

Guide to Completing the Common Application

Archbishop Alter Class of 2027

The Common Application is simply a “common application” in which a student submits one application for multiple schools. Hundreds of schools use the Common Application and all have signed an agreement stating that they will use the common application as equal to a school’s specific application.

The Alter Guidance Office has prepared this guide to completing the Common Application that includes both general information and steps specific to Alter students. Most questions you may have will be answered by following this guide; if you need further assistance, please use the “Help & support” section on the right side of the Common App website or see your counselor.

Step 1: Create an Account

- Go to www.commonapp.org and create an account. Write down your username and password. We do not have access to your accounts, so we can’t help if you forget.
- Be sure to use your legal name as it appears on official school documents and standardized tests. This will make sure colleges can match documents to the correct person.
- When prompted, use your home address.
- Your work will be saved each time you click “continue” to the next page, though you will be able to go back and edit completed sections. Completed sections will appear with a green check mark on the left side of the page.

Step 2: The Application

- Click the “My Common Application” option on the left side of the page or use the Dashboard option in the middle of the page. You will need to complete all required fields, as indicated with red asterisks. You can complete other fields as well, at your discretion. Seven categories will appear on the left: Profile, Family, Education, Testing, Activities and experiences, Writing, and Courses & Grades. See below for notes on each section.

Profile:

- You will begin with the “profile” page.
- Under “geography and nationality,” you will need to include your Social Security Number (SSN), if you are applying for financial aid via the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).
- If you answer “yes” to the question about whether or not you think you will qualify for a Common Application Fee Waiver, you will need to be able to prove it. Reasons for eligibility include: qualifies for federal reduced or free lunch, qualifies for ACT waiver, etc. If you have any questions regarding fee waivers, please see your counselor.

Family:

- Next, you will complete family information. Much of the information regarding your parents is not required, but we recommend you do complete as much as you are comfortable sharing. The education level of your parents is of particular importance.
- Note that if you answer that your parents attended college, you will be asked to indicate where by looking up the college by name. If your parents attended college overseas or their college does not appear, you can enter the information manually.

Education:

- Please choose Archbishop Alter High School in Kettering, Ohio.
- Your graduation date is May 2027.
- College and Universities: If you have taken any college courses (such as CCP through Sinclair), you can include that information here. Note that if you received college credit, you do not have to send a transcript at this time but will need to send one only to the college you choose to attend. This needs to be done by you, via the college's transcript request process, before you attend your university.
- Grades:
 - For class rank, indicate NONE. We do not rank. No exceptions.
 - For graduating class size, indicate 118.
 - You do not need to enter anything under GPA, GPA scale, or GPA weighting. We handle this part for you.
- Current or Most Recent Year Courses:
 - You will only be able to enter up to 15 courses here, which may be difficult for some students. As such, you should combine any consecutive term courses (anything that lasts a full year), and list them as one course. Recognize that your full schedule will be listed on the secondary school report form sent by the guidance office, so you do not need to worry.
 - List courses the way they will appear on your transcript, not by informal names.
- Honors: If you have received any honors during your 9th-11th grade years, list them here. These include honor rolls and "best in class" awards. We do not have a record of these.
- Community-Based Organizations: You will put "0" down unless you have received *free* assistance from a community organization for your college application.
- Future Plans: Listing a career interest indicates just that: it is an interest. This does not solidify a major and colleges know that you are likely to change your mind. Nonetheless, consider the following:
 - Other or undecided are perfectly acceptable choices for future plans, unless you indicate in your essays that you are deeply interested in a specific field. Many schools prefer you to come in with an open mind!
 - On the other hand, if you list "engineering" and are applying to a school that does not have an engineering program, this may suggest to them that you are not a particularly good fit for their school.
 - Likewise, "highest degree you plan to earn" has no major bearing on your application. If you do not know, it is perfectly fine to reply "undecided."
 - If colleges ask you to indicate interests in their supplemental questions, it is there that you should not reply undecided. They are simply asking you to indicate interests.

Testing:

- Remember that some colleges require testing scores to be sent directly from the testing agency (ACT or College Board) and that listing scores here is not sufficient. As such, listing your scores here is optional.

Activities:

- This section always creates a certain level of anxiety among students. How many activities should I list and in what order? What if I can't fill all the spaces available? What if I have more activities than there is space for? Consider the following:
 - Colleges are interested in those activities that are most central to who you are. It is much more about depth and quality than quantity. You do NOT need 10 activities if you do not have them.
 - If you have more than 10 activities and want to include them all, you can do so in the "Additional Information" section under "Writing."

- List your activities in the order of importance to you. Be sure to list those with which you are still involved before those you no longer participate in, as well.
- Under “hours spent per week” and “weeks spent per year,” be honest, but don’t sell yourself short. A varsity sport, for example, requires (on average) 1-2 hours of practice time, 4 days per week, plus one home (3 hours) and one away contest (might be 6 hours including travel). It is reasonable that a varsity sport could require 20 or so hours per week. Some activities are harder to quantify. Use your best judgment. If you overdo it, you won’t be credible but give yourself appropriate credit for everything you do!

Writing:

- Personal Essay: You will find prompts to the personal essay, otherwise known as the “Common App Essay,” on this page. Note that some colleges do not require this essay, but most will.
 - As you will read in this section, the personal essay “demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. It is your voice that matters here, more than the topic you choose. Consider what you want them to know about you, not what you think they want you to write.
 - Remember, too, that the prompts are not the questions, but rather the avenue to answering the question “What do you want the readers or your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores?” Your essay needs to be about YOU.
 - Your personal essay must be no more than 650 words, but longer than 250 words. If you are over the limit, work to sharpen your language, eliminate unnecessary elements, and revise! It is always helpful to put your essay away for a while and return to it.
 - While your essay needs to be your work, we strongly recommend you get feedback from someone who knows you well. We are always happy to help you edit! Even small grammar errors can be a big deal.
- Additional Information: If you feel that your application or achievements have been significantly impacted by challenges or other circumstances, or if there is anything else you would like to add for which there is no appropriate place, then you may share that information in this section. Please know that this is NOT required.

Courses & Grades:

- This section allows students to self-report the classes they took in high school, along with the grades they received. Not all colleges require this section. You can get a copy of your transcript from anyone in the Guidance office, if needed.
- Under each grade level, you will add “Archbishop Alter High School” as your school, as well as the school year you completed that grade, the grading scale (A-F), and schedule (semesters).
- You will need to list the subject you took, the course name that is listed on your transcript, and the level of the course (i. e. regular/standard, honors, or AP).
- First semester grades will be placed under the S1 column, and second semester will be put in the S2 column. You will list “No Grade” under the Final column.
- All Alter classes, except P. E., are worth .5 credit per semester, totaling 1 credit if it is a year-long class. The credits earned per class are listed on your transcript.

Step 3: Supplements

Some, but not all, will have a supplement you will need to complete to apply. To access supplements, you will need to add colleges to your Common Application list under “My Colleges.” Supplements generally include additional information questions more specific to their schools. They will also often include one or more additional essay questions. These essays are of particular importance in demonstrating your knowledge of the college you are applying to and, as such, your interest and fit. Be sure to do your homework on each college and tailor your responses to that school!

Step 4: Recommenders and FERPA

Once you have entered all required information and added one or more colleges to your “My Colleges” list, click on one of your colleges and you will see the “Recommenders and FERPA” option. You will only sign the FERPA authorization once, but information on recommenders will vary and will be available on each college’s page.

- First, you will need to read and complete the FERPA release authorization. Please read the explanation before agreeing to waive or not waive your rights. It is our very STRONG recommendation that you WAIVE your rights to view your recommendations. Alter’s policy is to not let students read recommendation letters. Additionally, many colleges discount recommendations when they cannot confirm that they are confidential. You can be confident that your teachers and counselors here will represent you in the most favorable light possible, and, while it is entirely up to you, refusing to waive this right can lead to unwarranted questions and concerns from the schools to which you are applying. Lastly, if you do not waive your rights, many teachers will no longer write recommendations for you, which is their legal right, as well.
- Because Alter is a Naviance school, you will NOT make teacher recommendation requests through the common application. This process is explained separately.
- You will be able to see how many teacher recommendations each college requires and allows on their page. If a college requires one and allows two, you must submit one and can submit two, but a second is NOT necessary.
- If a college allows additional non-academic recommenders, you will find a section called “Other Recommender” here. This option will not appear if a school does not accept these types of recommendations. Only teacher recommendations go through Naviance, so an “other recommender” will have to go through the Common Application.
 - Click “Invite Other Recommender” and select “Invite Other Recommender.” Complete the information about the recommender and click “Add.” Your recommender will receive an email from the Common Application and will be able to upload their recommendation directly.

Step 5: Preview and Submit

Once you have completed all required sections of the Common Application and the school supplements (if there are any), you will be able to click “Submit.” By clicking submit, you will generate a PDF of your application that you can preview before final submission. If you need to make changes, you can go back and do so ONLY before approving final submission. If you are finished, you can click the box that says you have previewed the PDF and are approving final submission. After you do, you will be prompted for any payment information or fee waiver, if there is an application fee.

Remember that while you have one Common Application, each school may have specific information/questions. If so, you will need to submit the application for each college from their “page.” Click on the school from your “My Colleges” tab.

Remember: your application is not complete unless you have submitted standardized test scores directly from the College Board or ACT, if required.