

Writing Your College Admission Essays/ UC Personal Statements

Helpful Tips & Exercises



Writing the College Admission Essay/UC Personal Statements

As a transfer student, the essay is an important part of your admission application for the University of California and most private and out-of-state universities. The essay is not read in isolation but *with* all the information you provide in the application.

- ◇ It's your one chance to explain to college admissions readers why you are a good fit for their school.
- ◇ This is where you become more than just another name – it's where you become an individual, and where you can share your personality, your goals, your experiences, and where you can explain any opportunities or obstacles that have affected your academic record.
- ◇ Is an opportunity to provide information that gives readers context for your accomplishments.
- ◇ It allows you to add information that you couldn't work into the other parts of the application.
- ◇ It adds clarity, depth and meaning to information collected in other parts of your college application.
- ◇ It enables you to make the best possible case for admission.

Tips for Getting Started

1. Do not wait until the last minute to write your essay!
2. Doing the preparation work before you begin to write your essay will make a significant difference in the quality of your completed essay.
 - **Investigate and explore your audience.**
 - Find out as much as you can about the universities you are applying to and their admissions process.
 - What do the admissions officers want to find out about their applicants through the personal statement.
 - This information can usually be found in the application and also on the university's website (click on Admissions).
 - Completing the "Know Your Audience" exercise in this workbook will help you have a better understanding of the different universities you are applying to.
 - **Explore Yourself !**
 - The more you know about yourself the easier it will be to write a compelling, interesting, pertinent essay.
 - Do the Self Exploration Exercises in this workbook.
3. The "Knowing Your Audience Exercise" and the "Know Yourself, Exercises 1-4" contained in this workbook can be completed at any time.
4. Before you write your personal statement, complete the admission application. When you're finished, ask yourself questions about it. Completing the admission application instead of jumping right into the essays helps you identify key patterns in your academic record and extracurricular choices and anticipate the inferences that readers will make about your academic profile. **Use the information you provided in the application to help you.**

Know Your Audience Exercise

- Find out as much as you can about the universities you are applying to, your major at that university, and their admissions process.
- Understand what the admissions officers want to find out about their applicants through the college essay/personal statement.
- Answer the following questions for each of the universities that you will be applying to.

University	What about the major at this university will assist me in meeting my educational and career goals?	What opportunities outside the classroom will assist me in achieving my medium and long-term goals by attending this university?	What are the main criteria used in the admission decision?	What do the admissions officers want to find out about the applicant through the college essay/personal statement?

Know Yourself - Exercise 1 - Identify Your Key Personality Traits

Step 1

Under each column, list all the words that best describe. **Me** = How you described yourself. **Best Friend** = How your best friend would describe you.

Favorite Teacher/Professor = How your Favorite Teacher/Professor would describe you. **Family** = How your Family would describe you.

Me	Best Friend	Favorite Teacher/Professor	Family

Now put a check mark by the words that came up most often.

Step 2

Pick the 3 words that came up most often and write each word in the boxes below. For each word, list the different situations where you have exhibited this trait/quality.

Key Word	Situations Where I Have Exhibited This Quality
1.	
2.	
3.	

Know Yourself - Exercise 2 - Your Accomplishments

On the chart below, write down everything that makes you proud or feel good about yourself. Don't limit your accomplishments to your academics only. If you have overcome a difficult obstacle/s, make sure to include that on the list. Don't worry how big or small the accomplishment is. If it pops into your head, write it down.

Age	Accomplishment	Why This Makes Me Proud/Feel Good

Know Yourself - Exercise 3 - List Your Skills

List your accomplishments from the chart in Exercise 2. Using only 1 or 2 words, list the skills that it took for you to be able to achieve this accomplishment. Next, write down any additional situations, circumstances, or examples from your life when you have also used these skills.

(Pages 11-12 have a partial list of skills you can review for assistance.)

Accomplishment	Skill/s That This Accomplishment Demonstrates	Additional Situations, Circumstances, Examples When I Have Used These Skills

Know Yourself - Exercise 4 - Significant Life Events

Before you start writing your college admission essays/UC Personal Statement, it's important that you understand what significant life events have helped shaped you and your unique educational journey. Use the exercise below to help develop this understanding.

Age	Significant Life Event	How does this event relate to your educational journey? Was it an obstacle or a benefit? How did your response to this event inform, inhibit, or enhance your education and subsequent educational goals and accomplishments?

Using the Information in your Application Exercise

Step 1 - Levels of Questions Strategy

The Levels of Questions strategy described below can help you develop the kinds of questions to ask about your completed application that will give you insight into the how to approach your essays/personal statements.

Level One Questions (L1) Answers are evident in the application. (What does the application say?)

Answers to L1 questions provide **detail in your essays/personal statements**.

Level Two Questions (L2) Answers are open to interpretation using the information provided in the application. (What does it mean?)

Answers to L2 questions are **topic sentences for your essays/personal statement paragraphs**.

Level Three Questions (L3) Answers address larger issues not evident in the application but supported by the application. (Why does it matter?)

Answers to L3 questions are **thesis statements for your essays/personal statements**.

Step 2 - Ask Questions

As you read through your UC application, write down questions about yourself that apply to the information you've included. Try to find a variety of questions of all levels. For example:

- What sorts of classes do I get the best grades in? (Level 1)
- Why am I interested in science? (Level 2)
- How can I use my interest in science to make a contribution to our understanding of the health care needs of the elderly? (Level 3)

My Questions

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Review Your Questions

- Did you ask deep enough questions?
- Are there interesting things about your record that you missed because they are too familiar to you?

Step 3 - Organize

A. Look at the questions you came up with and sort them according to which essay question/prompt they best fit.

Essay Question/Prompt 1 Questions Write question/prompt here:	Essay Question/Prompt 2 Questions Write question/prompt here:	Essay Question/Prompt 3 Questions Write question/prompt here:

B. More Questions to Answer

1. What topic will each response focus on? Because these are relatively short essays, you should focus on one topic per essay question/prompt.
2. Will the topic you have chosen for each prompt give you the opportunity to make the most persuasive argument?
3. Does this topic answer the most pressing questions related to this essay question/prompt?

C. Length of your responses.

If you have a similar number of questions from your application for each essay question/prompt, consider making both responses equal length. If you have more questions for one essay question/prompt than the other, think about responding to the essay question/prompt with the most questions associated with it in a longer essay.

The essay question/prompt with **the most questions** associated with it is likely to be the one that you have the most to write about.

Step 4 - Topic & Descriptive Sentence

1. Decide on your focus for each prompt. Since you don't have many words to spare, you'll want only one topic for each essay question/prompt.
2. Write a descriptive sentence for each prompt that details what you'll be writing about.

Consider whether you have chosen the most persuasive and compelling topic for each prompt. Then make sure you have chosen the topic with the most questions associated with it for your extended response.

Focus & Descriptive Sentence #1:

Focus & Descriptive Sentence #2:

Focus & Descriptive Sentence #3:

Writing your Essay/Personal Statement

Congratulations. By completing these exercises you now know your audience and are more familiar with your key personality traits, your accomplishments, skills, and significant life events. You have also developed your topics for each essay/personal statement. Now you are ready to actually write your essays/personal statements.

For Additional Information/Assistance

- ◇ Refer to the **Writing the College Admission Essay/UC Personal Statement** workshop handout which can be obtained in the SBCC Transfer Center, Room SS140 or at the Transfer Center website www.sbcc.edu/transfercenter Click on “Events” link.
- ◇ Meet with a Transfer Center Advisor during Drop-In hours.
- ◇ Bring a copy of your completed college essays/personal statements with you to the Transfer Center and our advisors will review and provide feedback for you.
- ◇ Websites

http://www.collegeboard.com/apply/essay_skills/

<http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeessay/a/brainstorm.htm>

<http://www.sru.edu/depts/admissio/lagnese/essays.htm>

<http://www.carleton.edu/admissions/essay/>

<http://www.west.net/~stewart/beste.htm>

http://www.baycongroup.com/education/ed_essay_01.htm

<http://www.accepted.com/college/dosdents.aspx>

<http://www.accepted.com/college/tenwritingtips.aspx>

<http://www.accepted.com/college/miningyouridentity.aspx>

<http://fastweb.monster.com/fastweb/resources/articles/index/102002?id>

<http://collegehunt.blogspot.com/2007/09/advice-for-university-of-california.html>

<http://www.californiacolleges.edu/admissions/university-of-california-uc/personal-statement.asp>

UCSB: http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergrad_adm/apply/how_apply/personal_statement.html

UC Berkley: <http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/index.htm>

UC Davis: http://admissions.ucdavis.edu/admissions/personal_statement.cfm

UCI: http://www.cfep.uci.edu/ub/senior_center/uc_personal_statement.html

UCLA: <http://www.admissions.ucla.edu/Prospect/PersonalStatement.pdf>

UCR: http://www.scholarships.ucr.edu/pers_statement.htm

For All UC's: <http://www.honorstcc.org/documents/PersonalStatementHTCC.pdf>

Skills List

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION - able to express yourself clearly in writing

- Thinking through in advance what you want to say.
- Gathering, analyzing and arranging your information in a logical sequence.
- Developing your argument in a logical way.
- Being able to condense information/produce concise summary notes.
- Adapting your writing style for different audiences

VERBAL COMMUNICATION - expressing your ideas clearly and confidently in speech

- Listening carefully to what others are saying.
- Able to clarify and summarize what others are communicating.
- Helping others to define their problems. Not interrupting.
- Being sensitive to body language as well as verbal information.
- Making the right impression in a wide variety of situations by making effective use of body language, dress, conduct, speech.
- Thinking up an interesting way to put across your message to groups.
- Successfully building a rapport with your audience when speaking to groups.

FLEXIBILITY - adapting successfully to changing situations and environments

- Keeping calm in the face of difficulties.
- Planning ahead, but having alternative options in case things go wrong.
- Thinking quickly to respond to sudden changes in circumstances
- Persisting in the face of unexpected difficulties.

PERSUADING - able to convince others, to discuss and reach agreement

- Putting your points across in a reasoned way.
- Emphasizing the positive aspects of your argument.
- Understanding the needs of the person you are dealing with.
- Handling objections to your arguments.
- Making concessions to reach agreement.
- Using tact and diplomacy.

TEAMWORK - working confidently within a group

- Working cooperatively towards a common goal.
- Contributing your own ideas effectively in a group.
- Listening to others' opinions.
- Taking a share of the responsibility.
- Being assertive - rather than passive or aggressive.
- Accepting and learning from constructive criticism and giving positive, constructive feedback to others.

LEADERSHIP - able to motivate and direct others

- Taking the initiative.
- Organizing and motivating others.
- Making decisions and seeing them through.
- Taking a positive attitude to frustration/failure. Persevering when things are not working out.
- Accepting responsibility for mistakes/wrong decisions.
- Being flexible - prepared to adapt goals in the light of changing situations.

PLANNING AND ORGANISING - able to plan activities and carry them through effectively

- Setting objectives which are achievable.
- Managing your time effectively/using action planning skills.
- Setting priorities - most important/most urgent.
- Identifying the steps needed to achieve your goals.
- Being able to work effectively when under pressure.
- Completing work to a deadline.

INVESTIGATING, ANALYSING AND PROBLEM SOLVING - gathering information systematically to establish facts and principles

- Clarifying the nature of a problem before deciding action.
- Collecting, collating, classifying and summarizing data systematically.
- Analyzing the various factors involved in a problem and being able to identify the key ones.
- Recognizing inconsistencies in reasoning.
- Using creativity/initiative in the generation of alternative solutions to a problem.
- Differentiating between practical and impractical solutions.

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONALISM

- Accepting responsibility for your views and actions.
- Showing the ability to work under your own direction and initiative.
- Making choices based on your own judgment.
- Paying care and attention to quality in all your work.
- Taking the opportunity to learn new skills.
- Developing the drive and enthusiasm to achieve your goals.