

**EVERYTHING YOU  
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT**

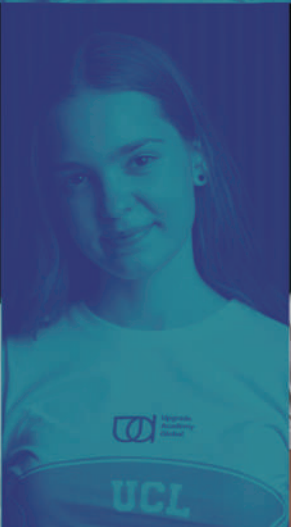
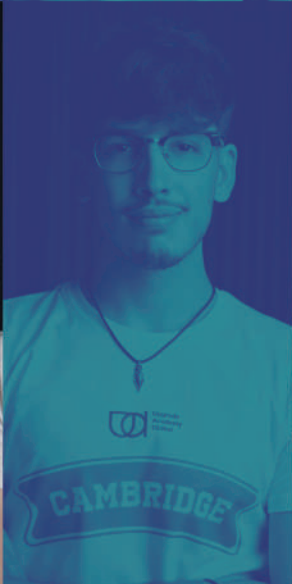
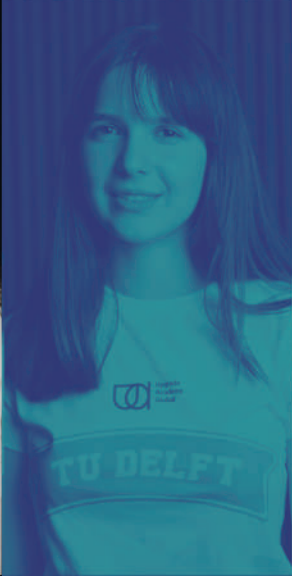
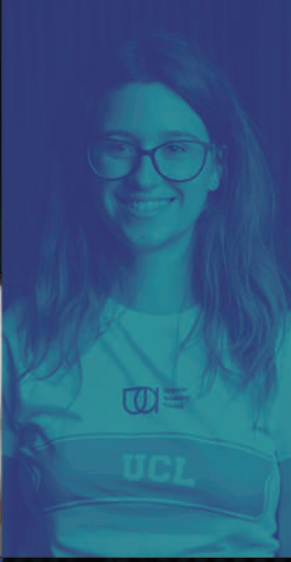
---

# **APPLYING TO THE US**

 [www.upgradeacademyglobal.org](http://www.upgradeacademyglobal.org)

 [@upgradeacademyglobal](https://www.instagram.com/upgradeacademyglobal)

 [www.facebook.com/upgradeacademyglobal](https://www.facebook.com/upgradeacademyglobal)







# Everything You Need to Know about Applying to the US

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of the admission process in the US have changed. Learn how these changes might affect your application and get up to speed with the latest insights on the US universities landscape from the Upgrade Academy Global team!



## How Is Your Application Evaluated?

First impressions matter, especially when we are talking about your university application. Here are the five categories you need to excel in to be considered for a spot in one of the top US universities.



### Affinity

Admission officers are looking for your proven interest in the university you apply to. They want you to be a good match for their student environment and more specifically with the programs you have targeted.

#### Do your research

It is important to do your research on the university of your choice and to express your interest with specific reasons. Perhaps you are planning to apply to a niche program that can only be found at this university, you would like to be a part of one of the university's clubs, be taught by one of their renowned professors, or you may even see yourself as part of a student group they have on campus.

#### So, how do they assess this?

First, they look at the values that are expressed in your profile. Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, for example, are very keen to accept individuals with leadership and entrepreneurial qualities.

Second, they are looking at your intellectual endeavours to see if they match with their values. Someone with good leadership skills will likely be managing other people, so having founded a club or having managed people in a group to carry out a project are good indicators of your leadership ability.



## Excellence

Excellence is the main thing admissions officers are looking for. They want people that will be able to handle the workload of the courses, graduate with great results and continuously push themselves and their peers in the pursuit of knowledge.

### **Variety is desired, but specialisation is essential**

University admissions officers are looking for what is called a T-shaped individual when selecting candidates. This notion refers to the skills and interests of the student, which resemble the shape of a letter T – depth in a couple of subjects and baseline knowledge of other fields.

You can use this in your application by showing that besides having a few subjects that you are an expert in, you also have the baseline knowledge for multiple other fields. By doing this, you prove to the admissions officers that you are very passionate about the subjects that you will study at university and that you are capable of being flexible and collaborating well with experts in other fields, and that you are capable of interdisciplinary thinking, which is at the heart of all innovation.



## Impact



The admission board of any prestigious US university aims to find potential students who will kick-start societal change and progress within their university and within society as a whole.

### **How can you display your potential impact?**

One way to prove you will have an impact on the progress of society is to have a list of projects you have developed yourself. Taking an idea and turning it into an executable project intended to bring about social change is a skill that not many people have.

Another approach is to show the admissions board that throughout your academic career you have been involved in various extracurricular activities, volunteering, organising fundraisers or activism causes.

If you are having trouble managing your own project, you can reach out to our mentors and they will help you set your project goals, involve your community and execute your plan.





## Academics

In recent years, academic achievements have been given less and less weight in admission decisions. This could be explained by a number of reasons:

For one, the COVID-19 context led to rapid changes in how students approach their education. Online learning, which has been a curse for most, plummeted some GPAs and compromised SAT results. For the year 2021-2022, SAT scores are optional in the application procedure for this exact reason.

Secondly, as competition to UK universities has increased dramatically over the last years, many more high achieving students have been applying to the US to study. This has made high academic results the norm for US applicants.

### What is important to keep in mind

Even though excellent academic results are no longer a differentiating factor in the admissions process, this is in no way an excuse for you to let your grades slip. What you must do is develop your extracurricular activities portfolio, so that you can differentiate yourself from the pool of equally academically endowed students.

## Personal Brand



After reading the information in your application, the admissions committee should be able to get a clear idea of who you are as a person and a student.

Your passion for a specific subject, your interests in humanitarian issues, your academic success, as well as your initiative to be a catalyst for change, are all building blocks of your identity as a candidate.

## What makes you the perfect candidate for top US universities?



Good university fit



Being a T-Shaped individual



Contribution to the community



Strong moral principles

# Enhance your CV and improve your admission chances

Follow our tips to present yourself better with an improved CV:

## Build technical skills

Most people only consider applying for university in the United States in their final years of secondary school, but American students have been thinking about and preparing for their admissions process throughout their academic career, some even starting their training in middle school.

In doing so, American students have acquired skills over the years that are useful for their applications, either by taking more practical classes or by joining activities that would help them improve their portfolios.

However, you can level the playing field on your own by attending classes online on different platforms like Coursera, Skillshare or LinkedIn. Having become proficient in technical skills will make a huge difference not only in your university years but also later in your career.

Show the admission officers that you are the master of your knowledge gain and prove that you are an independent learner.

## Build personal skills

Besides having technical skills, it is just as important to show that you have soft skills. Being able to manage your time effectively by juggling schoolwork, an internship and extracurricular activities will prove to the admission board beyond doubt that you are a T-shaped student.

Another way to display these skills is by talking about your accomplishments from outside the school and by presenting in your Common App essay a situation in which you applied these skills.



## Start your own projects

There are many unexplored opportunities for projects that will make your CV stand out. From apparel start-ups to societies or clubs that cater to your specific academic interests, there is a place for everything under the sun. Find out what you are truly passionate about and try to convey that through your CV, tying it back to your impact.

The perceived success of your endeavour is not the main focus of the admissions officers. Of course, they will assess your ability to execute projects and use logical reasoning when setting goals for them, but that is not the core of the issue. What really matters is that the admissions committee can see that you are not afraid of taking initiative and acting on your plans.

It is best if you can link your activities on the CV to your moral values, so choose a social theme for your project. It can be any social or environmental issue that you feel strongly about. Perhaps you are very passionate about fighting climate change and you want to launch a reforestation project. That could be a good indicator of both your abilities and what makes you tick.

On another note, you can develop a project that tackles an issue that affects you or your family directly. As long as your project demonstrates passion, leadership and initiative, your CV will make you stand out.







## Do an internship

A great way to gain work experience while studying is to do an internship.

If you are interested in studying computer science you could ask a local programming firm if you could shadow an expert or do an internship with them. ✨

Not only will it look good on your CV, but it will give you a glimpse into the career you want after you graduate. This will show that you are proactive and that you have a genuine interest in the subject you plan to study.



## Be constantly involved

Most students think it is enough to have 5 projects within grades 10 and 11 and nothing during the last two years of high school.

This conception is wrong. You want to show the admissions committee that you were able to balance extracurricular projects and academics all throughout high school. ✨



## Don't stress about academic achievements

Focus instead on developing your skills. Gain in-depth knowledge of the topics that are most important to you and apply that knowledge in projects you feel passionate about.

Your academic achievements will be reflected in your GPA anyway, so try to add the most impactful things you have done to your CV.



# Perfect Your Common App Essay

# 1

Top mistakes to avoid when writing your Common App essay

## Mistaking a rare topic for a good topic

Oftentimes students think that they have to come up with the most unique ideas for their common app to jump a few steps ahead of their competition.

What admissions officers look for in the common app essay is good writing skills, self-expression, introspection and maturity.

“

*If only the idea or topic of the essay makes it special, then you are not on the right track.*

**Tinu**

Upgrade Academy Global founder

# 2

## Not writing from a place of authenticity

Students are very focused on how they will be perceived through their essay, so they tend to adopt an overly academic tone in their writing. This can often feel unnatural and the end result could reflect poorly on you.

You should look out for convoluted terms and beware of the temptation to use a thesaurus for every word in your essay. Fight the urge to impress the admission officers with big words learnt in SAT prep.

Try to write in a conversational voice. Not only will it be more true to yourself than an overly academic voice, but it will also make for a more enjoyable essay altogether.

## COMMON APP PROMPTS FOR 2022

### Prompt 1: Something Meaningful

- › Your background, identity, interest, or talent

### Prompt 2: Overcoming Obstacles

- › A time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure.
- › How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

### Prompt 3: Questioning a Belief

- › Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea.
- › What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

### Prompt 4: Problem-Solving

- › An intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma — anything of personal importance, no matter the scale.
- › Explain its significance to you and what steps you took/ could be taken to solve it.

### Prompt 5: Personal Growth

- › An accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

### Prompt 6: Passion

- › A topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging it makes you lose track of time.
- › Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

### Prompt 7: Your Choice

- › It can be an essay you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.



# 3

## Writing a generic story

Similar to the last point, students are afraid of using too many details in their writing and they end up with bland essays because they want to appear a certain way to the admissions committee.

You should also avoid cliches in your writing. Instead of using 'happily ever after' or 'beggars can't be choosers' try to write in your own words what happened. Don't be afraid of using descriptive language to express your unique view of the event.



# 4

## Not getting feedback

While your English may be perfect, it is always a good idea to have some people read over your essay. Once you read a text too many times, your brain starts to ignore the mistakes and you have little to no chance of correcting them on your own.

Besides the obvious proofreading benefits of having someone read your essay, they can also point out any continuity issues with the text or even the times where your point does not get across as planned.

# 5

## Neglecting supplemental essays

The Common App essay is only the first introduction to yourself that the admissions committee has. Supplemental essays give a more indepth presentation into who you are as a candidate. These essays are meant to give the admissions officers a sense of whether your values and identity match with that of the university.

Most students make the mistake of giving too little thought to writing the additional essays. They either minimise their importance or they don't allocate enough time to researching the university.

This could severely reduce your chances of gaining admission at one of the top US universities, since these essays are the chance of aligning yourself with the values of the university of your choice. Our advice is to do a deep dive into the values and resources of the universities you are applying to, and then tailor your supplemental essays to each of the schools.



# SAT and ACT simplified



The idea behind both the SAT and ACT is the same: to demonstrate college readiness. There are no scientific reasons to choose one test over the other; however, the ACT is more focused on the test taker's English skills, while the SAT puts more emphasis on the student's maths skills.

The best course of action for you is to take both exams. Most universities will look at your biggest composite result either way, so there's no harm in preparing for both.

If you are still set on taking only one of these exams, our advice for you is to try your hand at a couple of practice tests and see for yourself which one is a better fit for you.

## SAT deep-dive

Your SAT score can greatly influence your admission to a top US university. There is no ideal SAT score, but you should aim to be in the top 50<sup>th</sup> percentile.

As is the case with every exam, your SAT score needs to be higher than that of the majority of test-takers to gain admission to any university. However, if you are aiming for a top university in the US, you might need to do better than 75% of test-takers, at least.

Take a look at the table to see in which percentile you should be to have a 'good' SAT score.

| TOTAL SAT SCORE (MATH + EBRW) | PERCENTILE  |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 1560 - 1600                   | 99+         |
| 1520 - 1550                   | 99          |
| 1420 - 1430                   | 95          |
| 1350                          | 90          |
| 1290                          | 85          |
| 1240                          | 80          |
| 1200 - 1210                   | 75 (good)   |
| 1170                          | 70          |
| 1130 - 1140                   | 65          |
| 1100 - 1110                   | 60          |
| 1080                          | 55          |
| 1050                          | 50 (median) |



## Your SAT Goal

| UNIVERSITY | AVERAGE SAT SCORE |
|------------|-------------------|
| MIT        | 1510 - 1570       |
| UPenn      | 1470 - 1550       |
| Harvard    | 1460 - 1570       |
| Yale       | 1460 - 1570       |
| Stanford   | 1440 - 1570       |
| Columbia   | 1440 - 1570       |
| NYU        | 1350 - 1430       |
| UCLA       | 1300 - 1530       |

Getting over the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile is not an easy task, but with a little help in your preparation, you too can reach that mark.

The key is to do as many test subjects you can lay your hands on and to have someone knowledgeable to tell you what you did wrong and why.

At Upgrade our SAT specialised mentors are there to help you improve your SAT score by 150 points.





## ACT deep-dive

Similarly to the SAT, there is no ideal ACT score you should get. Your aim should be the same as it would be when taking the SAT: be better than 75% of the students.

The ACT test has 4 sections: English, Math, Reading and Science and the optional writing section. The exam lasts 2 hours and 55 minutes, with an additional 40 minutes for the option writing section.

In terms of scoring, you can get a score between 1 and 36 for each section. Your ACT composite score is the average of all four sections scores.

Having a composite score of over 29 puts you into the 90 percentile, but you have to check the average score of the university you are applying to, so you can check if you need an even higher score.



## Your ACT Goal

| UNIVERSITY                 | AVERAGE ACT SCORE |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| MIT                        | 34 - 36           |
| Harvard                    | 33 - 35           |
| University of Pennsylvania | 33 - 35           |
| Columbia                   | 33 - 35           |
| Yale                       | 33 - 35           |
| Stanford                   | 32 - 35           |
| NYU                        | 30 - 34           |
| UCLA                       | 29 - 35           |



# Who We Are

Upgrade Academy is a mentorship service that offers admission support for secondary school students. We have helped our students gain acceptance to the best universities in the world by offering them individualised coaching plans and comprehensive guidance from inspiring mentors.



# What We Do

After our initial discussion, when we get to understand your goals, as well your current academic situation, our mentors create a long-term personalized plan, specifically suited to your particular needs, so that you maximize your chances of admission to your dream universities. Each application prep plan starts ASAP, from the point you are NOW in your high school career and ends at the end of high school, when you have all your results and are ready to leave for college.

Learn from the people who actually studied there. We are alumni from top US and UK universities including but not limited to Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford and Yale.

# How Does Upgrade Academy Help You?



## Decide on a Dream

We help you in choosing your field of study, the right schools and university programs.



## Essays Support

Write unforgettable essays that truly convey who you are. Together we brainstorm ideas, create a structure and iterate through multiple drafts.



## Academic Development

Gain proficiency in the field you are going to study in university.



## Interview Prep

Mock interviews, advice and feedback from people who have been through these interviews themselves.



## Extracurricular Development

Create your own projects with a real impact on society.



## General Application Support

Clear application timelines, advice on financials and constant communication with students and parents.





# Talk to a mentor!



Scan the code here to see how the perfect **Common App essay** looks like!



Read the comments our mentors have and use them **to improve your own essay!**



---

## Upgrade Academy Global LTD

71-72 Shelton Street  
Covent Garden  
London, WC2H 9JQ,  
United Kingdom

Do you want to know how to  
become a student yourself?

### CONTACT US AT

- ✉ [contact@upgradeacademyglobal.org](mailto:contact@upgradeacademyglobal.org)
- ☎ +44 122 739 2938
- 🌐 [www.upgradeacademyglobal.org](http://www.upgradeacademyglobal.org)
- 📷 [@upgradeacademyglobal](https://www.instagram.com/upgradeacademyglobal)
- 📘 [www.facebook.com/upgradeacademyglobal](https://www.facebook.com/upgradeacademyglobal)