The Activities section of the common app is important because it gives you the opportunity to show what makes you special. It is your opportunity to tell colleges how you spend your time and provide them with insight into what kind of a student you would be on their campus.

According to Common App, “activities may include arts, athletics, clubs, employment, personal commitments, and other pursuits.” Anything done outside the classroom qualifies as an activity. You can include up to 10 activities on the common application. You will list the Position/Leadership description and organization name (50 characters) and the Activity description including did and any recognition that you received (150 characters). Brevity will be your friend.

In addition, Common App requests the following information for each activity:

- Activity type (e.g., Art, Athletics, Community Service, Debate/Speech, Foreign Language, Research, Social Justice, Work)
- Participation grade levels (9, 10, 11, 12, Post-graduate)
- Timing of participation (During school year, During school break, All year)
- Hours spent per week
- Weeks spent per year
- Whether or not your child intends to participate in a similar activity in college (Yes/No)

**Make the most of each character.**

1. State role and organization name in top box, so you don’t waste characters in the lower, 150-character box. Instead of: (top box) School newspaper (description box) I am the editor for the school newspaper (And don’t repeat words!) Try: (top box) Editor of International Column, School Newspaper (description box) Responsible for brainstorming, revising, and supervising articles by other writers for my column.


3. Use active verbs to explain what you actually did (list your tasks). Instead of: Worked at a clinic doing different things. Try: Organized patient diagnosis notes; sterilized tools for surgeries; assisted with x-ray analysis.

4. To fit in more info: use lists, don’t use complete sentences, cut extra words. Instead of: I raised money to donate to a school in Ghana in Africa by selling t-shirts and bracelets. Try: Arranged advertising events, organized fundraisers, and gave presentations at school meetings.
5. Use the present tense if it’s something you still do. Instead of: I helped tour visitors around the campus and presented some information on school history and student life. Try: I give campus tours, providing info on school history, student activities, boarding life.

6. Aim for variety in your list, making sure your verbs aren’t redundant. Instead of: Instructing, helping, teaching children tennis (how are these three different?) Try: Instructing in proper technique, while imparting lessons in sportsmanship, health and integrity.

7. Include any responsibilities you had to demonstrate leadership skills. Instead of: I swim on the swim team. Try: Responsible for leading swim practices, planning fundraising events; assisting in recruiting process.

8. What if there isn’t much to say, or it was a one-time event? Explain the significance of the activity: who did the event matter to and why? Rather than: Tutored students. Try: Provided support to fourth graders with particularly difficult math concepts.

9. Avoid extreme language. Instead of: to help all those in need (or) to end poverty in the world Try: to help those in need (or) to aid in the fight against global poverty.

10. Use bigger words. Instead of: “Come up with” (or) “told people about” Try: Develop, brainstorm (or) advertised, marketed.

Here are more common app activity list examples (List them in descending level of importance.)

- Editor of International Column, School Newspaper
  Responsible for brainstorming, revising, and supervising articles by other writers for my column.
- Intern at Children’s Institute Otis Booth Campus
  Brainstormed ideas for after school programs for teens, created surveys, presented data to supervisor.
- Intern at Department of Cardiovascular Disease
  Organized patient diagnosis notes, sterilized tools for surgeries, assisted with x-ray analysis.
- Worked as assistant at Ye-In Dental Clinic
  Helped with patient registration, sterilized tools for surgeries, assisted with surgical processes.
- Speech and Debate
  Academic All-American Award, NFL Tournament Qualifier (’11, ’12), Rupe Scholar, Stanford Invitational Semi-finalist, Harker Invitational Semi-finalist.
- Korean Compassion: Korean-to-English Letter Translator
  Translated letters sent by supporters to impoverished children in Asian and African countries.
- Junior Researcher, Benetti Sport Inc.
  Conducted surveys to research youth interests, contributed ideas for future products.
- Math Tutor, Sippican Elementary School
  Using card games and quizzes to simplify concepts, taught basic math skills to third graders.
- School Tour Guide - International Guiding Staff
  Tour visitors around campus, while presenting school history, student activities, boarding life.
- Global Partner for International Orientation
  Help new international students with registration and adjustment to the new school environment.