



Writing for the US Application *A Short 2022 Guide for Alumni*



The sections to pay attention to:

- 1) The Five Academic Honours
- 2) The Ten Activities
- 3) The Essays

Tip: Do not focus on one section at the expense of the rest: your application is read *as a whole*. There should thus be **consistency** between your activities and essays.

1. Writing for the Academic Honours Section



The Academic Honours demonstrate your academic aptitude, in any field of study. This could be within or without school, ranging from academic prizes (e.g., best in a subject, excellence awards, JC scholarships) to paper presentations (e.g., science fair poster presentations) to competitions (e.g., essay writing competitions, business competitions, Olympiads). All-round excellence awards are also included.

Take a look at your academic track record from Sec 3 to the A-levels and even beyond, and consider: what were the *academic* awards and achievements you had that you were proudest of? These will be the ones you want to present. Tip: ensure that what you present is an **academic** achievement! Sports/leaderships/other awards are not academic honours. Also avoid acronyms that do not make sense to a foreign reader.



2. Writing for the Activities Section

Review all the activities you have done, which capture your growth and reflect your interests and passions as a unique individual.

Include activities which are academic and non-academic, within and without school, from Year 3 to now.

Important tip for alumni: Do not neglect what you have done in your NS or gap year—this is important in your growth too. For instance, in National Service, have you taken on vocations that

have taught you new skills which cannot be learnt outside of the military? Volunteered for any projects which helped you grow as person? Any accreditations or certifications attained? In your gap year, what did you do that was meaningful, which could not have been done in junior college? It's useful to reflect on *further* learning, development and growth, beyond your JC years. This allows your readers to understand what you have spent the past years doing, and paints a fuller picture of you as an individual, growing and progressing through the years.

In shortlisting, consider:

- Which activities most represent your values and what you stand for? Who are you, as a person?
- Which activities helped you grow as a person or (re)discover yourself?
- What impact have you had on the people and community around? Why may you be the kind of person a community would warmly welcome?
- What has 2 years of living in a pandemic taught you, positively? How have you demonstrated resilience, flexibility and creativity? And now, given that the pandemic has largely passed and restrictions have loosened, what new things and with what new energy are you pursuing opportunities?

Tip: once-off activities don't demonstrate passion and ability as much as sustained involvement does.

When writing:

In Activities, what you are really demonstrating is the *person* you are. Avoid merely listing, without elucidating *who you are and why you do the things you do*.

As you have only 150 characters, consider: have you explained what you accomplished in a clear and succinct manner? Leave out minor details of *doing*. Capture instead what it shows about *you as a person*.

When refining the overall, consider the big picture:

- Does my *overall* list of activities show what means the most to me as a person?
- Have I adequately demonstrated my personality or philosophy through what I have done?
- Have I used phrases or acronyms which require further explanation?
- Are my titles and descriptions universally understandable?
- For boys: do not neglect NS! This is a period of growth and maturation too.

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Writing the Essays: 5 Principles to Remember

1. **Do your research thoroughly: it pays to know who you are applying to.** Each school has a distinct character. Your essays should likewise be different: why you are a fit with one, is not necessarily the same reason why you are a fit with a second. Copying-and-pasting doesn't work.
2. **Avoid generalisations and clichés.** For instance, it's easy to want to 'change the world'. But why and how exactly do *you* want to change it? What have you done that demonstrates this capacity? Why do *you* believe in change? Be reflective and insightful.
3. **Authenticity:** Write your story in *your* own voice. Don't be afraid of it! While feedback from friends can be good, they should not dictate your story. Only *you* can tell it. Avoid a case of having too much interference, such that your own voice is lost.
4. **Also avoid repetition and unnecessary detail.** Your application, when read as a whole, should show as many different facets of yourself as possible. Be succinct and know the purpose of your story in each prompt. Avoid losing track of your key message.
5. **Covid-19:** If talking about the impact of Covid-19, frame your learning positively: it is easy to complain, far more difficult to show maturity, learning, adaptability of spirit and ingenuity. Additionally, now that the world is mostly opening up again, it's good to look ahead and talk about the new opportunities you are pursuing. Demonstrate fresh and good energy!

Overall counsel

- **Give yourself sufficient time and adhere to all application deadlines:** A good US application takes months of time, effort and research. Thus, start writing early. With regards to deadlines, do NOT wait until the last minute and begin only in Nov-Dec. **Adhere to all deadlines** as required by the universities and us.
- **Headsup!** Refer to the *Timelines 2022/2023* guide (published early Jun 2022), and ensure you adhere to the CIALFO deadlines in particular. The Common App and CIALFO guides will be published by mid-Aug 2022, so look out for them then. Please do **not** create accounts prior.
- **Be considerate.** A US app requires not just you, but your teachers and HEO. Approach your tutors personally for recommendations first, before pinging them on the system. Tip: a good time to do so is in Aug-Sep, before you create your CIALFO accounts. Do **not** leave this to the last minute in Nov-Dec, as your teachers have many to write for.
- Come July, HEO will make **written feedback submission** available for alumni applying to the US, so watch out for instructions on how this can be done. 😊

Best regards,

Your teacher-counsellors @ HEO