Choices and Options: Common App vs. Coalition App

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There are over 2,400 four-year private or public colleges and universities in the United States. Most of them accept either the Common Application or the Coalition Application. For each student and their family, it is important to research and understand the difference between them and decide which platform is best to use when submitting applications to each college or university.

Typically, experts recommend that each student submit between 8-10 applications. Each application requires a range of information from biographic/demographic to teacher recommendations and from transcripts to personal essays. Simply put, it is complicated and each school has different requirements, so it is important to manage this application process early and carefully, meeting the required deadlines for each college or university.

As your student begins to apply to colleges or universities, they need to decide which of the two free application platform systems they will use, either: the Common Application (Common App) or Coalition Application (Coalition App). Over 800 schools accept the Common App and approximately 140 accept the Coalition App. Overall, the two platforms are structurally similar, allowing your student to submit multiple applications through the same platform or portal. Either way, both application platforms require a personal essay featuring a topic of choice.

In addition, most schools feature additional essay and short answer requirements. It is important to note, that neither platform or portal provides an advantage in the application process. In some cases, an individual college or university will accept applications through **both** platforms. Of important note, although the two platforms are free of charge to use to submit application materials, you must pay each application fee for individual colleges or universities.
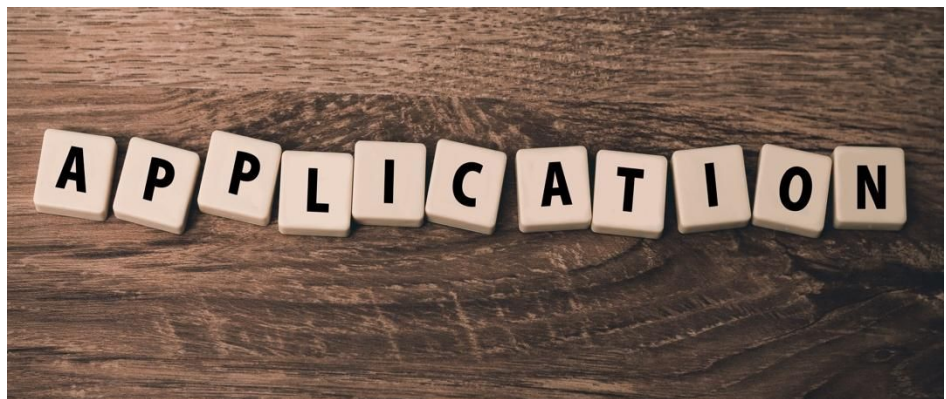
Since 1975, the Common App was the only platform to submit multiple applications on-line. However, in September, 2015 the Coalition App (Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success) launched, offering another option for college or university application. The Coalition App places emphasis on affordability and diversity, including access for low-income families. College or University members must provide affordable tuition fees/rates in combination with financial assistance (grants or scholarships), as well as meet or exceed "stringent" graduation requirements.

The Coalition App's most distinguishable feature is the "Locker" function. The Locker provides your student unlimited space to store files throughout high school years (Grades 9-12). Storage space can accommodate papers, photos and videos. In contrast, the Common App allows your student to submit up to 10 extracurricular activities in order of importance or priority, while the Coalition App provides space for 8 extracurricular activities. However, the Coalition App provides more space for activities: 64 characters for the activity itself and 255 characters to describe it vs the Common App which allocates 50 characters for each activity listed and 150 characters to describe the activity.

Another convenience or option provided by the Common App allows you to list only your most recent courses, while the Coalition App requires students to complete a list of all of your grades and courses in high school. Either way, you will still be required to submit an official transcript for your high school years.

It is important to remember that no college or university will penalize you for using one or the other of these platforms. Therefore, it is up to you to choose which platform you prefer, as it's a personal choice. So, which platform should you choose and what benefit does each one provide? Most of the schools in the Coalition App are also included in the Common App, so you will need to verify each member list before starting your application to assure your file will be processed according to the platform you

select. Ultimately, the Common App is recognized by more colleges or universities, although the Coalition App is growing in popularity very quickly. So, when it comes time to apply, be sure to double check which colleges or universities accept each platform to assure a smooth process.

Finally, there are always exceptions! For instance, the California university system and a variety of private, small colleges do not accept either the Common App or Coalition App. It is your responsibility to check with each institution to identify which application platform option they accept or prefer, including their own platform.

As always, good luck with the application process and enjoy the experience, as your college or university years are closer than you think...