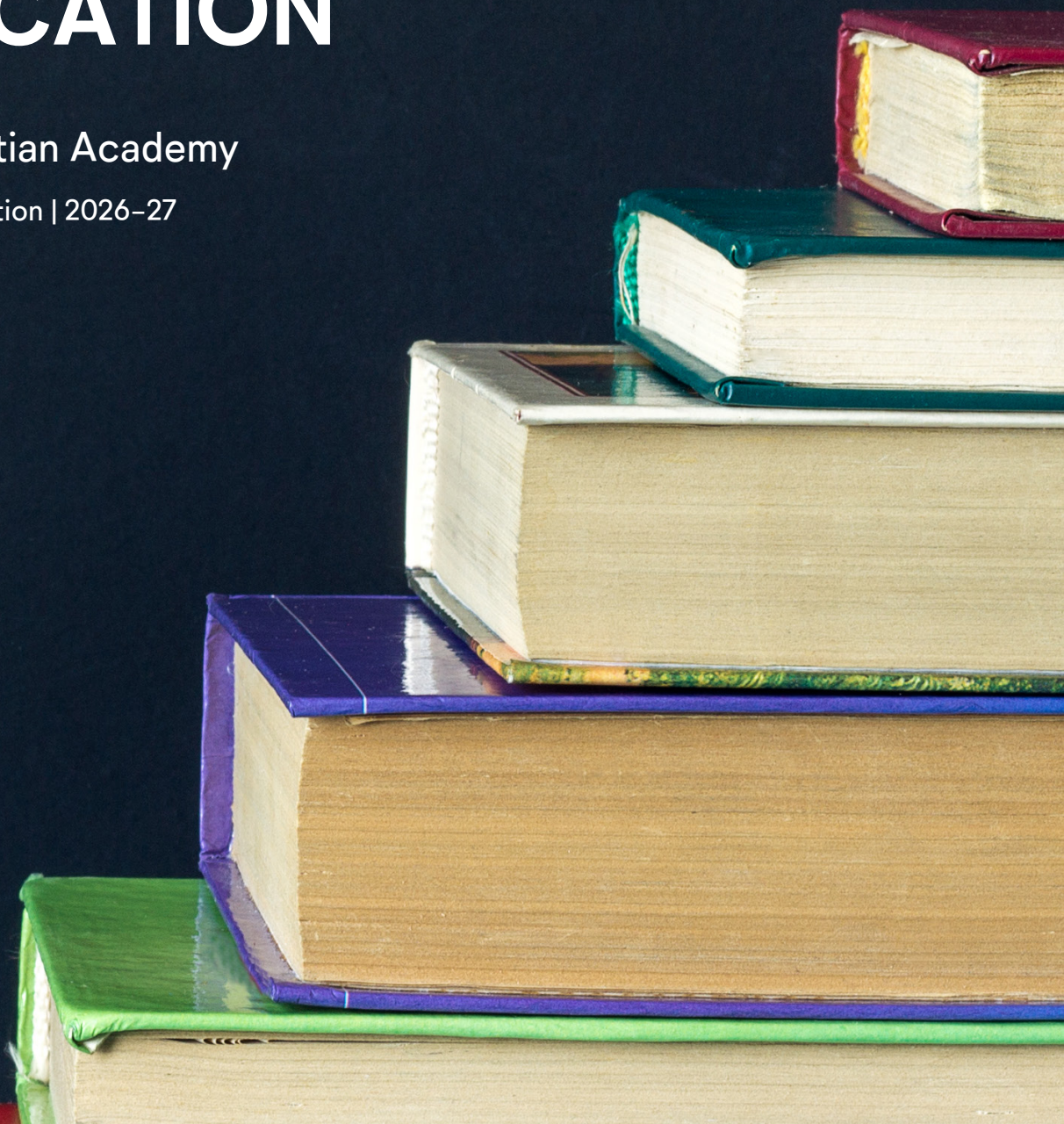


A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO THE COMMON APPLICATION

Heritage Christian Academy

Student & Family Edition | 2026-27



COMMON APP GUIDE

Your next step starts here

A guide for Heritage students

College applications are a series of manageable tasks. This guide helps you organize those tasks, describe your experiences accurately, and ask for help when you need it.

Your activities, interests, faith, responsibilities, and growth can all contribute to an honest picture of who you are. You do not need to manufacture an admissions persona.

How to use this guide

Read the section you are working on, gather the requested information, then complete and review that part of the application. Use your transcript and the live application as your source of truth.

Your HCA support

Miss Holly Hartley
Secondary Guidance Counselor
guidance.counseling@hcabothell.org

Bring questions to your senior counseling meeting. Students take ownership of their applications; families and school staff provide support.



Official resource: First-year application guide

COMMON APP GUIDE

Choose the right application

Common App

Many colleges use Common App for first-year applications. Add schools to your account and check the current requirements for each one. A shared application does not mean every school asks for the same materials.

Other application routes

Some colleges use their own application or another platform. Public university systems, community colleges, trade programs, and apprenticeships may have different processes.

Check the admission website of each college before starting. Avoid relying on old lists of schools that do or do not accept Common App.

First-year or transfer?

A student taking college classes while enrolled in high school normally applies as a first-year student. If you have enrolled in college after high-school graduation, check that college's definition of a transfer applicant.

One submission per school

Choose the application route a college accepts and keep a record of it. Do not submit duplicate applications to the same college unless its admission office directs you to do so.

Start with fit

Compare academics, student support, location, campus community, and the likely net cost. Your list can include college, technical training, or other pathways that fit your goals.

Official resource: First-year application guide

PLANNING WORKSHEET

Build your college list

Create a balanced list with affordable options you would be glad to attend. Admission predictions are never guarantees. Verify each deadline and application route with the college.

College / program	Why it fits	Application route	Deadline / plan

Understand the decision plan

Early Action: an early, usually nonbinding option. Some colleges restrict other early applications; read the exact policy.

Early Decision: a binding commitment under the college's agreement. Discuss fit and affordability with your family and Miss Hartley before choosing it.

Regular or Rolling Decision: follow the stated deadline or review window. Scholarships, housing, and special programs may have earlier dates.

Official resource: Application terminology

COMMON APP GUIDE

Prepare before you begin

Gather your materials

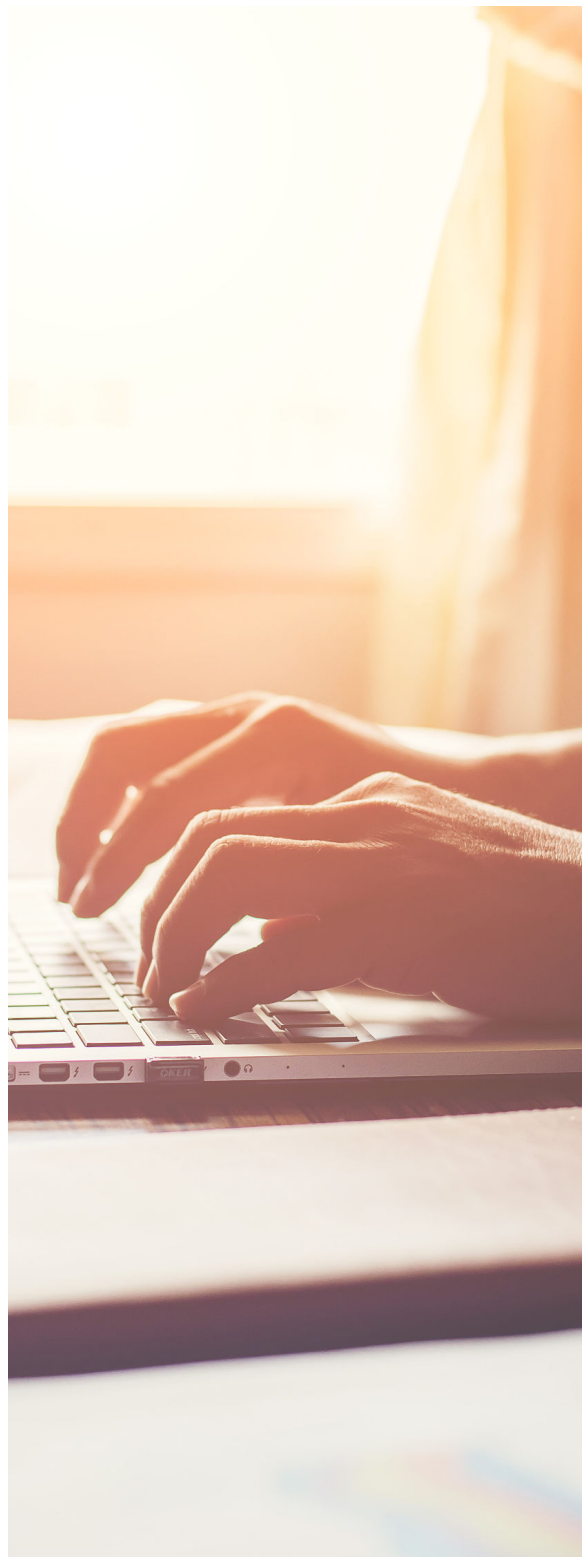
- A current copy of your HCA transcript and your senior-year schedule.
- A list of activities, work, service, honors, and family responsibilities.
- Parent or guardian information requested in your application.
- Test dates and scores, if you plan to report them.
- Recommender names and the contact information they prefer.
- A college list with application and financial-aid deadlines.

Make a simple system

Create a folder for drafts and confirmations, and a calendar for deadlines. Use a personal email address you can access after graduation.

Plan school requests early

Ask Miss Hartley how to request school reports, recommendations, and transcripts. Allow time for staff to prepare and review them.



Official resource: First-year application guide

COMMON APP GUIDE

Create your account & profile

Use accurate information

Create your own first-year account. Enter your name as it appears on your school records; include another or preferred name only where the application asks for it.

Use a reliable personal email, keep your password secure, and check your inbox regularly. A parent can help review without completing the application in your voice.

Check contact details

Confirm your mailing address, phone number, and email carefully. Tell the counselor if school records use a different name or if a recent move affects your information.

Work in the right cycle

For students applying during senior year in 2026–27, select the intended college entry term carefully. Common App's 2026–27 cycle opened August 1, 2026.

If you started an account earlier, review rolled-over answers. College questions and supplements can change from year to year.

A weekly routine

Reserve time to update your tracker, review deadlines, and check college portals. Put unanswered questions in one list for your counselor meeting.

Before moving on

Read your profile as if you were the person matching it to your transcript. Small errors can delay a document match.

COMMON APP GUIDE

Personal context & privacy

Answer what is asked

Some questions ask about language, geography, citizenship, or other background details. Read the wording and available choices rather than copying an answer from an old example.

Describe your language ability honestly. Speaking, reading, and writing proficiency may differ.

Understand optional questions

The application identifies optional fields. You can decide what to share in those fields. Do not assume that every college uses personal information in the same way.

Get help with an unusual situation

If a household, citizenship, address, or identity question does not fit your circumstances, ask Miss Hartley or Common App support. Avoid guessing an answer to make the form look conventional.

Protect personal documents

Use the secure application or the school's approved route for sensitive records. Do not place Social Security numbers, tax returns, or passwords in an essay, activity description, or shared draft.

Review for consistency

Your name, school history, dates, and contact details should agree across the application and the records colleges receive.

COMMON APP GUIDE

Application fees & waivers

A fee waiver can help

An application fee should not prevent you from asking about college options. Common App lists eligibility criteria, and colleges may also offer their own waivers or have no application fee.

Check your eligibility

Examples include eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, an SAT or ACT fee waiver, qualifying family income, or a supporting statement from an eligible school or community professional.

Review the full current criteria in the application and talk with Miss Hartley if you are unsure.

Request the correct waiver

Answer the fee waiver question accurately and follow the application's verification steps. A counselor may need to confirm the request.

Check each college's policy; not every institution handles Common App waivers in the same way.

Keep aid tasks separate

An application fee waiver does not complete FAFSA, WASFA, a scholarship form, or any college financial-aid application. Track those separately.

Your next step

Record the application fee or waiver plan for each school before submitting. Ask for help while there is time to resolve a question.

Official resource: Fee waiver eligibility

COMMON APP GUIDE

The Family section

Gather details together

The application may ask about your household, parents or guardians, siblings, education, and employment. A family conversation can help you collect accurate information.

Use the choices that fit

Families have many different structures. Follow the instructions for your situation; do not force an answer that does not describe your household. If information is unknown or unavailable, use the relevant option or ask for help.

Tell the truth without speculation

Report family education and other details as requested. You do not need to predict how a college might use them or make your family background sound more impressive.

Keep the student in charge

Parents can help check facts, but the application belongs to the student. Review names, dates, and education details together before moving on.



Official resource: First-year application guide

COMMON APP GUIDE

Education: your HCA record

School information

Use the school name listed in Common App and match it to your transcript.

Heritage Christian Academy
Bothell, Washington
CEEB code: 480099

Counselor contact

Holly Hartley
Secondary Guidance Counselor
guidance.counseling@hcabothell.org

Confirm the school's document workflow with Miss Hartley before sending invitations or ordering transcripts.

Use the transcript

Enter attendance dates and your expected graduation information accurately. List another secondary school if the application asks about previous enrollment.

A helpful check

School reports, recommendations, and transcripts are separate from the application you submit. Track their receipt in each college's portal.



Official resource: First-year application guide

COMMON APP GUIDE

School history & college courses

Previous secondary schools

If you changed high schools, report the schools and dates requested. When an explanation is needed, give a brief, factual account of the move or change.

A school change does not need a dramatic story. Explain a relevant circumstance clearly and use the current field's stated limit.

College study in high school

Report college courses or institutions where requested, including GCU dual enrollment. Use the correct institution and course information rather than treating college study as an AP course.

Two sets of records

HCA's transcript and a college transcript are different records. A future college may need the official college record even if a dual enrollment course also appears on your high-school transcript.

GCU dual enrollment

Keep your course list, grades, and syllabi organized. Ask GCU about its official transcript process; ask HCA how each approved course appears on the high-school record.

Check transfer credit separately

Admission and transfer-credit approval are different decisions. The receiving college determines whether a course transfers and how it applies to a degree.

Official resource: GCU dual enrollment

COMMON APP GUIDE

Grades, courses & self-reporting

Accuracy matters more than making your record look a certain way. Use your transcript, senior schedule, and Miss Hartley's instructions.

Item	What to do
GPA and scale	Copy the reported GPA and scale. Confirm whether it is weighted or unweighted. Do not calculate a different GPA for the application.
Class size and rank	Ask Miss Hartley which values HCA reports. If rank is not reported, use the appropriate application choice.
Current courses	List the courses you are taking now and their correct levels and schedule terms. Include approved dual enrollment where requested.
Courses & Grades	Some colleges require this section. Enter the record exactly and review it against the transcript.
Changed schedule	Tell the counselor and follow each college's instructions if your senior-year schedule changes after applying.

FINAL CHECK

Compare one term at a time. Check course titles, credit values, grades, and term labels. Ask before translating a school-specific grading code.

Official resource: Courses & Grades requirements

COMMON APP GUIDE

Honors & achievements

What belongs here

Use the academic honors fields for awards or recognition that fit the application's instructions. Read the live form's number of entries and character limits.

Be specific about the award, year or grade level, and level of recognition. A clear description is more useful than an inflated title.

Choose with care

If you have several honors, prioritize the ones that best show achievement or sustained effort. It is fine to leave unused spaces; you do not need to invent or stretch a category.

Illustrative examples

School recognition: academic excellence in a subject, if formally awarded.

Competition: the award name, placement, and competition level.

Publication: the relevant recognition and publication name, if it fits the academic honors question.

Avoid common errors

Do not claim membership as an award unless the selection itself is an honor. Do not imply that a school recognition was state or national. Avoid unexplained acronyms.

Draft first

Write your top honors in a planning document, then check the final entries for clarity and length.

COMMON APP GUIDE

Future plans: be honest

You may still be exploring

A high-school student does not need to have a fixed lifelong career. Choose the answer that best reflects your current interests, including an undecided option if it is available and accurate.

Avoid selecting a career only because you think it sounds impressive. You can be curious about more than one field.

Connect the choices

Use your Xello research, HSBP, visits, classes, and conversations to identify directions worth exploring. A broad interest can become more specific over time.

Check the college's rules

Some institutions admit directly to a major, require a separate portfolio, or restrict later entry to a program. An intended major can affect the application process; verify those details.

Questions to consider

- Which classes or activities make me want to learn more?
- What work or service would I like to try?
- What degree, certificate, or training might that require?
- Which programs offer support if my plans change?

Heritage perspective

Discernment includes learning about your gifts, asking wise questions, praying, and taking practical steps. A college decision is one part of your next season.

Official resource: First-year application guide

COMMON APP GUIDE

Testing: follow each college

Read the current policy

Colleges may require tests, make them optional, or use another policy. Requirements may also differ for scholarships, particular majors, or international applicants.

Report accurately

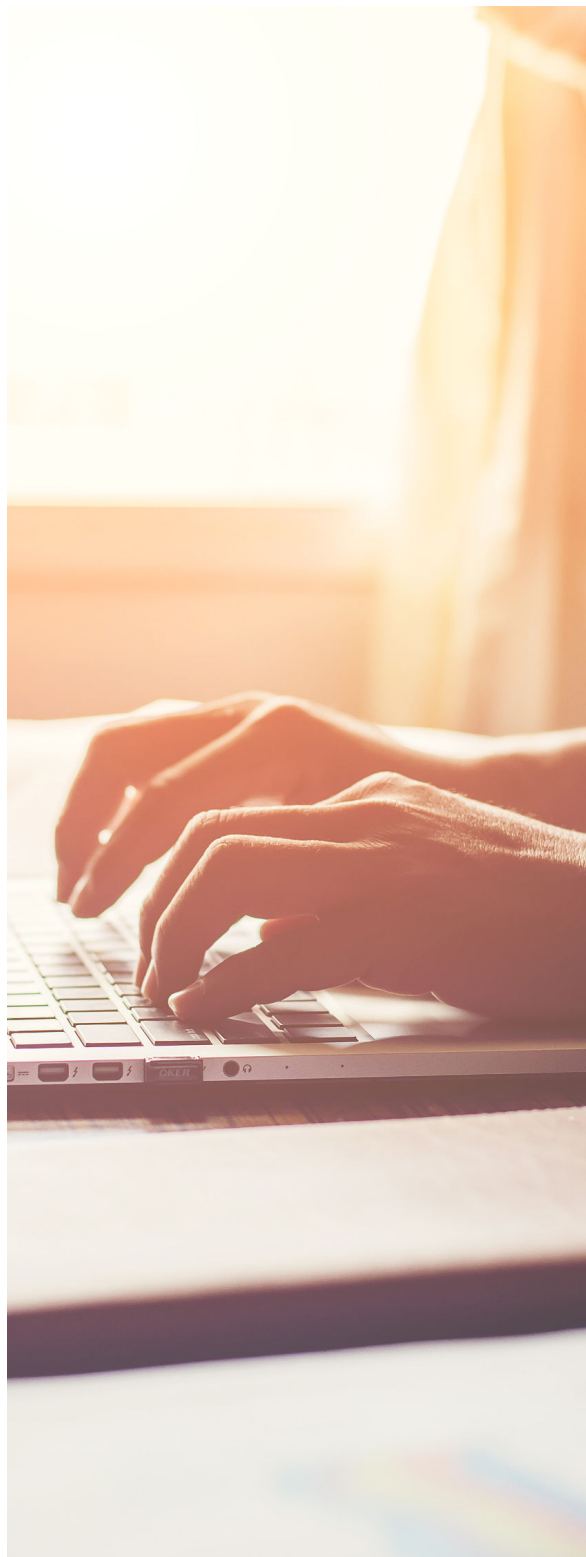
If you choose to report scores, use the correct test, date, section scores, and instructions. Self-reporting is not the same as ordering an official score report.

Send official scores when required

Some colleges accept self-reported results initially; others require official reports. Follow each college's timing and delivery rules.

A correction to older guides

SAT Subject Tests were discontinued in 2021. They are not a test you can schedule now. Ask about the tests and placement requirements that actually apply to your current plans.



Official resource: College Board: Subject Tests

PLANNING WORKSHEET

Make a testing policy tracker

Testing policies change. Fill this in from each college's current admission and scholarship pages; record the date you checked.

College	Required / optional / other	Self-report or official?	Deadline / checked

Questions to verify

Superscoring: Does the college combine section scores across test dates, and which tests does it accept?

Score reporting: Does it want a best score, selected dates, or all test results?

Separate requirements: Are scholarship, English proficiency, placement, or major-specific policies different from general admission?

Official resource: First-year application guide

COMMON APP GUIDE

Activities: how you spend time

Look beyond school clubs

Activities can include paid work, caregiving, church or ministry involvement, athletics, arts, community service, hobbies, and independent projects.

Choose meaningful entries

You may list up to ten activities. You do not need ten. Focus on experiences that mattered to you, took time, or involved responsibility.

Describe contribution

Explain what you did, who or what you helped, and what changed. Leadership can include reliable service and responsibility even without a formal title.

Use realistic time estimates

Report grade levels, timing, hours per week, and weeks per year thoughtfully. Avoid double-counting the same time in multiple entries.



Official resource: Activities planning resource

PLANNING WORKSHEET

Draft a clear activity entry

Draft outside the application so you can revise without losing your work. Character counts include spaces.

Field	Current planning limit / purpose
Position / leadership	50 characters. Name your role accurately.
Organization name	100 characters. Use a recognizable name.
Activity description	150 characters. Focus on actions, responsibility, and impact.
Time and participation	Report the years, timing, hours per week, and weeks per year in their separate fields.

An illustrative Heritage-style example

Role: Student volunteer

Organization: Church children's ministry

Description: Prepared weekly activities; welcomed children and assisted leaders with lessons, games, and cleanup.

Use an example only to understand the structure. Your final entry must describe your own experience.

My role, actions, and impact:

Official resource: Activities planning resource

COMMON APP GUIDE

Responsibilities count, too

The application gives context

Common App includes responsibilities and circumstances questions in the Activities section. These can help explain how work, caregiving, transportation, or access to resources affects the way you spend time.

Describe your actual experience

A paid job, caring for a sibling, supporting a relative, or handling household responsibilities can be meaningful. Report what is true and use the choices that fit your situation.

Strong descriptions are concrete

Paid work: explain the role and responsibilities rather than only naming the employer.

Family support: explain the recurring tasks and commitment without sharing someone else's private medical details.

Independent interests: describe what you practiced, created, studied, or organized.

Keep perspective

You do not need to have founded an organization to have a worthwhile experience. Depth, care, consistency, and initiative can appear in ordinary responsibilities.

Review your list

Does it show how you actually spent your time?
Are the descriptions accurate? Can a reader understand the work without insider vocabulary?

Official resource: Responsibilities and circumstances

COMMON APP GUIDE

Writing: your personal essay

Choose a story with meaning

The personal essay gives a reader a closer look at how you think and what matters to you. The live application shows which colleges require it. The maximum length is 650 words.

Start with a specific moment

A small experience can reveal a meaningful insight. Describe what happened, what you noticed, and how your thinking or actions developed.

Keep your voice

Use language you understand and would naturally use. Ask for feedback on clarity and structure while keeping the ideas and final writing your own.

Move beyond summary

Reflection matters: help a reader see what you learned, how you changed, or what the experience shows about your values. A polished list of achievements is not the same as a personal essay.



Official resource: 2026–27 essay prompts

WRITING WORKSHEET

Explore the seven essay themes

These are summaries of the 2026–27 prompts. Read the exact official wording before choosing your prompt and writing your response.

Theme	A question to help you brainstorm
1. Meaningful identity or interest	What part of your background, identity, interest, or talent helps explain you?
2. Challenge or setback	What did an obstacle teach you, and how did you respond?
3. Questioning a belief	When did you rethink an idea, and what followed?
4. Gratitude	How did someone's unexpected kindness influence you?
5. Personal growth	What experience changed your understanding of yourself or others?
6. Intellectual curiosity	What topic absorbs your attention, and how do you learn about it?
7. Topic of your choice	What story would you like to share in your own way?

Three moments or ideas I could explore:

Official resource: 2026–27 essay prompts

COMMON APP GUIDE

Additional information & context

Use the right space

The first-year application's optional Additional information response has a 300-word maximum. The separate Challenges and circumstances response has a 250-word maximum. Follow the limits shown in the live form.

Add useful context

A brief explanation can clarify an interruption, a school change, a responsibility, or a circumstance that is not clear elsewhere. Explain the impact and any relevant next steps.

Be concise and factual

This is not an extension of the personal essay or another activities list. Avoid repeating details the reader already has. It is okay to leave an optional space blank.

Ask before sharing

Miss Hartley can help you decide which information is useful and what can remain private. You do not need to disclose more than you are comfortable sharing.



Official resource: Optional response updates

COMMON APP GUIDE

Recommendations & school forms

Check what each college needs

Counselor forms, teacher recommendations, and other recommendations have different roles. A college may require some and accept only certain additional letters.

Ask people who know your work

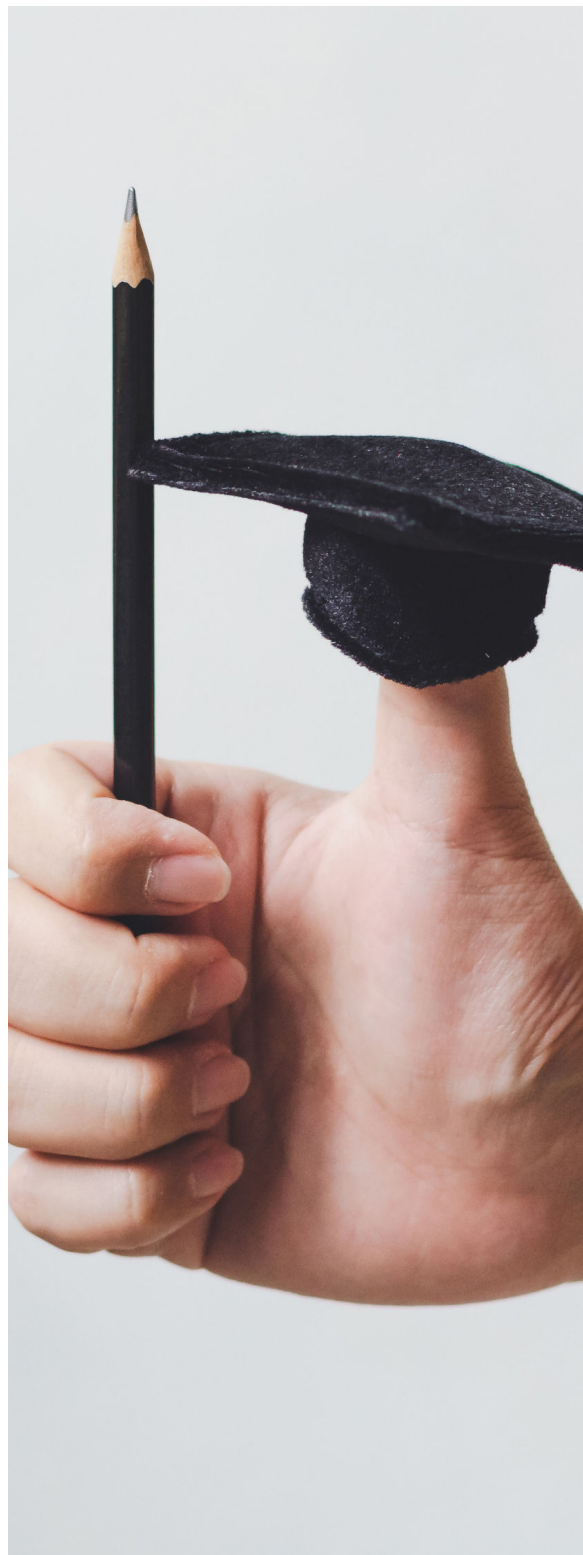
Request recommendations early and politely. Share your résumé or activity list, deadlines, and a few specific experiences the recommender may remember.

Complete the FERPA steps

Read the release authorization and recommendation waiver carefully. They address release of school records and whether you waive later access to recommendations. Discuss your choice with Miss Hartley if you have questions.

Coordinate with HCA

Confirm the counselor submission route before inviting or assigning recommenders. Xello planning does not by itself submit your college application.



Official resource: FERPA release and waiver

YOUR FINAL CHECKLIST

Review, submit & follow through

Before submitting

- Confirm the college, entry term, decision plan, and intended program.
- Complete college questions, supplements, and any portfolio requirements.
- Preview the application and check facts, spelling, formatting, and essay text.
- Review the fee or fee waiver and required acknowledgments.

After submitting

- Save the confirmation and check for a separate supplement submission.
- Activate each college's applicant portal and track missing materials.
- Complete financial-aid and scholarship steps separately.
- Request midyear and final records when required.

Your Heritage contact

Miss Holly Hartley
Secondary Guidance Counselor
guidance.counseling@hcabothell.org

Bring your college list, deadlines, and questions to your counseling meeting. Ask for help before an unresolved item becomes urgent.

Official resources

Common App first-year guide

2026–27 essay prompts

Common App applicant support

Federal Student Aid

Washington financial-aid guidance

Use current instructions

This HCA guide was updated September 29, 2026 using Common App's official resources. Individual colleges control their requirements and deadlines; check their current admission pages.

Official resource: First-year application guide