



## OPTIONAL APPLICATION SUPPLEMENTS

What they are, who should submit them, and how to make the best use of them in your applications

### » Art / Music / Dance Performance portfolio

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- **What:** The visual art/performance portfolio digitally showcases your talent to admissions officers. While it may be a requirement for art/performance courses, it's an optional supplement for those applying to academic courses. The portfolio should be a limited selection of your varied skill set in a particular area. For example, if you are submitting an art portfolio, submit pictures of 5-10 art works, but make sure that they capture different styles like oil, water colour, portrait, landscape etc. For music/dance/theatre supplements, you will likely be allowed to submit one video with a certain time limit (varies per school). You can feature excerpts from different performances. Consult an expert (like an art or music teacher) to select the pieces for your portfolio and brief them that you want to show a varied skill set. You could also consider adding a short note in your portfolio which describes your style, the techniques you use, and your inspirations. Most schools will require you to supplement your portfolio with an arts resume containing information about your professional training, performances, awards, masterclasses attended etc.
- **Who should submit:** This section allows you to showcase talents that cannot be fully expressed in the common app. It allows colleges to see how proficient you are in a stated activity. Often, these supplements are sent to the college's arts department and reviewed by experts. **So, you should submit the portfolio only if you are confident in your proficiency (your teachers, and previous experiences can indicate this), and the art form is a major part of your high school career and application.** However, if you are unsure about just how proficient your skills in this art form are, listing your awards/achievements in the art form might be more beneficial than submitting a full-fledged portfolio.
- **How to submit:** When applying through the common app, use Slideroom to digitally upload your portfolio. You can find a step-by-step guide on how to attach your portfolio to your common app on the link below. Remember, you do not have to send the same portfolio to each college; you can customize it per college. Step-by-step guide: <http://www.slideroom.com/commonapp/> Besides this, check the college websites to confirm this information, and add any specifications they might require. E.g., simply Google, "Stanford art portfolio submission".
- **How to leverage this in your application:** Submit an art/performance portfolio to show your commitment and proficiency to a certain art form. In your application, you could feature your involvement with this art form in one of the essays to further cement just how committed you are, and mention your achievements in your main resume/activities section of the common app. You may also consider adding your mentor in this art form as one of your additional recommenders.



## » Additional Letters of Recommendation

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- **What:** Additional LoRs are optional recommendations (other than the two teacher, and one school counsellor recommendations that are required) that you can submit in support of your application. **Remember, these cannot be sent in place of your required recommendations.**
- **Who should submit:** You should submit an additional LoR if you think it adds new perspective or information about you that is not provided by your standard recommenders. Applicants usually ask employers, research mentors, arts teachers etc. for additional LoRs. Only ask a recommender to write for you if you are certain that they have a positive opinion of you.
- **How to submit:** Since any recommendation is more credible when it is “blind” (i.e. not shown to the applicant), follow the same process for additional LoRs as you do for required LoRs. Add the additional recommender as one of your recommenders on common app and send them a request to make a common app account. When choosing your recommender for a college, select this additional recommender as well to make sure their recommendation is forwarded to the college. Also check your college’s specific policy on additional LoRs since some colleges have a limit on how many recommendations you can send.
- **How to leverage this in your application:** An additional LoR will be useful if the recommender has worked with you closely, can comment on an aspect of your personality/application that others have not talked about, and seems to know you well. A letter is especially useful if it substantiates an experience that you heavily reference in your application. For example, if your common app/college specific essays discuss your research project, it might be a good idea to ask your research supervisor for a LoR. A letter that sounds like a certificate, has a detached tone, seems to be from someone who doesn’t personally know you, or is written by someone who might not be objective about you (such as family member or family connection) will not help much.



## » Weblinks: Personal Website / YouTube Channel

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- **What:** These are links to personal blogs, websites, or YouTube channels that you might want admissions officers to see.
- **Who should submit:** In some cases, a website/blog/YouTube channel can provide information about your experiences, backgrounds, and personality that is not reflected in your application essays. Only mention these if you think they represent you in a positive, professional light. The content of blogs and YouTube videos can often be extremely personal and may contain information that you do not feel comfortable sharing with an admissions committee that is evaluating you. Scan your content thoroughly before submitting. While a blog/YouTube channel can be a marker of your commitment, remember that you can always describe these in the activities section of the common app without providing a link (if you are uncomfortable to do so). In addition to (or instead of) providing a link, you may also describe these in terms of the number of followers/revenue they generate and the impact they have created. **If you do provide a link, make sure that the website/blog/channel showcases your proficiency in a certain area.**
- **How to submit:** Describe the content of the channel/blog/website in the activities section, and supplement this description with the name of the channel/blog/website, and a weblink. You may consider shortening the link through tiny.url. Also mention the name/link/description in your resume. Many colleges (though not all) also have an additional links section in their college-specific common app page, so you can add this link here as well.
- **How to leverage this in your application:** If this activity is a central skill in your application, discuss it in an essay. Besides providing the link, also provide other markers of success such as number of readers/viewers, followers, and any forum on which the website/blog/channel was featured. These markers help the admissions officers gauge your level of commitment and skill in this enterprise. Prepare for the possibility that the admissions officers will not visit the link itself. **So, ensure that your link is supplemented by a detailed description of the nature/content of your website/blog/channel in the activities section of the common app.**



## » Research Paper

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- **What:** If you were involved in meaningful research independently, with a lab, or a research mentor, you can submit a research paper or abstract describing this research to colleges. Note that your paper does NOT have to be published in a journal to be impactful. If you have not written out a full paper yet, you could also submit an abstract: a 1-2 page summary that describes the objectives, methods, results, and implications of your research.
- **Who should submit:** You should only submit a research paper/abstract if your involvement in the research was meaningful, i.e. you weren't just observing or learning but actually contributing to the project. **Always consult your research supervisor before deciding whether to submit your research paper to colleges.** Most colleges will also require you to fill in additional forms with information about the duration of your involvement, your particular role etc. along with your research. **You should submit a specific research paper/abstract only if you followed rigorous research methods, and had definitive findings.** If this is not the case, it might be better to refrain from submitting a formal supplement; instead describe the research in your essays, and get a recommendation from your supervisor.
- **How to submit:** Most colleges (like Yale, Pomona) have separate portals for submitting research supplements after you have made a formal application through common app. Others (Columbia) have a section in their college- specific page of the common app itself. Check out your college's policy on this before submitting.
- **How to leverage this in your application:** A research supplement should always be accompanied by an abstract. Make sure that this research also features in your essays to the college, and/or your activities section of the common app. Finally, ALWAYS add an additional LoR from your research mentor, supporting the claims you made about contributing to the research project.



## » Essay / Creative Writing Pieces

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- **What:** If you submitted an essay or writing for a competition, recited your poetry at a major event, wrote a play, wrote an article for a renowned national magazine etc. you might submit it as an application supplement. This is any piece of creative, fiction, or even non-fiction writing that is not required by colleges, but can be submitted to showcase your writing prowess or expertise in a subject.
- **Who should submit:** This is a piece that showcases writing proficiency, and has already achieved some form of recognition; please only submit this after consulting your supervisor or an expert. You should select the piece very carefully, be sure to not overwhelm the admissions office with too many pieces; instead, choose ones that best represents your proficiency.

Here's some advice from the Yale admissions website:

*"If you are a creative writer whose work has been recognized at a regional or national level, you may consider submitting a sample of your work as part of your application. A carefully chosen short piece, or a collection of four or five poems, is preferable to a long manuscript or a large number of poems."*

- **How to submit:** Each college has a different policy on how to submit these. For example, MIT suggests that applicants submit their writing sample through slide-room, whereas Yale requires you to attach your piece in the additional information section of the common app itself. Check your specific college's website for information.
- **How to leverage this in your application:** A writing submission will be especially beneficial if it connects to your interests, goals, and topics you discuss in your application. For example, if you are a prospective environmental studies major, and you wrote an article on climate change which was published in a popular magazine or was submitted in a national essay writing competition, it would be appropriate to submit this article as a supplement. However, if this article was only a class assignment that received a grade of A+, you will need to develop it further, and submit it to an essay competition/magazine etc. before it can be submitted as a supplement.



## » ZeeMee

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- **What:** ZeeMee is a smartphone based app that allows applicants to create a profile outlining “their story,” answer certain prompts through short videos, and add pictures and documents describing their experiences. This profile is then made accessible to partner colleges. The app aims to make an applicant’s profile “come alive” by providing them the freedom to share their experiences through media other than written essays.
- **Who should submit:** Since every applicant has some story or experiences, anyone can submit their Zeemee. However, you should first check that your target schools actually partner with ZeeMee, and review applicant stories as part of their application review process. If your top 5-10 colleges aren’t using the platform, it doesn’t make much sense to create a profile and build content.

If you do opt to use ZeeMee, however, you might especially benefit from using its story tools if you think your application essays are unable to fully capture your experiences and achievements. If you have a compelling background and/or faced certain hardships that you feel are better communicated through a video, an informal story-sharing platform maybe impactful.
- **How to submit:** Download the app on your smartphone to create a profile. Common app now has a section where you can submit your Zeemee link in the college-specific part of the application.
- **How to leverage this in your application:** Even though Zeemee is a smartphone app akin to snapchat, it should not be considered completely informal. Curate it to make it look professional; prepare for your videos, and use intentional language. Use it to showcase your personal stories, information about your background, or supplement your activities with pictures and videos (e.g. if you are an avid slam poet, add in a video of one of your open mics to give the admissions officers an idea of your performance). However, remember that it is a recent platform, so you must be cautious about what you post, and who has access to your profile.



## » Duolingo

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- **What:** The Duolingo English proficiency test is an online test that involves questions testing your English proficiency, and a short video interview. It can be taken from any device, anywhere, and costs \$49. You can take the test here:  
<https://englishtest.duolingo.com/applicants>
- **Who should submit:** You should submit this test as a supplement to showcase your English proficiency. Submit it if you have low SAT/ACT/high school English language scores. Some colleges require international students to provide English proficiency evidence. You can submit the Duolingo as a supplement to your TOEFL scores (if your scores aren't satisfactory), or, in a few cases, as the primary evidence of your English proficiency (to schools who accept the test as primary evidence e.g. Barnard college).
- **How to submit:** Duolingo can send your scores to your chosen institutions for no extra cost. Find the list of institutions that the scores can be sent to here:  
<https://englishtest.duolingo.com/institutions>
- **How to leverage this in your application:** Your Duolingo score can be an evidence of your English proficiency if you have low scores. It is significantly less expensive than TOEFL, so it is worth reaching out to your college's admissions office to ask if they are willing to replace your TOEFL requirement with Duolingo. However, if you have taken the TOEFL and achieved a high score, Duolingo will not add much to your application.



## » Initialview , Vericant

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**What:** Both of these are third party interview platforms. Initialview is a website that conducts unscripted interviews over a video call (in your desired location), and can send this interview (unevaluated) to the colleges you select.

Vericant interview consists of a video call (similar to initialview), as well as a writing exercise (conducted on the video call). Vericant then sends your writing sample, and interview video (unevaluated) to the colleges you select.

- **Who should submit:** If you are applying to colleges that recommend third party interviews, or state that they are unable to hold interviews in your location, a video interview might showcase your spoken language proficiency, and a bit of your personality. If your English scores in SAT/ACT/TOEFL/high school are relatively low, an interview might help establish your command over the English language.
- **How to submit:** Both platforms will send materials directly to your chosen institutions.
- **How to leverage this in your application:** If you are unable to get an interview (due to your location), want to show your spoken English proficiency, make-up for low scores, and/or are required by the college to send them a third party interview, you can benefit from these platforms. If your SAT/ACT essay scores were relatively low, you might benefit more from using vericant which allows you to send a writing sample as well.