



A GUIDE TO APPLYING TO US COLLEGES

WINCHESTER
COLLEGE

A US COLLEGE EDUCATION

- Liberal arts undergraduate programmes
- Significant differences in curriculum structure from college to college, e.g. open curriculum to core-curriculum
- On-going assessment – regular testing/papers and all work counts
- College culture
- Huge differences in size of colleges from state colleges of 30000 to small liberal arts colleges of 500
- Lots of options geographically from city to mountains, east to west coast

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF US COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

CENTRALISED ADMISSIONS TEAMS - unlike in the UK admissions is administered centrally rather than by academic department

HOLISTIC - everything on your application counts

PERSONAL - interested in what kind of a person you are

FIT - want to see that you know why you are applying and that the fit works both ways

TIME - there are many elements to a US application and it takes a lot of time

DEADLINES - the deadlines mean there is the potential bottle neck with Oxbridge applications and both early and regular deadlines fall at the end of school holidays

RELATIONSHIPS - your relationships with your teachers are important, they will be writing you more personal recommendations

DIFFICULTY - the essay questions for US colleges look deceptively easy and short, but they require multiple drafts and are surprisingly challenging

REWARDING - because so much of your writing is personal it's a rewarding exercise to think through your values, experiences, interests and aspirations

APPLICATION DEADLINES



N.B. A note on deadlines and school support:

The early application deadline falls at the end of Leave-Out of Short Half. The regular decision deadline is on Jan 1.

School staff will NOT be available for advice during the holiday in the lead up to those deadlines. We will give as much help as is needed or requested in the lead up to Leave Out and the Christmas break.

RD

REGULAR DECISION

- You apply to the college via the “normal” application route.
- Typically, these applications are due in January.
- Non-binding.
- You do not have to notify the university that you will decline their offer, you simply do not accept it.

EA

EARLY ACTION

- The same “rules” that apply to regular decision apply to early action, you just apply earlier.
- Applications typically due in November.
- Non-binding.
- A school may defer you to regular decision if you apply through early action, and you can supply additional information (i.e. updated test scores, higher senior year grades) to attain admission.

ED

EARLY DECISION

- If applying early decision, apply to your first choice school.
- Applications typically due in November.
- Binding
- You may apply to one university via early decision.

EDII

EARLY DECISION II

- Early decision II is a second round of ED. A student may apply to their first choice school via ED and their second choice school via ED II
- Applications typically due in January.
- Binding.
- If you apply to one school via ED and are rejected, the binding agreement ends. Then you apply to another school via EDII, engaging in a new binding application.
- Unless there is overlap, this does not violate early decision rules. Check the early decision restrictions and deadlines of both schools to be sure you are not in violation.

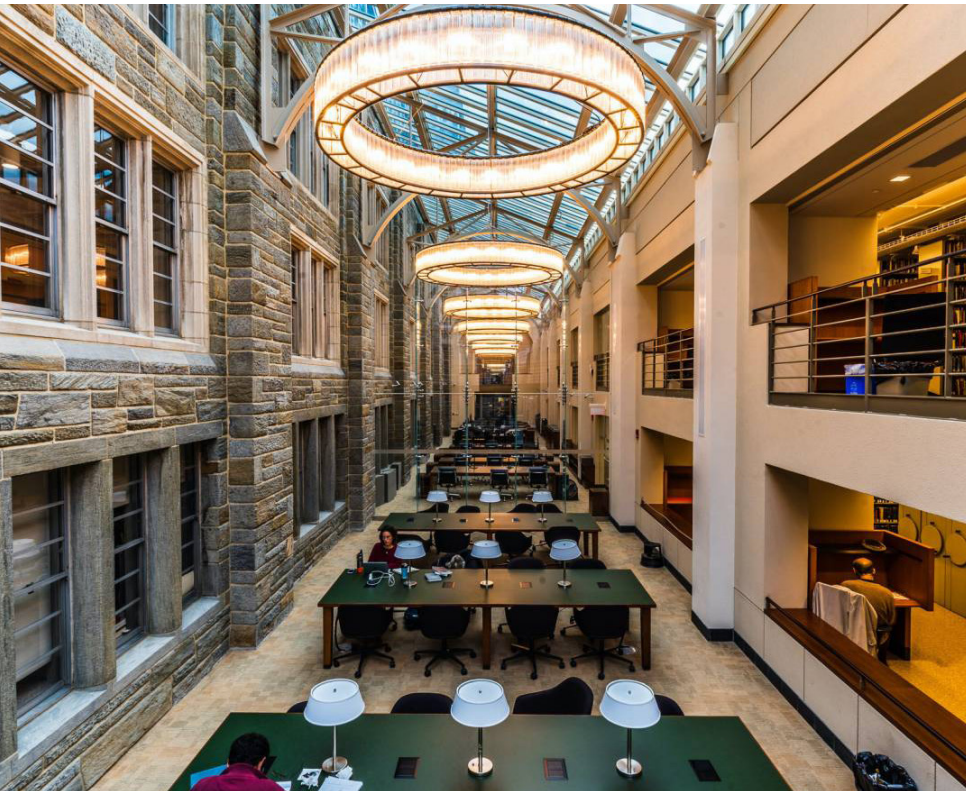
REA

RESTRICTIVE EARLY ACTION

- Similar to early action, but schools tack on a few additional rules at their own discretion.
- Applications typically due in November.
- Non-binding.
- Students applying to Stanford University under restrictive early action must respond to the offer earlier than in other options and they may not apply to any early action programs at other private institutions.

WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR US APPLICATIONS?

- Common App essay, personal info, activities list, educational history
- FERPA waiver
- College supplemental essays
- SAT/ACT (many schools are now test optional)
- Sometimes an example of work e.g. Princeton
- Interview (non-academic)



WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL PROVIDE?

- Counsellor recommendation - written by the housemaster
- Teacher recommendations – applicants need to find out how many recommendations are required/ allowed by the colleges they are applying to
- Transcript
- School profile
- Mid-term and final year report
- Other recommendations – some colleges allow external recommendations e.g. employer. The school does not upload these
- Unlike with UCAS students submit their own work and the school submits the supporting materials separately

TIMELINE INTRODUCTION

VI Book 2 (Lower Sixth) is about building your application profile;

- Get involved with school life as widely as possible – sport, music, societies, Makyth Ventures etc.
- Make plans for your holidays & use your time wisely – volunteering, reading, upskill through online courses, network, start a business etc.
- Put yourself in a position to get the best grades possible, with excellent predicted grades. Be academically rigorous
- Build good relationships with your teachers/coaches

SHORT HALF (AUTUMN TERM) - VI BOOK 2 (LOWER SIXTH)

- Complete SAT/ACT preparation classes
- Oct/Nov book ACT/SAT test to take in Dec-Jan
- Plan US college visits

COMMON TIME (SPRING TERM)

- Create Common App account, research colleges and develop a college list
- Look at college supplemental essay titles and Common App essay prompts
- US college visit during Leave Out (Half Term) or the Easter holiday
- Pair your Common App account with BridgeU

CLOISTER TIME (SUMMER TERM)

- Firm up your college list (probably no more than 10 colleges) with a range of choices from safety to reach
- Decide on which dons (teachers) you would like to write your teacher recommendations. Meet with them to discuss the recommendation
- Write a first draft of your Common App essay and as many college specific essays as you can

SUMMER HOLIDAY

- Research in detail the colleges you are applying to
- Draft and re-draft your college essays
- Use your time well: volunteer, read, travel, research, get work experience
- Start completing your Common Application online
- Finalise all your application essays and complete the Common App
- Make sure you have signed the FERPA waiver
- Interview practice
- If you are applying ED/EA/REA you need to have all your applications ready to submit before Leave Out of Short-Half
- If you are applying RD you need to have your application ready to submit by the end of November
- Princeton requires a graded piece of work from a humanities subject

US APPLICATION GLOSSARY

THE COMMON APP

[Apply to college with common app | your future starts here](#)

The platform most colleges use for their application process. It's where you will enter all your application details. MIT and Georgetown have their own platforms. You need to make sure you have spoken to your recommendation writers and your Housemaster about this, and sent the document requests separately. Universities of California colleges also use their own portal (there are no essays or recommendations needed).

THE COMMON APP ESSAY

[First-year essay prompts \(commonapp.org\) & 21 Stellar Common App Essay Examples to Inspire Your College Essay | CollegeVine Blog](#)

A 650 word essay responding to one of the Common App essay prompts. The essay will go to all the colleges you apply to that use the Common App platform.

ACTIVITIES LIST

[How to Fill Out the Common App Activities Section | CollegeVine Blog](#)

On the Common App you can list up to 10 activities that you have been involved in, both in and out of school. You do not need to use all 10. It is arguable that listing fewer with greater time commitment and involvement creates a stronger impression than lots of activities that you have only had surface level involvement with.

SCHOOL QUALIFICATIONS

This is where you will provide your GCSE grades and A-level predicted grades. There is a separate guide on how to fill this section in as a UK student. The key difference between UK and US school assessment is that we do not provide a GPA (grade point average).

FERPA WAIVER:

[What is the FERPA Waiver? \(commonapp.org\)](#)

You have to agree that you will not read your counsellor or teacher recommendations. This way admissions teams can be sure that recommendation writers have been able to write honestly. That said your recommendation writers will always try to give as positive a picture of you as possible

SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

[Supplemental Essay Guide 2022-23 - College Essay Advisors: Admissions Essay Experts](#)

Each college that you apply to requires supplementary essays. Many of these are 'why us?' questions. They require research on the specific college – courses, professors, experiences. They also offer the opportunity for you to talk about your academic and personal interests in more detail. They range from no upper word limit to 50 words, to a list of books and movies that are important to you.

SAT/ACT & TEST OPTIONAL

[SAT vs ACT: Which Test is Right for You? | The Princeton Review](#)

Aptitude tests that can form part of your application portfolio. Many schools are now test optional, but our general advice is that it is worth taking the tests. If you do well it will only add to your application. You will need to find out if the colleges you are applying to are test optional.

COUNSELLOR RECOMMENDATION

[The Counsellor Letter of Recommendation: how to get the recommendation you need : Unifrog Blog](#)

Usually written by your Housemaster. The counsellor recommendation focuses on your wider contribution to the school, as well as your character and personality. It is possible to have your counsellor recommendation include quotes from non-academic teachers: music, sports coaches, CS don. Its purpose is to show all that you will bring to a college community. All dons are provided with training on how to write counsellor and teacher recommendations.

TEACHER RECOMMENDATION

Written by an academic teacher who knows you well and is able to highlight your academic rigour, engagement and positive attitude to learning. You will want them to be able to comment on your participation, reliability, punctuality, openness to new ideas, intellectual curiosity, and so on. Depending on the college you will submit from one to four teacher recommendations. The college information on the Common App will tell you how many teacher recommendations you can upload. Where recommendations are optional, only use them if the additional recommendation is very strong.



OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Some colleges allow you to submit a recommendation from someone outside school e.g. where you did some work experience, volunteered, were involved with a summer programme. You can find this out in the recommenders page of the Common App.

TRANSCRIPT

The school submits a transcript which will include your GCSE grades and your predicted A-Level grades. Putting yourself in a position where the school can predict you high grades is also essential for the UK. This means your VI2 year is essential. US universities do not offer conditional offers; your predicted grades rather than a GPA will inform admissions teams. Your predicted grades will be used to form the mid-term and final reports that are submitted in Feb and June, once your initial application has been made.

SCHOOL PROFILE

Gives information about Winchester College to the colleges you are applying to. It outlines the curriculum that is offered, the extra-curricular activities available, as well as information about daily life, and the school's ethos. It is intended to provide context for your application. Admissions tutors will be looking to see if your application demonstrates that you have taken advantage of all that the school offers.

MID-TERM AND FINAL REPORT

Added to your application in Feb and June respectively. They offer the chance for the school to add recent achievements or update details of the application. They are more important for US schools where a GPA may fluctuate through the year. The report usually involves simply re-uploading the school transcript.

EARLY DECISION, EARLY ACTION AND RESTRICTED EARLY ACTION: EA, ED, REA, RD:

[What's the Difference? | CollegeVine Blog](#)

The early deadline is 1 Nov. It indicates that you are committed to a particular college. ED is a binding agreement which states that if offered a place you have to take it. For precise details on the differences see the link above. Opinion is divided on whether applying early increases the chance of acceptance.

BRIDGE U AND THE COMMON APP:

[Homepage - BridgeU \(bridge-u.com\)](#)

Winchester College uses BridgeU, a free university advice platform, to bring together all the school's documentation for an applicant. Applicants need to pair their Common App account with BridgeU in order for the school to do this. BridgeU offers excellent insights on colleges for both the UK and US. Pupils are provided with instructions on how to pair the two accounts.

FAQs

CAN I APPLY TO THE UK AND THE US?

Yes. It is possible to apply to both but you will need to think carefully about the time commitment needed. There is a bottle neck of deadlines with UCAS and ED/EA/REA deadlines very close together. If you are applying to Oxbridge you will also be preparing for interview at the same time as completing your RD application essays.

SHOULD I APPLY TO IVY LEAGUE COLLEGES AS A BACK-UP TO OXBRIDGE?

No. Remember that all of the Ivy League colleges have a lower acceptance rate than Oxbridge, as do several other non-Ivy league schools. Applying to only Ivy League colleges is the equivalent of only applying to Oxford or Cambridge. However it is worth noting that because there is no upper limit on the number of colleges you can apply to in the US there are many more who apply to highly competitive colleges who might not if there was a limit. Not only this but the fact that many colleges have gone test-optional for the time being, means there has been a surge in application numbers.

DOES TEST-OPTIONAL REALLY MEAN TEST-OPTIONAL? WON'T THE ADMISSIONS TEAMS ASSUME I DID POORLY IN THE SAT/ACT IF I DON'T SUBMIT A SCORE?

Test-optional really does mean test-optional. Colleges cannot assume that not submitting a score means the applicant has a low score. They can only judge an application on the basis of the material they see. If a test score is not submitted then the rest of the application has to be very strong.

IS IT ALWAYS MY HOUSEMASTER WHO WRITES MY COUNSELLOR RECOMMENDATION?

Usually, yes. However, if an applicant wants a teacher to write it this is a possibility. Bear in mind, your housemaster will know you best of all your teachers in the school, and is therefore in the best position to write a counsellor recommendation.

HOW MANY COLLEGES SHOULD I APPLY TO?

We recommend not more than 10. Trying to apply to more colleges than this will become very time consuming.

DO MY PREDICTED GRADES MATTER FOR US COLLEGE APPLICATIONS?

Yes. Your predicted grades will be used by the admissions team and academic excellence is assumed at the most competitive colleges. In this sense your predicted grades matter a great deal. However, they are taken as part of a holistic application and will be weighed alongside your extra-curricular achievements and contributions, as well as your essays and your teacher recommendations.

DO US COLLEGES MAKE CONDITIONAL OFFERS AS IN THE UK?

No. US colleges will make an unconditional offer. They will usually state that the offer is dependent on the applicant maintaining the standard of work at the time of application.

DO I NEED TO SUBMIT A GPA?

No. We explain our assessment processes in the school profile so US colleges understand that we have standardised national exams in year 11 (10th grade) and in year 13 (12th grade).

For the answers to many more detailed questions about US universities please look at: Theuniversityguys.com.

WHAT ABOUT FINANCIAL AID?

US universities are expensive however they are also very generous. Many universities offer means based financial aid. Some colleges are need blind which is where the ability to pay fees is not be taken into consideration at the time of application. Several colleges extend this to international applicants. Other colleges are need aware, which means they examine the financial situation of individuals at the time of application. The Fulbright Commission offers useful advice: [Funding | US-UK Fulbright Commission](#). This is a list of colleges that offer financial aid to international applicants. [Schools that Grant Financial Aid to International Students: A Complete List | CollegeVine Blog](#)

ARE THERE ANY MERIT-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS?

There are two international scholarships that Winchester College students have been awarded in the past. The Jefferson Scholarship ([The Jefferson and Walentas Scholarships | Jefferson Scholars Foundation](#)) to University of Virginia and the Morehead-Cain Scholarship ([moreheadcain.org](#)) to the University of North Carolina. If these are of interested you will need to speak to the Head of International Universities about applying.