

COLLEGE CONSULTING PLAYBOOK

BeyondU Admit

A complete operating guide for the Common App
and UC application process — Fall 2026 cycle

For Students

Week-by-week roadmap, essay frameworks, and submission checklists

For Parents

What's included, milestones, what to expect, how to support

For Consultants

Service scope, deliverables, workflows, ethical guardrails

Prepared May 2026 · For the Fall 2026 application cycle (Class of 2027)

NAVIGATION

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01

How to use this playbook

This playbook is the operating system for every BeyondU Admit engagement. It assembles industry-standard college consulting practice with the exact dates, prompts, and deliverables for the Fall 2026 cycle (students applying now for entry in Fall 2027).

Three tracks, one document

- Students — Sections 03, 04, 05, 06, 07 are your daily working materials. Use the week-by-week roadmap and treat the appendices as printable worksheets.
- Parents — Section 10 explains what's included, what's not, and how to support your student without taking the pen out of their hand.
- Consultants — Sections 02, 11, 12 define scope, deliverables, and ethical lines. Use the workflows to onboard new families consistently.

Cycle covered

Common App opens August 1, 2026. UC applications open August 1, 2026 with a submission window of October 1 – December 1, 2026. UC admissions decisions arrive March 2027; most Regular Decision results land between mid-March and April 1, 2027. National Decision Day is May 1, 2027. All dates below are sourced from [UC Admissions](#) and [Common App](#).

Promise to students

We coach, we critique, we strategize — but we never write your essays, fabricate activities, or submit your application for you. Your voice is the asset. Our job is to protect it and sharpen it.

02

Service scope & package overview

BeyondU Admit operates within the standards of practice published by the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA), Higher Education Consultants Association (HECA), and NACAC. Three packages cover the most common student needs for the Fall 2026 cycle.

Package matrix

Package	What's included	Application coverage	Best fit
Essentials Self-directed students who need targeted feedback	Up to 8 hours of 1:1 coaching 2 essay reviews per prompt (max 8 essays) 1 college list review 1 final application audit	Common App personal statement, 1-2 supplements, UC PIQs	Rising senior already underway
Comprehensive Full-cycle support, most popular	Weekly 1:1 sessions June 2026 – Feb 2027 Unlimited essay rounds (up to 12 essays) Activity list + honors coaching Interview prep (2 mocks) Final audit on every submission	Common App + up to 12 schools of supplements + full UC application	Rising senior applying to 8-12 schools
Premier High-touch, selective school strategy	Bi-weekly sessions starting summer Unlimited essay rounds (no essay cap) Activity narrative architecture 4 mock interviews + alumni connections Recommender briefing prep Final audit by senior consultant + admissions committee review	Common App + up to 20 schools + UC + scholarship & honors college apps	Students targeting Ivy/Top 20, BS/MD, or specialty programs

What every package includes

- Kickoff intake — 60-90 min diagnostic covering transcript, scores, activities, family context, target list.
- Written strategy plan — Delivered within 7 days of intake: school list, testing plan, essay plan, timeline.

- Shared workspace — Drive folder with master tracker, essay drafts, school research, deadline calendar.
- Parent check-ins — Monthly 20-minute summary calls; weekly written status during peak season.
- Application audit — Pre-submission final read for every Common App and UC application.

What we don't do

Hard lines

No ghostwriting. Consultants never write or rewrite student essays.

No admission guarantees. No reputable consultant promises a specific outcome.

No application submission on behalf of the student. The student clicks submit.

No fabrication. Activities, hours, awards must reflect what the student actually did.

No referral kickbacks. We accept no commissions from tutors, test prep, or programs we recommend.

Standards drawn from [IECA Best Practices: College Consulting](#) and [HECA Standards for Working with Students and Families](#).

Add-on services

Service	Scope	Available to
Activities List Audit	Standalone 90-min session + 1 written revision pass on all 10 entries	Essentials clients
Interview Prep Intensive	3 mock interviews (alumni / generic / behavioral) + written feedback	Any package
Honors College & Scholarship Essays	Coaching for named scholarships, honors college supplements, BS/MD essays	Essentials, Comprehensive
Transfer Strategy	UC TAG planning, transfer essay, course articulation review	Standalone
BS/MD or Direct Admit Strategy	Specialty pathway support — additional 10 hours	Premier add-on
Late-cycle Rescue	Joining at supplements stage — 30-day sprint to deadline	Standalone, capacity permitting

Engagement workflow

Phase	Timing	Outcome
1. Discovery call	Free 30 min	Family fit assessment, package recommendation
2. Intake & assessment	Week 1	Transcript, score, activity review; goals interview; assessment tools
3. Strategy plan	Week 2	Written plan: school list, testing, essay calendar, milestones
4. Activity & essay phase	June – Sept	Brainstorm, draft, revise; school research deepens
5. Application build	Sept – Nov	Common App + UC + supplements; recommenders briefed
6. Audit & submit	Oct – Jan	Pre-submission audit on every application; submission cadence managed
7. Decisions & enrollment	Mar – May	Decision review, financial aid comparison, SIR & deposit coaching

03

The Fall 2026 cycle at a glance

Every date below applies to students applying in Fall 2026 for entry in Fall 2027. Always reconfirm with each college's site — individual schools may move earlier than the headline date.

Universal milestones

Date	Milestone	What it means
August 1, 2026	Common App opens	Common App and UC application both open for the Fall 2026 cycle
October 1, 2026	FAFSA & CA Dream Act open	Financial aid filing begins; CSS Profile also opens
Oct 1 – Dec 1, 2026	UC filing window	All UC applications submitted within this window; no early action/early decision
November 1, 2026	ED I / EA wave 1 deadline	Common App early deadlines at most selective schools
November 15, 2026	ED I (second wave)	UVA, Vanderbilt, Boston College and others
November 30, 2026	UC application due	Hard close 11:59 PM PT — system gets congested in final 48 hours
December 1, 2026	UC final cutoff	Late applications not accepted
January 1–15, 2027	Regular Decision deadlines	Most schools fall in this window; check each
March 1–31, 2027	UC decisions release	Campuses release on a rolling schedule
March 15 – April 1, 2027	RD decisions release	Ivies on Ivy Day (~Mar 27); most others by April 1
May 1, 2027	National Decision Day	Statement of Intent to Register (SIR) and enrollment deposits due
July 1, 2027	Final transcripts due	Final official transcripts postmarked to enrolled campus

Source: [UC Admissions — Dates & deadlines](#) and [Common App opening calendar](#).

Critical lead-time windows

- Recommenders — Ask by end of junior year (May 2026) or first week of senior year. Provide brag sheet + résumé.
- Testing — Last useful SAT/ACT sittings for ED/EA are August and September 2026. October works for RD.
- Common App essay — Targeted complete by Labor Day (Sept 7, 2026) so supplements get full attention.
- UC PIQs — Four essays, 350 words each. Target full drafts by end of September 2026.
- Supplements — Top tier schools release prompts late July/August. Plan a supplement sprint in September.

04

Student roadmap — week-by-week

This is your operating cadence from June 2026 through decision day in May 2027. Each phase has a single primary deliverable so you always know what 'done' means.

June 2026 — Foundation

- Week 1–2: Complete BeyondU intake. Pull transcript, list every activity since 9th grade, write down anything you'd want a college to know.
- Week 3: Build initial 25-school exploration list. Sort into reach / target / likely (ballpark — refine later).
- Week 4: Brainstorm Common App essay topics (3 candidate stories). Begin Values + Feelings/Needs exercise from Appendix C.
- Deliverable: Strategy plan signed off with consultant.

July 2026 — Drafting

- Week 1–2: Draft Common App personal statement (650 words). Target two complete drafts.
- Week 3: Draft your activity list — all 10 slots, 150 chars description + 50 char role. Use action verbs.
- Week 4: Begin first UC PIQ draft. Ask recommenders if you haven't already.
- Deliverable: Common App essay v3 and activity list v1 reviewed by consultant.

August 2026 — Build

- Aug 1: Common App and UC application portals open. Create accounts, transfer profile data.
- Week 1–2: Fill out Common App profile, education, family, testing sections. Lock activity list. Polish Common App essay.
- Week 3: Draft remaining UC PIQs (you need 4 of 8). Begin school-specific supplements as prompts release.
- Week 4: Finalize school list. Confirm testing strategy (October ACT? December SAT?).
- Deliverable: Common App essay final. UC PIQ drafts 1–2 complete.

September 2026 — Supplements sprint

- Week 1: All UC PIQs in draft. Begin top supplements (Why Us, community, intellectual passion).
- Week 2: ED/EA school supplements complete first — they're due November 1.

- Week 3: Continue supplements. Send recommenders Common App invitations and your brag sheet.
- Week 4: Final mock interview if applying to schools that interview (Stanford, MIT, Yale, etc.).
- Deliverable: All ED/EA supplements at v2 by Sept 30.

October 2026 — First submissions

- Week 1: Run pre-submission audit on ED/EA applications. Confirm fee waivers if eligible.
- Week 2: Submit ED/EA applications by Oct 25 (one week before deadline — never submit on the final day).
- Week 3: Begin UC application data entry. Confirm coursework and grades match transcript exactly.
- Week 4: File FAFSA. Run UC application pre-submission audit.
- Deliverable: ED/EA submitted. UC application 80% complete.

November 2026 — UC + RD prep

- Week 1–2: Submit UC application by Nov 20 (10 days before deadline — system congestion is real).
- Week 3–4: Push remaining RD supplements. Most RD deadlines hit January 1 — get to v2 by Thanksgiving.
- Deliverable: UC submitted. RD supplement drafts done.

December 2026 — RD finish

- Week 1–2: Final passes on RD essays. Schedule audit calls.
- Week 3: Submit RD applications by Dec 22 — never submit during the final 48 hours.
- Week 4: Holidays off. You earned it.
- Deliverable: All RD applications submitted.

Jan – Feb 2027 — Mid-cycle

- Submit mid-year reports as schools require them.
- Interview if invited. Send thoughtful thank-yous within 24 hours.
- Update colleges with new awards or achievements via the applicant portal.
- If deferred from ED/EA: send a tight letter of continued interest in early February.

March – April 2027 — Decisions

- UC decisions release rolling March 1–31.
- RD decisions land mid-March through April 1.
- Compare financial aid packages side-by-side. Appeal aid if circumstances changed.
- Visit admitted-student events if possible.

May 2027 — Commit

- Submit SIR / enrollment deposit by May 1, 2027 (one school only).
- Notify other schools you're declining.
- Schedule orientation. Send final transcript by July 1.
- Withdraw from waitlists you're no longer considering.

05

Common App — complete walkthrough

The Common App is used by 1,000+ member colleges. One account, one profile, one personal statement — then per-school supplements. Here is the working tour for the Fall 2026 cycle.

Account & profile

- Create the account at commonapp.org using a permanent email — not your school address.
- Select 'First-Year Student' as application type.
- Profile section: legal name, address, demographics, language, citizenship, military status. Use exact spellings as they appear on official documents.
- Family section: parent/guardian education, occupation, contact info. Optional household income (needed for fee waivers).

The seven sections of the Common App tab

Section	What it captures	BeyondU note
Profile	Identity, contact, demographics, citizenship	Match official documents exactly
Family	Parent / guardian info, siblings, household	Be honest about education levels
Education	High schools, GPA, class rank, current courses, future plans	Senior schedule must be entered; counselor verifies
Testing	Self-reported SAT, ACT, AP, IB, TOEFL, IELTS	Optional at test-optional schools — but report if it strengthens
Activities	Up to 10 activities; 150-char description, 50-char position	Treat as a résumé — use Appendix D framework
Writing	Personal essay (250–650 words), disciplinary history, additional info	Most important narrative on the application
Courses & Grades	Required by some schools — exact transcript entry	Tedious; allocate 3+ hours; double-check every grade

The personal essay

Choose one of seven prompts (full list in Appendix A). The essay should sit between 500 and 650 words. Most BeyondU clients land between 620 and 650. Aim for a single specific moment

or theme that reveals values, voice, and growth — not a résumé in paragraph form.

Supplements

- Why Us — Specific courses, professors, programs, traditions. Generic Why Us is the most common rejection reason for qualified applicants.
- Community / Identity — Often called the diversity essay. Concrete, specific, personal.
- Intellectual passion — A topic, idea, or question that genuinely captivates you.
- Short answers (150 words) — Treat like a tweet with substance. One image, one insight.
- Optional Additional Info (650 words) — Only fill if you have meaningful context to share. Empty is fine.

Submission & after

- Preview the full PDF before submitting. Read every page out loud.
- Pay the application fee (or apply the fee waiver). Each school is a separate submission.
- After submission, you cannot edit that school's application — but you can change profile data for unsent schools.
- Check applicant portals at each school after 72 hours to confirm receipt and complete any school-specific portal items.

06

UC application — complete walkthrough

The University of California uses its own application — separate from Common App. One application covers all nine undergraduate campuses (Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz). No teacher recommendations. No supplements per campus.

The fundamentals

Portal	apply.universityofcalifornia.edu
Opens	August 1, 2026
Filing window	October 1 – December 1, 2026 (11:59 PM Pacific)
Application fee	\$80 per campus (\$95 international) — fee waivers available for up to 4 campuses
Recommendations	Not required (some campuses may request supplemental letters during review)
Test scores	Test-blind — UC does not consider SAT/ACT scores in admission decisions
Decisions	March 1–31, 2027
SIR deadline	May 1, 2027

Sections of the UC application

- About you — Identity, contact, residency. California residency for tuition is determined [here](#).
- Campuses & majors — Select campuses to apply to + alternate major where allowed. Engineering, business, nursing often require direct admission to the major.
- Academic history — Every high school you've attended, every course, every grade — exactly as listed on transcript. UC verifies against transcripts at admission.
- A-G courses — The 15-course college prep pattern required by UC. Confirm via your school's UC Doorways listing.
- Activities and awards — Up to 20 entries across six categories. More room than Common App — use it.

- Personal Insight Questions — Choose 4 of 8 prompts; 350 words max each. Equally weighted. Full prompt list in Appendix B.
- Additional comments — 550 words for context (gaps, hardships, anomalies). Optional.

Activities & awards — the six categories

Category	What goes here
Award or honor	Academic awards, scholastic honors, scholarships
Educational preparation programs	AVID, Upward Bound, MESA, etc.
Extracurricular activity	Clubs, athletics, performing arts
Other coursework	Summer programs, college courses, online courses
Volunteer / community service	Unpaid service to community
Work experience	Paid jobs, family responsibilities, internships

UC strategic note

Because UC is test-blind and reads PIQs holistically, your essays carry more weight than at almost any Common App school. Treat the four PIQs as a portfolio — together they should cover four different dimensions of who you are. Never reuse a Common App essay as a UC PIQ — the audience, length, and tone are different.

07

Essay frameworks & prompt guidance

The BeyondU essay process — six drafts

Stage	What happens
1. Brainstorm	Values + Feelings/Needs + 21 Details exercises (Appendix C). No writing yet.
2. Outline	One-sentence thesis. Three-beat structure (scene → development → reflection).
3. Discovery draft	Write fast. Don't edit. Get the story on the page even if it's 900 words.
4. Structural revision	Cut 30%. Move the strongest line to the opening. Ensure the close earns the open.
5. Line edit	Sentence-level: verbs, specificity, rhythm. Read aloud.
6. Polish	Word count, grammar, format. Three sets of eyes before submit.

Common App personal statement — by prompt

1. Background, identity, interest, talent

Best for students whose core identity is essential context (immigration story, family role, cultural identity, lifelong talent). Land on specifics — what objects, sounds, or moments make this real?

2. Challenge, setback, failure

Spend $\frac{1}{3}$ on the challenge, $\frac{1}{3}$ on what you did, $\frac{1}{3}$ on what you learned. Don't dwell on the wound — colleges want to see agency and reflection.

3. Questioned or challenged a belief

Show intellectual courage. The belief can be small or large — what matters is the genuine wrestling and the change in your thinking.

4. Gratitude that motivated you

Easiest to write badly. Pick one specific moment from one specific person. Avoid 'thank you Mom and Dad for everything.'

5. Accomplishment / event / realization

Personal growth essay. The accomplishment is the doorway — the essay is about who you became, not what you achieved.

6. Topic that captivates you

The intellectual passion essay. Pick something genuinely strange or specific. Show your thinking, not your transcript.

7. Topic of your choice

Most popular prompt for a reason. Use only if you have a story that doesn't fit the others — never as a hiding place for a generic essay.

UC PIQ — by prompt

Choose four of eight. All equally weighted. 350 words maximum each. Total: 1,400 words. Together your four PIQs should illustrate four different sides of you — don't pick four creativity prompts.

PIQ 1 — Leadership

Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.

Leadership ≠ title. Captain of debate is fine, but so is being the person who fixed a broken group dynamic. Focus on influence and outcome.

PIQ 2 — Creative side

Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically. Describe how you express your creative side.

Most students default to art. Engineers, coders, organizers, debaters — your creativity counts. Show the process, not just the product.

PIQ 3 — Greatest talent or skill

What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

Pick a skill with a track record. Show the arc: how you discovered it, how you developed it, what it enables you to do now.

PIQ 4 — Educational opportunity or barrier

Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

Two essays in one prompt. Opportunity = a program, course, mentor that you maximized. Barrier = something that stood between you and learning and how you pushed through.

PIQ 5 — Significant challenge

Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

Must address academic impact. If your grades were unaffected, say so explicitly. If they dipped, this is your chance to contextualize.

PIQ 6 — Academic subject that inspires you

Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.

Crucial if you're applying to a specific major. Connect the inspiration to coursework, research, projects, reading, and future plans at UC.

PIQ 7 — Improving your school or community

What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

Define your community — it doesn't have to be geographic. Focus on initiative, sustained action, measurable change for others.

PIQ 8 — Strongest candidate

Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?

The 'anything else' prompt. Use only if you have something genuinely uncovered by the other PIQs. Don't repeat your résumé.

08

Activities, honors, additional information

Common App activities list — the 10 slots

Up to 10 activities. Each entry has a 50-character role/position field and a 150-character description field. Order by importance — top three matter most. Quality > quantity. Eight strong entries beats ten weak ones.

Description formula

150 characters that land

Action verb + what you did + scope/impact + specific outcome. Use commas and semicolons aggressively. Drop articles (a/the). No first-person pronouns.

Weak: 'I was a member of the debate team and we did really well at competitions.'

Strong: 'Led 12-person varsity policy team; placed 3rd at state; coached 4 novices; wrote evidence used by 18 teams.'

Honors section (5 slots)

- Academic honors only — not extracurricular awards (those go in activities).
- Order by prestige: International > National > State > Regional > School.
- Specify level. 'Honor Roll' is meaningless without context: 'Honor Roll (4 semesters, top 10% GPA)'.

UC activities — 20 slots, six categories

UC gives you more room: up to 20 entries across the six categories listed in Section 06. Use the space. UC reviewers see this section as a primary evidence base for the comprehensive review.

- Include paid work and family responsibilities — UC explicitly values these.
- Hours per week and weeks per year are required; estimate carefully. 'During school year' vs 'all year' matters.
- Awards and honors go in their own UC category — don't duplicate as activities.

Additional information section

- Common App Additional Info (650 words) — Use ONLY for: significant context (illness, family disruption, COVID impact on opportunities), academic anomalies (grade drop with reason), or context for activities/awards that need explanation. Not a place for a second

essay.

- UC Additional Comments (550 words) — Same purpose. Same caution.
- Disciplinary disclosure — Required if applicable. Brief, factual, accountability-focused. Consult your consultant.

09

Recommendations, transcripts, test scores

Teacher recommendations

- Most schools require 1–2 teacher recs from junior- or senior-year academic teachers in core subjects.
- Ask in person, by end of junior year if possible. Have a backup teacher in mind.
- Give your teachers: brag sheet, résumé, list of schools with deadlines, and a written paragraph about a memorable moment in their class.
- Send a thank-you note (handwritten beats email) regardless of outcome.

Counselor recommendation & school report

- Submitted by your school counselor through the Common App or directly to UC if requested.
- Includes context about your school's rigor, your GPA, course load, and any disciplinary record.
- Meet with your counselor by September — they often write 100+ letters and need lead time.

Transcripts

- Initial transcripts: sent by your counselor with the school report when each application is submitted.
- Mid-year report: most schools require Q2/S1 senior grades — submitted by your counselor in January–February.
- Final transcript: required by July 1, 2027 for the school you commit to.

Test scores

Context	Policy / strategy
UC system	Test-blind. Scores not considered in admissions. Don't send.
Most Common App schools	Test-optional through 2026–27 at many schools. Verify each policy.
Test-required schools	Returning at MIT, Georgetown, some Ivies, Caltech, Yale, Dartmouth, Harvard, Brown for Fall 2027 — confirm with each.

Context	Policy / strategy
Self-reported	Most schools accept self-reported scores at application; official scores due if admitted/enrolled.
Last sittings	ED/EA: take by September 2026. RD: October 2026 is the last reliably useful sitting.
<p data-bbox="243 483 519 525">Send or don't send?</p> <p data-bbox="243 535 1331 651">Rule of thumb: send if your score is at or above the 50th percentile of the school's middle 50% range. Below the 25th percentile, don't send to test-optional schools. Confirm score range on each school's Common Data Set.</p>	

10

Parent guide

This section is written for parents and guardians. Your role is essential — and different from what most parents expect. The single best predictor of a smooth application cycle is a parent who knows when to step in and when to step back.

What's included in your engagement

- Monthly summary call (20 min) — progress, blockers, next milestones.
- Weekly written status during peak season (September – December).
- Shared Drive folder — read access to all working documents, trackers, calendars.
- Two parent-only consultations per cycle — for financial aid strategy, decision negotiation, or specific concerns.
- Full transparency on hours and deliverables — invoices itemize every session and review.

Milestones you'll see

Milestone	What you'll see
End of June 2026	Signed strategy plan reviewed with family
End of August 2026	Common App essay locked, application accounts active
End of September 2026	All UC PIQ drafts complete, supplements underway
End of October 2026	ED/EA applications submitted
End of November 2026	UC application submitted
End of December 2026	All RD applications submitted
Early February 2027	Mid-year reports filed, deferral responses sent if needed
April 2027	All decisions received, financial aid packages compared
May 1, 2027	SIR submitted; one college committed

How to help

- Hold the calendar, not the pen. Remind, don't write. Ask 'where are you on the UVA supplement?' — don't read it first.
- Pay for the visit, fund the test prep, manage the logistics. These are unambiguously your domain.

- Talk about money early. Run the Net Price Calculator on every school by July. A surprise no in April is preventable in July.
- Be the editor of last resort, not first. The first reader of an essay should not be a parent — emotions get in the way.
- Let the student own the no. Rejection happens. The cycle is not a referendum on your parenting.

How not to help

Three habits we ask parents to avoid

1. Don't edit essays into your own voice. Admissions officers read 50+ essays a day — they spot adult voice in 10 seconds.
2. Don't email admissions offices on the student's behalf. They track this and it hurts.
3. Don't compare your student to other kids in real time. The cycle is long enough without it.

11

Consultant playbook — workflows & deliverables

Internal operating standard for BeyondU Admit consultants. Every engagement follows the same phase structure, with the same deliverables, regardless of package tier — the depth and frequency vary, the artifacts do not.

Phase deliverables

Phase	Deliverable
Discovery (pre-engagement)	30 min free consultation; package fit memo (internal); fee proposal
Intake (Week 1)	Diagnostic intake form completed; transcript + scores + activity inventory; goals interview notes
Strategy (Week 2)	Written 5–7 page strategy plan: school list, testing plan, essay calendar, milestones, parent expectations
Activity & essay phase (Jun–Sep)	Activity list v3 minimum; Common App essay v6; UC PIQ drafts 1–4
Application build (Sep–Nov)	Common App profile complete; UC application complete; supplement tracker maintained per school
Audit & submit (Oct–Jan)	Pre-submission audit on every application with sign-off; submission cadence managed by consultant
Decisions (Mar–May)	Decision tracker; financial aid comparison; SIR coaching; final transcript handoff

Documentation standards

- Every session ends with written session notes in the family Drive folder within 24 hours.
- Every essay round uses tracked changes; never edit in-place — student must see the suggestion and accept it.
- Master tracker updated weekly: schools, deadlines, supplement status, recommender status, scores.
- Communication log retained for the full engagement and 12 months after.

Quality checkpoints

Artifact	Checkpoint
Strategy plan	Senior consultant review before delivery to family
Common App essay	Two-consultant review at v4 and v6
UC PIQs	Two-consultant review at v3 of each PIQ
Pre-submission audit	Senior consultant final read before student submits; checklist signed in shared folder
Decision-stage coaching	Director-level review of financial aid comparison and final commit decision

Consultant cadence by package

Package	Meeting & touch cadence
Essentials	Bi-weekly during active essay phases; monthly otherwise; 8 hours total
Comprehensive	Weekly June – February; bi-weekly March – May; 24–30 hours total
Premier	Bi-weekly summer; weekly Sept – Dec; on-call cadence Jan – May; 50+ hours; senior consultant lead

12

Ethical guardrails & AI policy

BeyondU Admit aligns with the IECA Standards of Excellence, HECA Standards for Working with Students and Families, and NACAC's Statement of Principles of Good Practice. These are not suggestions — they're the conditions of a legitimate engagement.

Hard prohibitions

- No ghostwriting essays or supplements. We coach; the student writes.
- No fabrication of activities, hours, honors, or experiences.
- No submission of applications by the consultant on the student's behalf.
- No guarantees of admission to any specific school, ever.
- No referral commissions accepted from tutors, test prep, summer programs, or universities.
- No discrimination by race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or family status.

AI use policy

AI is permitted as a thinking tool, not as a writing tool. Recent data shows applicant AI use in college admissions has risen from 4% in 2023 to 23% by 2025, and most colleges have updated their policies accordingly — brainstorming and research are typically acceptable; ghostwriting is not.

- OK: Brainstorming topics, generating outlines, asking for feedback on structure, grammar checking.
- OK: Researching schools, generating practice prompts, summarizing program differences.
- Not OK: Having AI write the essay, then editing it. Reviewers can detect this and many schools now ask students to certify the essay is their own work.
- Not OK: Generating activity descriptions wholesale. AI doesn't know what you did.
- Required: Disclose AI use to your BeyondU consultant. We'll help you stay on the safe side of every school's policy.

Family agreement

What we sign together

Every engagement includes a written letter of agreement that delineates: scope of services, package fee, expectations of student and family, confidentiality, AI policy, and termination terms. No work begins until the agreement is signed.

13

Appendix A — Common App essay prompts (2026–2027)

Choose one prompt. 250–650 words. Word count is enforced. The 2026–2027 prompts are unchanged from the prior cycle. Source: [Common App announcement, Feb 27, 2026](#).

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

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Appendix B — UC Personal Insight Questions

Choose four of eight. 350 words max each. All eight are equally weighted in review. Source: [UC Admissions — Personal insight questions](#).

PIQ 1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

PIQ 2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

PIQ 3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

PIQ 4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

PIQ 5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

PIQ 6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.

PIQ 7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

PIQ 8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?

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Appendix C — Brainstorming exercises

Values exercise (15 min)

From the list of 60 values (curiosity, family, justice, humor, independence, mastery, etc.), circle 10 that feel essential to you. Then narrow to 5. Then to 3. For each of your top 3, write one specific moment from the past two years when that value was visible in your action. These moments are essay candidates.

Feelings and needs exercise (20 min)

Pick a challenge or moment of growth. Make four columns: What happened · What I felt · What I needed · What I did. Write at least three rows. The 'what I did' column drives the essay's arc. The 'what I needed' column reveals your values to the reader.

21 details exercise (10 min)

Open a timer for 10 minutes. List 21 specific, weird, true details about you — objects in your bedroom, foods you've made, books you've reread, conversations you remember verbatim, small obsessions. Specific beats generic every time. These details are seeds.

Everything I want colleges to know (15 min)

Open a doc. Write everything you'd want a college reviewer to know about you that won't appear on the transcript. Don't structure it. Don't edit. Push past the first 200 words — the real material starts after the obvious.

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Appendix D – Activity description framework

The CAR method

Context (who/where/scope) → Action (what you did, with strong verbs) → Result (outcome, scale, impact). All three must fit in 150 characters for Common App; UC has slightly more room.

Strong action verbs by category

Category	Verbs
Leadership	Led, founded, directed, chaired, coordinated, organized, mentored, recruited
Building / creating	Built, designed, developed, launched, prototyped, authored, composed, produced
Teaching / mentoring	Taught, tutored, coached, trained, advised, guided, facilitated
Analysis / research	Researched, analyzed, evaluated, investigated, synthesized, published
Service / community	Served, volunteered, mobilized, supported, contributed, raised
Performance / athletics	Competed, performed, ranked, qualified, captained, choreographed

Before / after examples

<p>Robotics team member</p> <p>Before (weak): 'Was a member of robotics team and went to competitions.'</p> <p>After (strong): 'Lead programmer FRC team 2473; wrote autonomous code in Java; placed regional finalist; mentored 5 freshmen on Git workflow.'</p>
<p>Family caregiver</p> <p>Before (weak): 'Took care of my younger siblings after school.'</p> <p>After (strong): 'Primary after-school caregiver for 2 siblings (ages 6, 9); managed homework, meals, transport 15 hrs/week while parents worked evenings.'</p>

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Appendix E — Final submission checklist

Run this checklist before clicking submit on every application — Common App or UC.

- Legal name, date of birth, address match official documents and transcript
- Email address is one you'll have access to for 4+ years (not your high school email)
- All high schools attended are listed (not just current)
- Senior-year course list is complete and matches your school's registrar
- GPA matches transcript exactly — weighted vs unweighted is consistent
- All test scores entered (or omitted) consistently with each school's policy
- Activities list reads cleanly when previewed as PDF — no truncation, no typos
- Honors section is academic only, ordered by prestige, levels specified
- Personal essay word count is within 250–650 (Common App) or 350 (UC PIQ)
- Every supplement has been read aloud, spell-checked, and reviewed for school-specific generic-Why-Us errors
- Recommenders are invited via Common App with FERPA waiver signed (waive your right)
- Counselor knows about every school, every deadline
- Application fee paid or fee waiver applied
- Full PDF preview reviewed page by page
- Submitted at least 5 days before the deadline (not in the final 48 hours)
- Applicant portal at each school checked 72 hours after submission for school-specific items
- FAFSA filed if you're seeking financial aid; CSS Profile filed if required

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Appendix F — Sources & further reading

- **Common App — 2026–2027 essay prompts announcement**

<https://www.commonapp.org/blog/announcing-2026-2027-common-app-essay-prompts/>

- **UC Admissions — Personal Insight Questions**

<https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-first-year/personal-insight-questions.html>

- **UC Admissions — Dates & deadlines (first-year)**

<https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-first-year/dates-and-deadlines.html>

- **UC Admissions — Applying as a first year**

<https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-first-year/>

- **IECA — Best Practices: College Consulting**

https://www.iecaonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ieca_committee-college-specialty-standards-of-excellence.pdf

- **IECA — Standards of Excellence for Member Consultants**

<https://www.iecaonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/IECA-Standards-of-Excellence-2023.pdf>

- **IECA — What is an Independent Educational Consultant?**

<https://www.iecaonline.com/student-parent-information/what-is-an-independent-educational-consultant/>

- **HECA — Standards for Working with Students and Families**

<https://www.hecalive.org/standards-for-working-with-students-and-families>

- **NACAC — Professional Certificate: Core Concepts for IECs**

<https://www.nacacnet.org/professional-certificate-core-concepts-for-independent-educational-consultants/>