

# Writing College Admissions Essays/ UC Personal Statements

Information, Strategies, & Tips



# Workshop Topics

- Understanding the Role of the College Admission Essay
  - Examples of Essay Questions
  - UC Personal Statement
  - Preparation Before You Write the Essay
  - Tips
  - Mechanics of Writing the Essay
  - Helpful Websites
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# Role of the Admission Essay

- 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 your 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.

# Role of the Admission Essay

- Is an opportunity to provide information that gives readers a context for your accomplishments.
- Offers you a chance to contribute your voice to the admission process.
- The readers are looking for insight into you as a person.
- As a writer; the reader will also evaluate your writing style, language usage, organization, and content.



## Role of the Admission Essay

- Allows you to add information that you couldn't work into the other parts of the application.
- Adds clarity, depth, and meaning to information collected in other parts of your college application.
- Enables you to make the best possible case for admission.

# USC - Examples of Essay Questions

- Students must complete the Essay, Short Answers, and Quick Takes.
- Essay Question - Please write an essay of approximately 500–700 words (typically about two double-spaced pages) on one of following topics:
  - The 18th-century French philosopher Denis Diderot said, “Only passions, great passions, can elevate the soul to great things.” Describe one of your passions and discuss its contribution to your personal growth.
  - Thomas Edison failed many times before successfully inventing the modern electric light bulb. He said, “If I find 10,000 ways something won’t work, I haven’t failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward.” Reflect on an accomplishment you achieved in an unlikely way.
  - Newton’s First Law of Motion states that an object in motion tends to stay in motion in the same direction unless acted upon by an external force. Tell us about an external influence (a person, an event, etc.) that affected you and how it caused you to change direction.



# USC - Examples of Essay Questions

- Short Answers - Please answer questions 1 through 3. Question 4 is optional.
  - 1. Tell us about an activity that is important to you, and why.
  - 2. Describe your academic interests and how you plan to pursue them at USC. (Transfers only: Please be sure to address your first- and second-choice major selections.)
  - 3. Why are you planning to transfer to USC?
  - 4. If there is any information you believe is relevant to our consideration of you as an applicant that is not already contained in your application, feel free to explain on an additional sheet.

# USC - Examples of Essay Questions

- Quick Takes - On a separate sheet, please respond to each of the following in one sentence or less. (A single word may suffice.) These questions have no right or wrong answers.
  - Three words that describe you
  - Favorite leisure activity
  - Favorite food
  - Last book you read for pleasure
  - Role model
  - Best movie of all time
  - Favorite musical performer/band/composer
  - Favorite quote
  - Most prized possession
  - Dream job

## Westmont

- Essay Questions (2 required). Each essay should contain 300-600 words.
  - #1. Westmont encourages students to learn more about the Christian faith and to develop Christian commitments in all areas of their lives. How will attending a liberal arts college in the Christian tradition contribute to your personal growth?
  - #2. Tell your story. Why did you select your current institution and why do you wish to transfer to Westmont?

# Michigan State University

- Personal Statement - Michigan State University is interested in learning more about your background, talents, and experiences and how you plan to apply them to your MSU education and future. Choose one of the personal essay topics below and write a short essay of up to 400 words.
  - Based on your life experiences, how do you anticipate contributing to the cultural life of Michigan State University?
  - In view of your educational experiences and the socio-economic environment in which you grew up, provide an example of a challenge you faced. How did you overcome or strive to overcome this challenge?
  - Describe a specific experience when you learned about a culture different from your own and how it affected or did not affect your worldview.
  - Describe your experiences promoting global understanding and/or the value of diversity in society.



# SUNY - Albany

- PERSONAL STATEMENTS - Respond to both questions.
  - Please describe your reasons for seeking admission to the University at Albany and how enrolling here would fit into your educational goals. Briefly tell us about your academic performance and progress toward your goals.
  - Feel free to use this space to tell us anything additional you would like us to know when we review your application.



# The UC Admission Essay

- Referred to as the Personal Statement.
- A critical element in the admission review process for UC Berkeley and UCLA.
- For applicants to impacted majors and/or borderline applicants UC Irvine & UC Merced also use the Personal Statement in the admission process.
- All UC campuses use the Personal Statement responses for scholarship consideration.
- The Personal Statement will never be the sole criteria for determining the admission decision.



# UC Personal Statement Prompts

- You will write two essays in response to these prompts. The length of each response is up to you, but neither one should be less than 250 words and the combination of both responses should not exceed 1,000 words.
  - Prompt #1. What is your intended major? Discuss how your interest in the subject developed and describe any experience you have had in the field – such as volunteer work, internships and employment, participation in student organizations and activities – and what you have gained from your involvement.
  - Prompt #2. Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

# UC Personal Statement Prompts

- Additional Comments (500 word maximum)
- Prompt – Describe anything else that you have not had an opportunity to include elsewhere in your application.
  - You can use the Additional Comment section to clarify or expand on important details. Some possible information:
    - Your family's socio-economic, cultural, educational history.
    - Specific challenges/obstacles that you encountered and overcame on your educational journey.
    - Explain reason's for poor academic performance or sub-standard grades.
    - Indicate if you were admitted to a UC campus as a freshman ( indication of UC eligible from high school.
    - Explanation of taking transferable math course for UC eligibility in the last term prior to transfer.
      - Example: Student has not taken any college-level math and will be taking transferable math course for UC eligibility in the last term prior to transfer. Should include information on math courses completed in high school and grades and the math assessment placement.

# Where Do I Start?

- Start with the preparation work before you begin to write your essay.
- Two Key Areas of Preparation:
  - 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 instructions and also on the university's website (click on Admissions).
  - Explore Yourself!
    - The more you know about yourself the easier it will be to write your essay.



# Where Do I Start?

- Can the Transfer Center assist me in doing the preparation?
- Yes. We have developed a Workbook for writing college admission essays/UC Personal Statements that contain 5 exercises you can do to help you learn about your audience and yourself.

You can download the Workbook at the Transfer Center website

[www.sbcc.edu/transfercenter](http://www.sbcc.edu/transfercenter).

# Where Do I Start?

- Before you write your personal statement, complete the application.
- By completing the application instead of jumping right into the essay you can identify key patterns in your academic record and extracurricular choices and anticipate the inferences that readers will make about your academic profile.
- Use the application to help you:
  - Think critically about the application's content. Your life story is so familiar to you, it's hard to have perspective on it without analyzing it.
  - See your personal and academic experiences as worthy of reflection and analysis.
  - Connect the issues raised by the application to the responses provided in the personal statement.
  - Find the questions that your readers might ask. This will help you fulfill the reader/writer pact. You as the writer have a responsibility to try to answer your readers' questions.

# Tips for Writing the Essay/Personal Statement

- **Get Personal** - A successful essay is the one where the reader learns about you and your life.
- **Details, Details, Details** - Use details to personalize your essay and to make it more interesting to read.
- **Be Honest** - Write about what really happened and who you really are.
- **Don't stop with just the facts** - the why and how of the information is also important. Use specific, concrete examples and language. Avoid generalities like "being on the track team was fun" and go right for the details. Make sure your response directly addresses the prompt, avoid a collection of facts or examples, and expand on - don't simply repeat - information contained in your application.
- **A strong essay demonstrates self-awareness, a key indicator of intelligence.**

# Tips for Writing the Essay/Personal Statement

- Write responses that get right to the point. Don't worry about being abrupt — you need to get your information out there.
- Adhere to word restrictions. Keep to the word count as closely as you can — a few words over or under the limit is okay, but be careful.
- Ensure that the responses complete the application. The personal statement answers are an extension of your application. They should give new information, not repeat things you've already put in your application.

# Mechanics of Writing the Essay

- Be original - be yourself.
- Tell a story - your story.
- Remember to put things in the words and language with which you are comfortable. Don't use big, fancy words normally not used to communicate, especially if you are not sure of the meaning of the words.
- A simple style is best. Good writing sounds like speech rather than a vocabulary review lesson.
- Use clear, vivid prose.
- Don't summarize in your Introduction.
- The body of each paragraph must relate to the first sentence of the paragraph.
- Use transitions.
- Your Conclusion is crucial.
- Revise, Revise, Revise!
- Make corrections in sentence construction, grammar punctuation, and spelling. Read aloud what you have written to help you locate any rough spots you will need to rework.
- Put your draft aside for twenty-four hours and read it again.



# Steps to Writing an Excellent Essay

The image shows a screenshot of a web browser window displaying a presentation slide. The browser's address bar shows the URL: [http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/educators/counselors/resources/materials/CC\\_2007/CC07...](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/educators/counselors/resources/materials/CC_2007/CC07...). The slide content is as follows:

## Steps to Writing an Effective Personal Statement

- Draft, Get Feedback, Revise
- Develop Topic and Thesis
- Read Critically
- Gather Information

The slide is numbered 13 in the bottom right corner. The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows the Windows Start button and several open applications: Novell Gr..., Windows..., SARS\*Me..., T H E G ..., 2 Inter..., 2 Micro..., and Microsoft... The system clock shows 2:50 PM.

# After You Have Written Your Essay

- Stop by the SBCC LRC to have your essay reviewed for grammar and spelling.
- Have a family member or close friend read your essay for an “authenticity check.”
- Stop by the Transfer Center and meet with an advisor or counselor for a final review.



# Review your Essay/Personal Statement with the Checklist

- Does your personal statement do the following things:
    - Assist the reader in learning about you as an individual?
    - Assist the reader in gaining an understanding of your experiences, accomplishments, and point of view that you would bring to the University's undergraduate body?
    - Assist the reader in gaining an understanding of your attributes and experiences that are not evident through a review of your academic record?
  - In the Personal Statement did you:
    - Describe any unusual circumstances or challenges you have faced?
    - Discuss how you responded to your unusual circumstances or challenges?
    - Discuss your interest in your intended major?
    - Discuss how your interest in your academic field developed?
    - Describe any related work or volunteer experience you've had?
    - Discuss your long-term goals after the Bachelor's degree?
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# For Additional Information/Assistance

## General Websites

- [http://www.collegeboard.com/apply/essay\\_skills/](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.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>

# For Additional Information/Assistance

## UC Websites

- UCSB: [http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergrad\\_adm/apply/how\\_apply/personal\\_statement.html](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](http://admissions.ucdavis.edu/admissions/personal_statement.cfm)
- UCI: [http://www.cfep.uci.edu/ub/senior\\_center/uc\\_personal\\_statement.html](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](http://www.scholarships.ucr.edu/pers_statement.htm)
- For All UC's: <http://www.honorstcc.org/documents/PersonalStatementHTCC.pdf>
- <http://collegehunt.blogspot.com/2007/09/advice-for-university-of-california.html>
- <http://www.californiacolleges.edu/admissions/university-of-california-uc/personal-statement.asp>



# Transfer Center

## Drop-In Assistance Hours

### SS 140

#### Now thru October 31st

Tues: 9 am-12 pm &  
1 – 6 pm

Wed: 9 am-12 pm &  
1 – 6 pm

#### Nov. 2nd – Dec. 11th

Tues: 9 am-12 pm &  
1 – 6 pm

Wed: 9 am-12 pm &  
1 – 6 pm

Fri: 9:00 am – 1pm

#### December 14<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>

Tues: 9am – 12pm & 1- 4pm

Wed: 9am – 12pm & 1- 4pm



# Questions?

Happy Writing!

