

10 Tips for the Common App Activities List & 5 Tips for the Honors Section

Here's the deal:

- “Activities” will go on your Common App tab that reads “Activities,” but
- “Honors” can be found by clicking on the “Education” tab (at the bottom)
- You can list up to 10 Activities and 5 Honors/Awards

Quick tips:

- Fill in as many Activities and Honors/Awards as you can
- List Activities and Honors/Awards in order of importance/impressiveness/awesomeness
- If you have more than 10 Activities or 5 Honors, list the overflow in your Additional Info Section (but only after you've followed the tips below for how to describe them)
- Go for variety in how you order your Activities and Honors (so: if you have 3 soccer Activities or Honors, for example, maybe put only 2 in your main list, and put the third one in your Add'l info section)

MOST IMPORTANT:

- For each Activity: you only get 50 characters for the position/Leadership description and organization name and 150 characters for the description
- For each Award: you only get 100 characters to name and describe each one.

Because you have such a limited number of space how do you make the most of them? Here are 10 tips for the Activities and 5 Tips for the Honors:



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10 TIPS FOR YOUR 10 ACTIVITIES

1. State role and organization name in top box (50 char.), so you don't waste characters in the lower, 150 character box—and use all your space!

Instead of: (top box) Model United Nations

(description box) I'm the president and started our school's Model United Nations club. (**And don't repeat words!**)

Try this:

Founder and President of Model United Nations

Organize meetings, coach students for conferences, raise money and awareness for UNICEF causes, awarded "Outstanding Delegate" at every conference attended.

150 char.
description.

50 char.
role & org.

2. Emphasize tangible, measurable impact.

Whom did your activity help? How many people? How much money did you raise?

Instead of: Raised money for children in Africa.

Try: Raised \$3,000 to provide three uniforms and scholarships for students attending the Joseph Waweru Home School in Kenya: http://www.exop.org/home_school.html

3. Use active verbs to explain what you actually did (list your tasks).

Instead of: Worked at a clinic doing different things.

Try: Organized patient diagnosis notes, sterilized tools for surgeries, assisted with x-ray analysis...

4. To fit in more info: use lists, don't use complete sentences, cut extra words.

Instead of: I raised money to donate to a school in Ghana in Africa by selling t-shirts and bracelets.

Try: Arranged advertising events, organized fundraisers, and gave presentations at school meetings.

5. Use the present tense if it's something you still do.

Instead of: I helped tour visitors around the campus and presented some information on school history and student life.

Try: I give campus tours, providing info on school history, student activities, boarding life.

6. Aim for variety in your list, making sure your verbs aren't redundant.

Instead of: Instructing, helping, teaching children tennis (how are these three different?)

Try: Instructing in proper technique, while imparting lessons in sportsmanship, health and integrity.

7. Include any responsibilities you had to demonstrate leadership skills.

Instead of: I swim on the swim team.

Try: Responsible for leading swim practices, planning fundraising events; assisting in recruiting process.

8. What if there isn't much to say, or it was a one-time event?

Explain the significance of the activity: to whom did the event matter and why?

Rather than: Helped organize events.

Try: Assist with the organization and production of grassroots events and presentations to inform youth of the importance of being informed citizens.

9. Avoid extreme language.

Instead of: ...to help all those in need (or) to end poverty in the world

Try: ...to help those in need (or) to aid in the fight against global poverty

10. Use bigger words.

Instead of: "Came up with" (or) "Helped"

Try: Developed, brainstormed (or) promoted, facilitated



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Here's how your Activities List should look:

Remember: List them in descending order of impressiveness/importance.

Intern at the Los Angeles Superior Court

Assisted a Los Angeles District Attorney by researching relevant case laws, drafting briefs, and assisting with client interviews

Student Council Alumni Relations Commissioner

Student Council Committee Member (9, 10, 11), RSVP Leadership Committee (11, 12), D-Block Rep (12), Link Leader (12), Student Ambassador (12)

Administrative Assistant at Shingari's School of Rhythm

In charge of customer service, managing financial accounts, recording attendance, managing inventory, and all other administrative aspects

Research Assistant at the UCLA Psychology Department

Conducted study on gender, age, and sexual identity under Dr. Negin Ghavemi.
Responsibilities: data input, research, analysis, drafting reports.

Intern at Department of Cardiovascular Disease

Organized patient diagnosis notes, sterilized tools for surgeries, assisted with x-ray analysis.

Worked as assistant at Ye-In Dental Clinic

Helped with patient registration, sterilized tools for surgeries, assisted with surgical processes.

Speech and Debate

Academic All-American Award, NFL Tournament Qualifier ('11, '12), Rupe Scholar, Stanford Invitational Semi-finalist, Harker Invitational Semi-finalist

Mock Trial Pretrial Attorney

Utilize critical thinking and public speaking skills, research case law, and apply knowledge of the legal system to real situations

Sunday School Teacher/Dance Instructor

Teach 1st grade Sunday School students and teach weekly dance lessons in Indian Classical Dance and Bollywood dance styles.

Volunteer Organizer for the SF Valley Democratic Party

Assist with the organization and production of grassroots events and presentations to inform youth of the importance of being informed citizens

Note: for advice on the UC Activities List, go here:

<http://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/2014/11/23/how-to-write-your-uc-activities-list>



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5 TIPS FOR YOUR 5 HONORS

1. Use abbreviations selectively.

Example:

- The description: Winner of the National French Honor Society French Film Contest (2014-2015) Wrote script and played the main character in the short film, as well as assisted in editing (170 char)
- Can become: Winner of Nat'l French Honor Society Film Contest: Wrote script, played main char, asst. editor (95 char)

2. It doesn't have to be an official award to count as an honor.

In fact, I think that's why it's called the "Honors" section and not the "Awards" section.

Examples:

- Jr. Honor Guard: Of 746 students, I was 1 of 16 chosen to represent class at 2014 graduation
 - FBLA Intro to Business Communication: 3rd place Inland Section; 5th place in CA (of 214 students)
 - USIAMMDA Int'l Math Competition - First place in Platinum Level (84 students competing)
 - Selected participant the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation Summer Seminar
- Note: You can explain acronyms (like USIAMMDA) in the Additional Info section

How can you make sure what you include feels like an "honor"?

3. Emphasize selectivity.

See the three examples above.

Questions to ask yourself: How many were competing? How many were chosen? In short: why was this (were you) special?

And, in the case of the last example, participation (sometimes) counts!

4. If you won a ton of awards in something, don't try squeezing them all into 100 characters.

Use that "Additional Info" section. That's what it's for.

Example:

- You won the following in Speech and Debate: Academic All-American Award, NFL Tournament Qualifier ('11, '12), Rupe Scholar, Stanford Invitational Semi-finalist, Harker Invitational Semi-finalist
- Don't write: "Debate: Acad All-Amer, NFL Qual ('11, '12), Rupe Scholar, Stanford Invit Semis, Harker Invit Semis"
- That might get confusing. Instead, use simple bullet points, one line per award, in your Add'l Info section:

Speech and Debate Awards

- Academic All-American
- NFL Tournament Qualifier ('11, '12)
- Rupe Scholar...

5. Don't push it.

Once you feel like you're scraping the bottom of the barrel, stop.

Example: Cesar Chavez Day Participation: I showed up!

Bonus Tip: List common Honors near the bottom.

There are certain Honors and Awards that are pretty common and should be listed close to the bottom, or in the Additional Info section. Some of these include: Honor Roll, National Honors Society, Mu Alpha Theta, etc.

Exception: If one of these is extremely difficult at your school (like it's extremely competitive and only the top 5% are selected), be sure to emphasize this in either your description or your Additional Info section.



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Here are some examples of Honors:

Remember: List your Top 5 on your main application. Put the rest in the "Additional Info" section.

Jr. Honor Guard: Out of 746 students, 1 of 16 chosen to represent class at 2014 graduation ceremony

FBLA - Business Communication - 4th place in Inland Section (of 168 competing)

USIAMMDA International Math Competition - First place in Platinum Level

(Twice) Honorable Mention for National French Exam Grand Concours 2012-2013 & 2014-2015

Winner of Nat'l French Honor Society Film Contest: Wrote script, played main char, asst. editor

Student of the Year for first semester of French III; SoY second semester for APUSH

National Merit Scholarship: outstanding performance on the PSAT (Score: 214)

Tennis Coach's Award: given based on leadership, sportsmanship, team spirit, and skill

President's Volunteer Service Award: 100+ hours of community service in one year

National Honors Society: given for academic achievement & community service, I'm also Treasurer

(Twice) Med. Science Academy Award: Best Class Presentation and Best Academic Achievement



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