



BE BOLD



BE AUTHENTIC



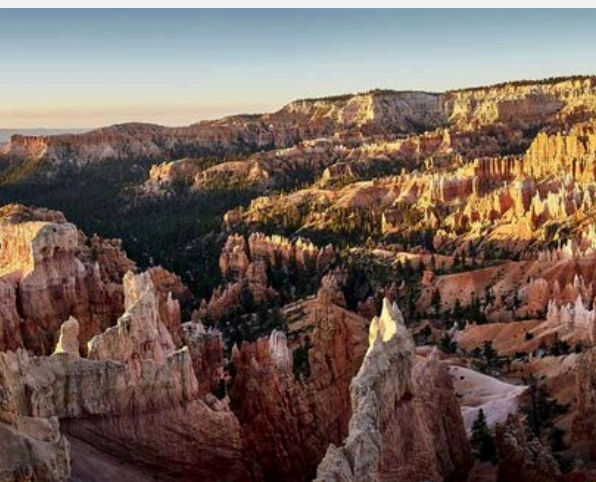
BE YOU

HEO'S 2024 **ALUMNI** GUIDE TO WRITING FOR YOUR US APPS



THIS GUIDE COVERS

- Key Application Info
- Writing the 5 Academic Honours
- Writing the 10 Activities
- Essays -The Heart of It All
- Notes on Early Apps, agents and NS



Key Application Info

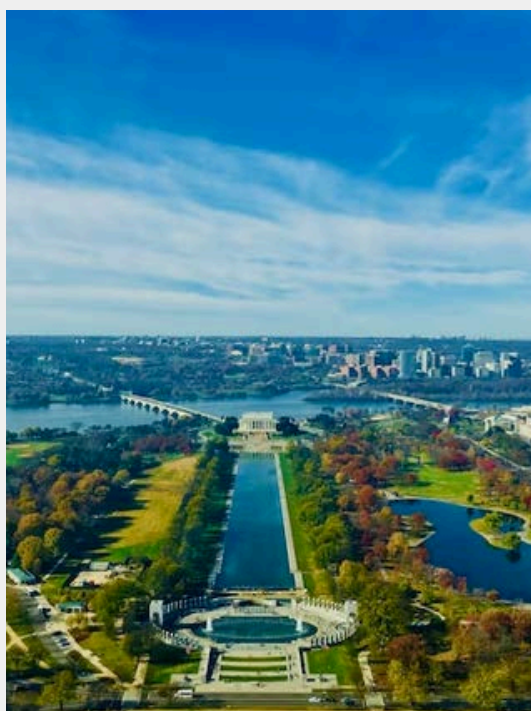
Portals & Deadlines

The Application Portals

Common App: **Common App (CA)** is where you write and submit your applications. Pay attention to the CA deadlines of your respective universities, and ensure you submit your apps on time. Some schools, like the UCs and MIT, are on their own portals. Please follow these accordingly. For all other schools which have CA as an option, **use only CA.**

CIALFO: This platform will be synced to your CA account. It is where you request for teacher recommendations. As well, HEO will send through your required transcripts, recs and other school documents via CIALFO.

The CIALFO guide will be published mid-Aug on RI's website when this current cycle is done. **Wait for this and create your CIALFO account then.**



Deadlines to adhere to

All students adhere to RI internal deadlines for CIALFO.

These are:

- **All Early apps (18 Oct 1700h)**
- **All Regular Decision (16 Dec 1700h).**

These deadlines are non-negotiable. HEO needs a firm list to send your documents to for timely consideration. You may complete your CA apps and submit them by the respective deadlines of the universities.

Refer to the *Timelines* guide for all relevant deadlines.

Students will want to note that UCs have just one deadline:
30 Nov.

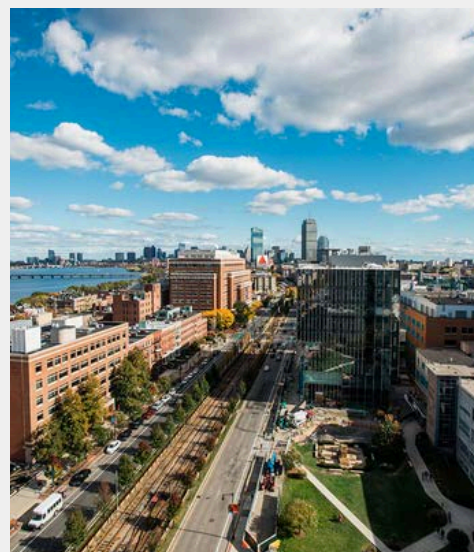
Key Application Info

What makes a good app

Early prep, thoughtful apps

US apps take a lot of time, effort and money. You'll need to do your research into schools, write meaningful essays for every single choice, in a **timely** manner. Headsup! The research and writing will take months of effort, so if you are considering a US app, **start early**.

If you had applied previously and were unsuccessful, consider now: what material difference is there between your app of last year(s) and this? What new and/or different things have you done, that make you a stronger applicant this year? Perhaps you may want to broaden or change your list of schools?



A focus on quality, not quantity

HEO's recommendation: 5-8 universities, tops. It's fine to apply for fewer. In general, quality of apps is inversely proportional to quantity of apps. Take on the number you can manage in accordance with your NS and other commitments.

As well, take proper time to **make sense of your own self and experiences**. In particular, in your year(s) away from school, you would have met new people, learnt new skills, gained new experiences. How have these shaped you, beyond the school context?

At the same time, as you research about the schools, **question: is this a place I will fit into, thrive in, and contribute positively to?**

Finally, if you do not have a safety option yet and this is your final year of apps, do put in at least one for this cycle. This could be in SG, or anywhere else.

Key Application Info

What makes a good app

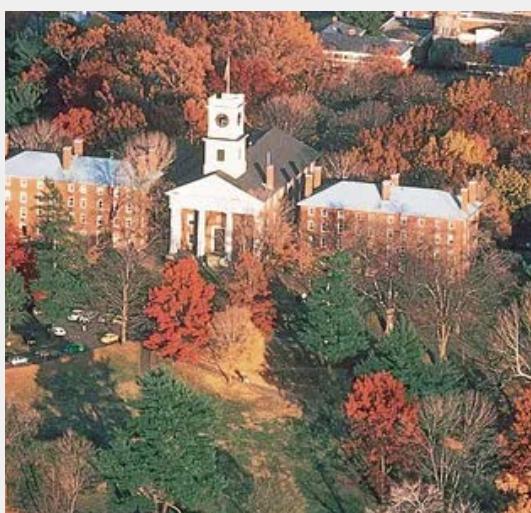
In writing: originality and authenticity

Do write your application yourself. While friends, family or even AI may be able to help you with the generation of ideas or critique your writing, they are fundamentally not you.

Nobody can be you, except you.

So take a step back, and reflect. **Writing a US app is really a journey of self-discovery.** In putting together your app, you fundamentally answer these questions: Why and to what end have you pursued what you pursued? What have you learnt, and what have you given in return?

Who are you, as an individual?



Consistency between what you say and what you have done

It is not just about writing on what you think the schools are looking for, or laundry-listing medals. **There is no model portfolio.**

Rather, your activities and honours will showcase what you have done, and your essays fill out the portrait of you, by illuminating the reasons, motivations and learning behind all you have done. **Consistency** across the entire app is key to drawing the portrait of yourself.

Meaningful reflection on post-JC years

As you've left RI for one/two years, consider: how have you grown, learnt and changed in the years since? What have you learnt, that could not be learnt in school? Describing the time and experiences gained outside of the school context can be invaluable in telling your story of growth and individuality.



Writing the 5 Academic Honours

What is an academic honour?

Academic Honours refer to prizes & accolades won in a specific academic discipline, or for all-rounded excellence in academia.

In the **Common App**, you can list 5 Honours. This is under the Education section.



For each Honour: you have up to 100 characters to describe the Honour won, state the year(s) you were awarded, and the level of recognition. These can be at school-wide, nation-wide, region-wide or the international levels.

Honours are from Sec 3 to Year 6 (this is the SG equivalent of Grades 9 to 12 in the American high school system). If you have won an academic honour post-JC, you may list it as well.

Tip: Prior to writing this, it is useful to have a list of all your academic-related prizes, awards and achievements. Avoid spamming, **curate what to include**. If you have fewer than 5 Hons, consider curating an appropriate list of schools. Be aware that if your list comprises of top schools, where admission comprises the top 1-2% of the global population, the 5 Hons should not be difficult to fill in. This is to ensure you are competitive globally.



Examples in the local context

Examples of valid academic honours: science fair presentations & paper publications, ABRSM/Trinity certificates & diplomas, essay writing competitions, Olympiads and related competitions, Edusave scholarships, any MOE scholarships (e.g., Humanities Scholarship), A*STAR JC scholarships, all-round academic excellence awards, subject prizes.

Examples which are not academic honours: sports/colours awards, character awards, leadership & community awards.

Three tips for writing your Hons

- Avoid acronyms that a foreign reader will not understand.
- Include **specific detail, so the level of competition and degree of excellence** is captured.
- Should you have more than 5 Hons, it's useful to select what best represents you **as a person**, especially in context of your 10 activities and your essays.



The 10 Activities

In the 5 Hons, you give your readers a sense of academic exceptionalism. In the 10 Activities, you give a pen-pic of what is most important to you, as a unique individual.

Activities are not synonymous with achievements merely. Use the 150 characters meaningfully to give inflections of whats, whys and hows. Consider: Why did you pursue the activity? What did you learn and how did the experience change you? What is your place in a community, and what do you bring to others? Reflect succinctly: bring life to yourself on paper.



The details of what you write

It is useful to draw out your records from Years 3-6. Your RI Journey, Raffles Digital Badges and CCA records will also be useful. As well, your NS experiences: it would be odd to leave this out given you have spent a year or more in the service. Pick out the activities you participated in which were meaningful to you. Also have the years of participation, the intensity & duration of it.

In Common App, for each Activity, you will:

- specify the activity type
- be given 50 characters for position/leadership description,
- 100 characters for the organization name,
- 150 characters to describe what you did.

In checkboxes and short fields, you indicate the years you took part, the no: of hours/week, and no: of weeks/year.

You are also asked if you intend to participate in a similar activity in college: just answer yes/no according to what you intend for this. No need to over-think!



Tips for a Great 10!

- Specific, concrete detail is useful in demonstrating the level of involvement and scale of impact. Avoid generalisations that sound like everybody else. Also avoid laundry-listing, as it is highly anonymous.
- **That is to say, it is important to capture meaning and intention.** For instance, why did you pursue the activity? How would you define yourself in that role? Your biggest takeaway?
- **Consciously use adjectives, verbs and nouns** to convey dynamism, purpose and individuality. It is not just about the doing.

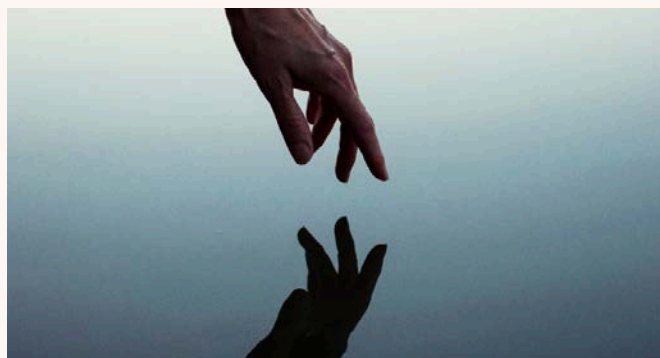
People, not portfolios, are admitted.



Essays: The heart of it all

No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart.

-F. Scott Fitzgerald



The details

There is a Common App (CA) essay which goes to all your schools. As well, supplementary essays for every school you choose. The Common App prompt is already known, and most schools will have their prompts out by mid-Aug. All of this is on CA.

As the CA essay goes to all your CA schools, it's useful to use this piece to **reflect on something core to your identity, values, beliefs**. What is one story that is central to you, without which your identity would be lost?

Note: The UCs and MIT are on their own portals, so the CA essay does not go to these schools.

Tip 1: Do not underestimate the length of time needed to write and refine essays. **Start early**. In general, beginning in mid-Aug when the supplementary prompts are released is a good idea.

Tip 2: Curate a practical number of schools that you are able to write well for. Avoid putting in so many apps that you get frazzled and meaning is lost. **HEO's recommendation is 5-8 schools max.** Less is perfectly fine.

Tip 3: As hard as this may be, enjoy writing. Try. After all, if you don't enjoy writing about yourself, why would your readers enjoy reading about you?

On use of ChatGPT & other AI

You may be tempted to use ChatGPT to write essays. **Don't**. In writing, the authentic heart matters. There's also the issue of open source--what you feed in becomes fodder for others.

In short: **the voice of a machine is not the voice of a human. Experienced readers can tell.**

Where AI may be useful: on generation of ideas, if for instance, you need some words to choose between, or if you are stuck on how to phrase a certain line. **Never** put your entire essay into an AI software.



Essays: The heart of it all

You can take for granted that people know more or less what a street, a shop, a beach, a sky, an oak tree looks like. Tell them what makes this one different.
-Neil Gaiman



As you write: the big picture

Be aware that you are **writing to demonstrate fit with the university**. Thus, consider, what aspects of yourself are a match with the school in question? What are the best sides of yourself you want to showcase to the universities? These should be the focal points of your various essays.



Consistency across the entire app is critical. Your activities & honours already represent what you have done. Now, explain the *whys* behind your pursuits, the *hows* you have grown and learnt.

Avoid repetition. Write succinctly so that you keep the interest of your reader.



As you write: some questions to think about

- Who are you as an individual? What makes you stand out?
- What do you value, why?
- What were the experiences that made you grow?
- How, why, and with what impact have you contributed to others and the community?
- What can you give to make their place better than it already is?

Word limits are there for a reason. **Write without fear, edit without mercy.**



Notes on Early Apps, agents & NS

Note on Early apps

Differentiate between **Early Decision** and **Early Action** (all types: Single Choice, Restricted, Unrestricted).

Early Decision (ED) is binding. This means you commit to attending the school if offered. **You and your parents will sign to the commitment that you will accept, and withdraw from all other apps in all parts of the world.** This is **not** to be taken lightly. You are expected to adhere to what you sign on to.

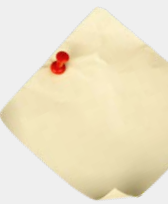
As such, ED is for those who **definitely** want that one school and have the funds to attend. If unsure: apply for Regular Decision (RD) or other EA programmes.

Early Action (EA) is non-binding. This means that if you are offered, you have until Regular Decision deadline to choose whether to accept or not. If your school is an REA/SCEA, adhere to its conditions similarly.

For those considering Early apps: Consider if you are ready to submit your app by Oct/Nov. If you aren't, opt for RD instead. **A strong app is defined by its quality, not its Early/Regular status.**

Note on agents

In line with the US universities, HEO does not approve of the use of private consultancies and agencies. Be aware that these do not necessarily operate in your best interests.



Note for those in NS 1st year

In general, all US universities will hold 2 years for those with NS, with the **exception of UC Berkeley**. Check specific websites for latest updates.

Do note that if you are offered and accept your offer, it equates to a commitment to enrol. Invariably, the T&Cs include a clause that you are not allowed to apply to any other university, in any part of the world, while your place is being held for you.

In all cases, you are expected to honour the commitment you signed on to.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever. -John Keats

May your writing be a reflection of all that glows bright in you.