



A Complete Guide to the Common App Activities List

The activities section of the Common App allows you to pick **up to 10** extracurricular activities to showcase as your resume.

In addition to a brief description of your role or accomplishments, the following details are required by the Common App for each activity:

- Type of activity (**research, community service, art, athletics, etc.**)

- Level of participation
 - Grade level (**9, 10, 11, 12, post-grad**)
 - Hours/week
 - Weeks/year

- Timing of participation (**during school, during break, all year**)

- Intention to participate in college (**Y/N**)

Picking Your 10 Activities

You should list the activities in order of importance – start listing the **most important activities first**.

But how should you rank your activities?

Here are some things to consider:

- Length of commitment
 - College admissions like to see long-term commitments rather than sporadic involvement.
 - A 3-year engagement with the local charity organization should probably rank higher than a one-semester stint as a 2nd chair violinist at the school orchestra.
 - That said, **short-term activities aren't necessarily bad**. Limited-time activities such as summer internships or standalone projects can rank high in your list. It all depends on...
- Relevance to your declared major / goal
 - Let's say you're applying as a pre-medical track with a major in biochemistry.
 - Spending two summers at a research institute should rank higher than your 4-year run as a championship-winning quarterback (even though the latter might be more impressive on paper).
- Significance of your role / responsibilities
 - Being a production manager for the school play in charge of 100 cast members should probably rank higher than spending 4 years as an average member of the school dance troupe.
 - Of course, the value of each experience is subjective. But try to prioritize activities that can showcase qualities such as leadership, compassion, proficiency, and competence.

*** Combining similar experiences is okay (multiple different shadowing experiences as a "single" experience → average out the hours).

*** You can make different lists of 10 activities for different programs, so you can tailor them to different schools.

Writing The Descriptions

- **Title / Position** (50 characters)
 - Be specific and define your role.
 - Member ()
 - Grantmaker ()
 - In the case of evolving titles, list them out. The most senior position first.
 - Editor-in-Chief (yr 4), Managing Editor (yr 1-3)
 - If you wear many hats at the activity, list them out using commas.
 - Science Olympiad - Mentor, Treasurer, Competitor
 - If you're struggling for character space, it's okay to use widely accepted shorthand.
 - President → pres.
 - Vice President → VP
- **Organization Name** (100 characters)
 - Spell out the entire organization name, followed by the acronym in parentheses.
 - Girls Advisory Board (GAB)
 - National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
 - *** don't assume your acronym is understood by everyone ****
 - Adding short description of the organization in the title itself? → ask others for input!

- **Description** (150 characters)

You're given 150 characters to write detailed descriptions of each activity. Wonder how long that is? It's exactly the length of this short paragraph.

- Use the **past tense** to describe activities you are no longer involved in or happened for a limited time; use the **present tense** to describe activities you still currently do.
- Don't use complete sentences.
 - As a member of the fundraising club, I helped organize Hurricane Relief Efforts that included food drives and donation of clothing
 - **Organized food drives and clothing donations for Hurricane Relief efforts**
- List out your roles or achievements, separated by commas.
 - I transport patients and make their beds. I also deliver meals, fold laundry so that nurses can focus on caring for the patients. This was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the hospital was experiencing staff shortages.
 - **Transport patients, make beds, deliver meals & fold laundry so nurses can focus on patient care; especially important during pandemic staff shortages**
- Use specific quantitative/numeric descriptions of your achievements.
 - Mentored young kids in various subjects and performed well in tournaments. Even represented the school at the national level competition.
 - Mentored 8 middle schoolers in Anatomy & Physiology & Disease Detectives; 1st place in Regional Tournament; 12th place in National Invitational (2022)
- Use action verbs instead of generic verbs.

Action verbs refer to verbs that describe specific actions that can help you describe your accomplishments, skills, and responsibilities. A stronger action verb provides more information and is more specific than generic verbs.

Generic verbs, on the other hand, are verbs that are vague and open-ended (took part in, helped).

Take a look at this list of generic vs. action verbs:

Generic Verbs	Action Verbs
Did	Led
Made	Trained
Helped	Directed
Worked	Authored
Handled	Managed
Dealt with	Designed
Involved in	Analyzed
Carried out	Resolved
Took part in	Mentored
Assisted with	Organized
Contributed to	Facilitated
Participated in	Streamlined
Played a role in	Coordinated
Responsible for	Implemented

- Responsible for managing the newspaper team

- **Edit** articles, **mentored** 70 reporters, **lead** class & **mastered** FinalCut Pro/Adobe Premiere. Work as a team to meet deadlines & **produce** monthly publications

More Examples

Research Program - Student Researcher

1 of 40 selected globally. Researched a miniprotein's inhibition potential of NorA protein of MRSA under Dr. Bryan Domingo. Authored 15-page paper.

LASA Cares - President

Hosted drives: donated 1000+ hygiene items, books, school supplies, etc; Hosted events: school/park clean up, created/distributed 200+ sensory items

Student Researcher, UT Austin's BioProspecting Lab

Researched the Superworm gut microbiome; Fed worms varied plastic diet; Extracted, amplified, and sequenced the DNA from collected frass samples

UC Schools

Need to write an activities list for UC schools?

Follow the same guidelines for the Common App activities list, except some key differences:

- Up to **20** activities and awards
- Up to **350 characters** for descriptions

Coalition/Scoir

Need to write an activities list for Coalition/Scoir schools?

Follow the same guidelines for the Common App activities list, except some key differences:

- Up to **8** activities
- Up to **253 characters** for descriptions