

An aerial photograph of the Willamette University campus, featuring several large, multi-story brick buildings and numerous trees. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent red overlay. The university's name and logo are centered over the image.

WILLAMETTE  UNIVERSITY

Common Application & Essay Workshop

Introduction



Sue Corner '90, P'24 **Dean of Undergraduate Admission**

- Willamette alum
- Parent of a current Willamette student
- Worked in enrollment for over 20 years



Today's Workshop:

- **Application Review Process**
- **The Elements of the Common Application**
- **A Look at commonapp.org**
- **Writing the College Essay**
- **Questions**



Application Review Process

WILLAMETTE  UNIVERSITY

Application Review Process

Holistic Application Review

- Focused on mutual fit
- Uses each piece of the application to put together a whole picture of you
- Offers flexibility

Traditional Application Review

- Focused on meeting requirements
- Uses GPA / Test Scores as “benchmarks” or “gateways”



How Willamette Uses Holistic Review

Future Bearcats...

- Stay true to who they are
- Are detailed-oriented
- Challenge themselves academically
- Communicate effectively
- Ask for support when they need it
- Take advantage of opportunities to connect and ask questions
- Demonstrate desire for leadership and service opportunities



Elements of the Common Application



Your Application to Willamette

Required

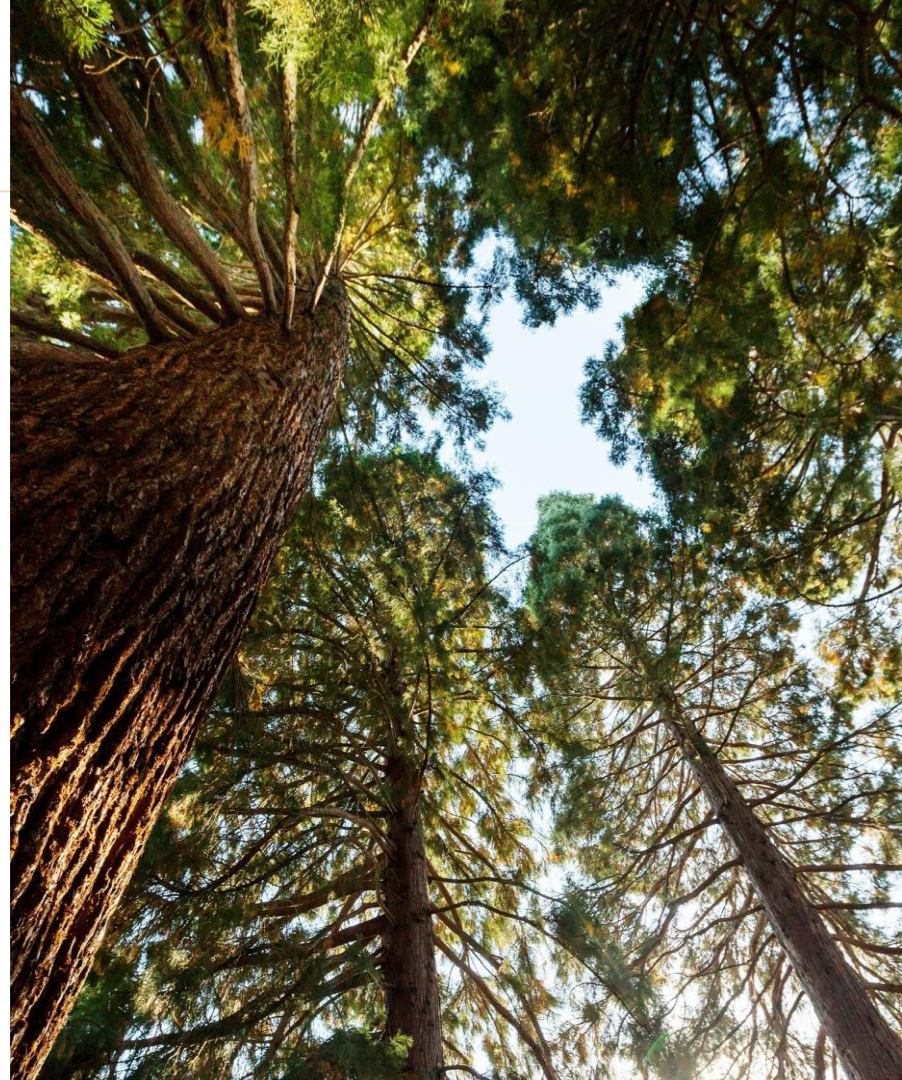
- Common Application
- High School Transcript
- School Report
- Counselor Recommendation

Optional

- SAT/ACT Scores
- Additional Recommendations
- Admission Interview
- Resume
- Additional Information

Deadlines

- Early Decision/Early Action- Nov 15
- Regular Decision- Jan 15



Tips for Three Critical Elements of the Common Application:

- Activities & Involvement
- Essay
- Additional Information



Activities & Involvement

- Allows us to get to know you and what you are passionate about outside of school
- Highlights what skills you have acquired and how you would contribute to our campus in a meaningful way
- Formal vs. Informal
- Breadth vs. Depth
- Activities during COVID-19



Activities & Involvement

A Strong Activities Section...

- Documents long-term involvement with organizations/activities
- Is descriptive
- Lists awards and leadership roles
- Highlights activities related to your academic interests or potential career goals

Avoid...

- Using acronyms (ex. NHS, FBLA, BSA)
- Leaving out activities, even if they were short-term
- Discounting informal activities



Activities & Involvement

Activities

Music: Vocal

9, 10, 11, 12
School
5 hr/wk, 36 wk/yr
Continue

Choir Member, Secretary, & Section Leader, South Salem High School Choir Program

I have been involved all four years in my high school's select choir program, participating in the Bella Voce, Chamber Women's, and Symphonic Choirs.

Music: Instrumental

9, 10, 11, 12
School
3 hr/wk, 36 wk/yr

Piano, Suzuki Method Private Lessons, Connie Snyder Studio

I have taken piano lessons for 12 years, reaching Level 7 of the Suzuki curriculum. I have performed in many recitals, concerts, and NFMC Festivals.

School Spirit

9, 10, 11, 12
School
6 hr/wk, 36 wk/yr
Continue

Participant in Dynamic Leadership Class, South Salem High School Leadership

I have learned to lead through service in my school's leadership class, where we plan assemblies, organize school events, and support our community.

Athletics: JV/Varsity

10, 11, 12
School, Break
12 hr/wk, 12 wk/yr
Continue

Tennis, JV Captain & Varsity Team Member, South Salem High School Girls Tennis Team

I earned a varsity letter, was named Athlete of the Week, was a district tournament doubles finalist, and received state recognition for our team GPA.

Other Club/Activity

11, 12
School
3 hr/wk, 36 wk/yr

Secretary/Member, National Honor Societies, South Salem High School NHS/French NHS

As an officer, I help organize our NHS chapter meetings and events. I am an active participant in French NHS.

Student Govt./Politics

12
School
2 hr/wk, 36 wk/yr

Associated Student Body Council Member, South Salem High School Comm. Liaison

As part of our ASB council, my job as community liaison is to ensure that South is a good neighbor to the families that surround and support us.

Work (Paid)

12
Break
25 hr/wk, 12 wk/yr

Dining Room Server and Kitchen Crew, Madrona Hills Retirement Community

My summer job has included serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner to a delightful group of senior citizens. I have also participated in resident events.

Work (Paid)

11
Break
14 hr/wk, 9 wk/yr

Childcare Provider for Local Family

I spent the summer before my junior year taking care of a two-year-old named Camilo two days a week. I learned a lot while caring for him.

Religious

9, 10
Break
15 hr/wk, 1 wk/yr

Vacation Bible School Small Group Leader, Open Door United Methodist Churches

I spent a week the summers before ninth and tenth grades leading a small group of children during our Vacation Bible School Program.

Theater/Drama

10
School
20 hr/wk, 12 wk/yr

Musical Theater, Ensemble Cast Member, South Salem High School Drama Department

I performed in "Once Upon a Mattress" my sophomore year in the production's ensemble. In preparation for the show, I helped design and build sets.



Activities & Involvement

Activities

Athletics: JV/Varsity

12

School

12 hr/wk, 20 wk/yr

Continue

Football, Middle linebacker, Edward C. Reed High School

Northern Division 5A All-Region team football specialist-second team



The College Essay

- Should be an original example of your best writing ability
 - Proper structure and format
 - Appropriate use of grammar and syntax
 - Accurate spelling
- Should tell us all about you
 - The topic can be anything, but it should highlight who you are
- What makes a “good essay” or an essay we enjoy reading?
 - An essay that showcases you opinions or passions, and what led to those conclusions or how you developed those interests
 - A creative approach to a common experience (i.e the transition to high school, or moving to a new city/state)
 - A surprise ending
 - A writing style in which we can “hear” how you speak



Additional Information Section

- Tucked just after the essay - easy to miss
- Open text box where you can add anything you'd like
 - Did you make a unique curriculum choice?
 - Did you struggle in a certain semester or in a particular subject?
 - Is there something unique that didn't fit in the activities section?
- We want as much context as possible
- Putting something in this section shows us you are paying attention and care about your application



Other Common Application Sections

- **Institution-Specific Questions**

- Preferred Name
- Scholarship Interest
- Single Influencer
- Connection to the University
- Disciplinary question

- **COVID-19 Question**

- A chance to explain if COVID-19 had an impact on your personal or academic experience (i.e. changes in your high school's grading system, family responsibilities, or other significant impacts that affected you or your family)



Major Takeaways

It is important to...

- Be honest
- Be thoughtful in your responses
- Utilize the opportunity if the question applies to you
- Be thorough and give us as much context as possible

Avoid...

- Writing what you think we want to hear
- Rushing through your responses
- Missing the opportunity to clarify



An aerial photograph of the Willamette University campus, featuring several large, multi-story brick buildings and numerous trees. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent red overlay. The text "A Walk Through" is in white serif font, and "commonapp.org" is in a teal sans-serif font with a teal underline.

A Walk Through commonapp.org

WILLAMETTE  UNIVERSITY

An aerial photograph of the Willamette University campus, featuring a large red brick building with a central tower and a dome, surrounded by green lawns and trees. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

WILLAMETTE  UNIVERSITY

Questions?

College Essay Writing



What we'll cover in this session:

- What role does the essay play in the application?
- What are some do's and don'ts when it comes to your application essay?
- What does a really effective essay sound like?

What role
does the essay play
in the application?

The essay serves two purposes:

- It is an academic measure of your preparation for college
- It helps us understand who you are and what's important to you

- The essay matters
 - For many, it is second only to the transcript when it comes to assessing preparation
 - It can be the tipping point if you're on the cusp
- The essay is unique within the file
 - It's the most personal part of the application
 - It's like you started talking to me

What are some
do's and don'ts
when it comes to your
application essay?

Do:

Write the essay yourself and with the clear understanding that your essay will be read and may affect the decision.

Don't:

Allow anyone else to write or significantly change your essay for you. We want your voice and ability to come through!

Do:

Have someone you trust proofread your essay for you - helping with small grammatical and punctuation errors.

Don't:

Wait until 11:00pm before a midnight deadline to complete your essay - rushing almost always ensures sloppy work.



WILLAMETTE
UNIVERSITY

Do:

Choose a topic that allows you to stand out and tell a story that is important to you, gives us insight, and is authentic to who you are.

Don't:

Spend weeks agonizing about which topic is right or wrong. Any topic is okay, so long as you tell the story around that topic uniquely.

Do:

Answer the prompt
and be mindful of
word count.

Don't:

Reuse a piece of
writing you've written
for class.

Do:

Think about all the ways you provide context within the essay.

Don't:

Mention a specific school within your Common Application essay.

What does a
really effective essay
sound like?

Social Capital

- wonderful storytelling quality
- lots of details included that give me extra clues about this applicant's character
- nice use of imagery - water/bridge, sink/swim
- use of language is very straightforward
- there's vulnerability here that is really appealing
- the topic: he moved

Old People

- answers the prompt
- nice attention-catching opening
- great sense of humor but also touching
- demonstrates herself through others
- familiarity in her storytelling
- lots of descriptive details
- values - gratitude, observance, tenderness

Super Heroes

- answers the prompt
- nice “hook” at the beginning that ties in at the end
- vulnerable and relatable
- demonstrates a challenge and growth
- ends on a wonderfully positive note
- creative thinking around the idea of failure
- incorporates dialog

Questions?

Thank you!

Sue Corner
Dean of Admission
Willamette University
scorner@willamette.edu
503-375-5337

www.willamette.edu

