, including the question about waiving your right to review recommendation letters.
- If you do not understand the question, stop and ask your counselor before submitting it.

FLORIDA PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: DON'T FORGET YOUR SELF-REPORTED ACADEMIC RECORD

If you are applying to a **Florida public/state university**, check that university's admissions checklist for an additional self-reported academic record requirement. Many Florida public universities use **STARS**.

UCF is the exception to remember: UCF uses **SPARK** (Self-Provided Academic Record for Knights), which serves the same general purpose of having students self-report their high school academic record.

- After applying, check the admissions portal for EACH Florida public university on your list.
- Look for STARS, SPARK (UCF), or another self-reported academic record requirement.
- Use your transcript when entering courses and grades.
- Follow that university's instructions carefully and make sure the requirement shows as received or complete in your portal.

Example: You submit Common App to UCF. You are not finished. As a current high school senior/FTIC applicant, you must also complete UCF's SPARK form as directed in your UCF admissions checklist.

Remember: Common App submitted does not always mean application complete. Always check the applicant portal for every college after you apply.

BEFORE YOU SUBMIT: FINAL CHECKLIST

- My legal name and contact information are correct.
- I used a professional email address that I check regularly.
- My high school information is correct.
- I identified myself as a First-Time-in-College/Freshman applicant.
- My GPA and school information match my transcript.
- I did not calculate my own GPA or class rank.
- My senior courses are entered correctly.
- My activities are ordered intentionally and hours are realistic.
- I proofread my activities and essay.
- I checked each college's testing policy and talked with my counselor if I need help deciding whether to submit test-optional scores.
- I linked my Common App and Xello accounts.

- I added my assigned counselor in Xello.
- I requested school-based teachers through Xello.
- I used Common App only for appropriate outside recommenders.
- I used Parchment or HAC to verify transcript information when self-reporting.
- If applying to a Florida public university, I checked for STARS or SPARK (UCF).
- I checked deadlines and Courses & Grades requirements.
- I reviewed the application PDF preview before submitting.

WHAT SHOULD I ASK MY COUNSELOR?

- Which GPA and GPA scale should I report?
- Does Nease report class rank, and what should I enter for class size?
- What course level should I select for a class?
- How should I report my Dual Enrollment coursework?
- Does this award belong in the Honors section?
- Should I submit my test scores to this test-optional college?
- Do I qualify for an application fee waiver?
- Who is my assigned counselor in Xello?
- How do I handle FERPA or recommendation requests?
- Does this college require STARS, SPARK, Courses & Grades, or another self-reported record?
- What should I do if something in Common App does not match my transcript or school records?

FINAL ADVICE

- Start early. Applications take longer than you think.
- Correct information matters more than getting a green checkmark quickly.
- Be accurate and never exaggerate.
- Check every college individually because requirements can differ.
- Proofread the application preview before submitting.
- Check each college's applicant portal after you apply.
- Ask questions before you submit when something is unclear.

YOU'VE GOT THIS. Complete the application one section at a time. You do not need to finish everything in one day.