SkillBridge

How Your Experience Carries Over to College Applications

How your resume, your experiences, and the people you meet can help when you apply to college.

The work you do to get experience in high school also helps when you apply to college. You will already have a list of what you did, stories to write about, and older people you can ask. This guide shows how to keep all three ready.

1 Your resume becomes your activity list

Not every college asks for a resume, but applications do ask what you did outside class. A resume you keep updated gives you those answers.

- The Common App lets you list up to 10 activities, with 150 characters to describe each one.
- The University of California application lets you list up to 20 activities and awards.
- Some colleges also accept a resume. UT Austin lists one as optional. If you send one, it asks for details on what each activity involved, plus your hours per week and weeks per year.

> Save your dates and hours as you go, so you do not have to guess them during senior year.

2 Your experiences become essay stories

Application essays ask about you, so something that happened at an internship, a job, or a project can become your story. The 2026-27 Common App prompts include one about an obstacle and one about personal growth. For the University of California, you choose 4 of 8 questions and write up to 350 words for each. One option is about leadership.

- A problem you ran into and what you tried.
- A mistake you made and what you did next.
- Feedback that changed how you worked.
- A moment that made you want to keep going or to stop.

> Write these down the week they happen, because the small details are the first things you forget. The work log in our internship guide works for this.

3 The people you meet can tell you about their colleges

Older friends and mentors can tell you things a college website won't. We have done this ourselves. Friends we met at summer programs told us about their applications and what their programs are like at Berkeley, Columbia, Stanford, and UT Austin.

- What is your program like day to day?
- What do you wish you had known when you applied?
- What surprised you after you got there?
- Who else should I talk to about this program?

> One person's experience is only one example, so ask more than one person. Check deadlines and requirements on the college's own website.

Start now

You do not have to wait until senior year. Doing these small things now means you will have what you need when applications open.

- Add each new activity to your resume when it starts.
- Keep a running list of moments worth writing about.
- Save the names of people you meet and what they are studying.
- Thank them now, so it is easy to ask them a question later.

Last verified November 5, 2026. We checked the Common App, University of California, and UT Austin details on their official websites. Applications change each year, so confirm them on the application you are using. This guide is about using what you have already built. It is not admissions advice and cannot promise a result.