Writing Your Personal Statement for UCs and Scholarships

Career & Transfer Center
Los Angeles Pierce College
The Personal Statement

• A critical element in the admission review process for UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UCLA, UC Merced

• For applicants to impacted majors and/or borderline applicants

• 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 Prompts

Prompt 1
• What is your intended major? Discuss how your interest in the subject area 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 reflect who you are?
Instructions

- Respond to both questions using a maximum of 1,000 words

- Divide the word count as you wish, but each response must be at least 250 words

- Options:
  - 250 + 750 = 1,000
  - 500 + 500 = 1,000

- Tip: Start on a WordDoc. then Copy & Paste onto your application
Purpose

• Provides an opportunity for the readers of your application to get a feel for who you are as a person as well as a student

• It’s a place where you can put your academic record into the context of your opportunities and obstacles

• Adds clarity, richness, and meaning to the information presented in other parts of your application

• Provides information that may not be evident in other parts of your application

• Distinguishes you from other applicants

• Allows you to make your best case
Approach

“My personal statement is not good enough”

- There is no one correct way to write a personal statement
- In general those who will read your essay are looking for two important things:

  **HOW** the essay provides evidence of your achievements that isn't reflected in other parts of your application

  **HOW** and **WHY** the events that you describe have shaped you as an individual: your attitudes, focus, and intellectual vitality
Approach

Your personal statement should:

• Tell a **story** only you can tell
• Be honest, thoughtful, and **reflective**
• Strive for **depth**, not breadth (**quality over quantity**)  
  o Have an underlying theme --- ex: overcoming obstacles  
  o Provide Detail  
• Be **lively** and show passion  
• Conform to guidelines*  
• Answer the question(s)*  
• Show **Growth**  
• Allow the reader to share your experience
Structure

Treat your personal statement like an essay

• Introduction
  o Hook your reader
  o Capture the main idea of your essay
  o Provide your controlling theme

• Body
  o Expand upon and provide support for the theme you introduced in the first paragraph
  o Provide details and examples that move your theme forward
  o Create smooth transitions

• Conclusion
  o Widen the lens and wrap up your essay without summarizing or repeating what has already been written
Tone, Style, and Grammar

- Be concise and direct
  - Do not say what you are going to say, say it again, and then say that you have said it
- Don’t be wordy, flowery, or use difficult/unusual words
- Forget the words: Very, Really, and I, I, I
- Don’t have an over confident voice
  - Utilize quiet confidence--the kind that reveals itself through your description of lifelong interests, sustained commitment, and/or perseverance in the face of adversity
- Transform blemishes into positives (show growth)
- Watch your grammar and spelling (if you don’t, the college will)
Be Cautious Not To:

- Repeat information contained elsewhere in the application
- Complain about your circumstances rather than explain them
- Discuss money or a college ranking as a motivating factor for applying to a particular major/college
  
  “I want to study engineering because a recent US News and World Report article said that engineering is the fastest-growing industry in the nation and the best place to study engineering is UCLA.”

- Make claims that are not backed up by your application

- Have grammatical errors and include clichés or meaningless prose
  
  “A feeling of indescribable disbelief overcame me.” (Wordy prose)
Process =

1. Start Early
2. Brainstorm
3. Write, Write, Write
4. Revise
5. Get Feedback
6. Revise
7. Proofread
8. Submit
Getting Started

• Before you begin writing your statement, take some time to do some reflective introspection. **Ask yourself thought-provoking questions that give insight into who you are individually.** The answers to these questions will be important in helping you draft your essay.

  1. Past experiences
  2. Present motivations
  3. Future goals
  4. Enduring qualities

• At the point where you begin to write your first draft, do not stifle yourself by trying to write the perfect essay on the first go-round. **IT WILL NOT HAPPEN!** Free-write your first draft. Just allow yourself to write whatever comes out on the page. Don’t worry about appropriateness or length at this point. Just write!

• After you finish your first draft, read through it and see what you’ve come up with.
Web Resources

• 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/dosdons.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
UC Websites

• 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

Take Home Message

Make it about you and not what think you should be or what the reader expects you to be.
We are here to help!

- Rock your application clinic:
- M-Th 12-2pm Career & Transfer Center
- Writing your college admissions essay workbook