

Guidelines for Writing Your Fall 2013 UC Application Essays (for Fall 2014 Admission)

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- Be sure to look at these important websites before you get started:
 - Palomar College Transfer Center website:
<http://www.palomar.edu/counseling/transfercenter/>
 - Useful information from UC Berkeley:
<http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/>
 - Worksheet from UC Santa Barbara:
www.admissions.ucsb.edu/Pdf/PersonalStatement.pdf
 - Useful tips for transfer students from UCSB:
<http://www.admissions.ucsb.edu/prospective/ApplicationTips.asp>

- Purpose of the UC application essays:
 - The UC application essays are used as part of the Comprehensive Review process. The Admissions Office uses your essays to take into account you as a whole person – not just your GPA and academic preparation.
 - The essays basically answer the question: “What do we know about this person?”
 - As of fall 2011, only three schools use the essays in the admissions process: Berkeley, UCLA, and Irvine. The essays are otherwise used for decisions regarding impacted majors and scholarships.
 - The readers of your essays are UC faculty, local high school and community college counselors, and local high school and community college teachers/instructors.
 - When asked for advice to give essay-writers, the UC faculty who read the essays said this:
 - “While it is acceptable to receive feedback or helpful suggestions, applicants’ personal statements should reflect their own ideas and be written by them alone.”
 - “Be honest, relate your ideas to your current goals, and use *recent* experiences.”

- In your essays, the UCs are trying to learn more about you as an individual:
 - The UC schools that look carefully at your essays want to understand the circumstances under which you have or have not yet fully achieved your academic potential.
 - They want to know more about your character, your educational values, and your life goals, especially as they relate to your major.
 - They want to see your personal characteristics, such as creativity, intellectual curiosity, initiative, ability to overcome hardship, motivation, leadership, service to others, exceptional activities, academic recognition, etc.
 - The UC schools also want to know what and how you will add to the diversity of the entering transfer class.
 - In particular, they want to see that transfer students have been *working* or have *taken on responsibilities*.
 - As you begin to write your essays, think about the lessons you’ve learned from your hardships, challenges you have faced, and obstacles you have faced.

- Important general strategies:
 - Before you begin writing, remember your audience -- an admissions reader who does not know about you and your background.
 - Thinking of this will help you try to answer and address any questions a reader might have about your background and qualifications.
 - As you write, *try to paint a picture* of your unique qualities. Focus the unique qualities and experiences that make you stand out from the next student. These qualities are what you want to emphasize in your essays.
 - Don't just *list/tell* us about your characteristics; rather, *show* them!
 - *Showing vs. telling*
 - Do your application and personal statement together portray who you are, or do they leave unanswered questions?

- Pre-Writing/Brainstorming/Planning Your Essays
 - If you're having a hard time coming up with information about yourself, try doing some brainstorming (use a worksheet designed for this purpose) or ask your closest family members and friends for their outside perspective.
 - How do they view you? What do they think your greatest strengths or most unique experiences are?
 - As you plan your essays, think of *vivid, memorable examples* that you can use.
 - When doing your rough draft, try some freewriting/vomit on the page to get your ideas out of your head and flowing onto the page.
 - The idea is to *vomit on the page, and then clean it up afterwards*.

- Background on writing the two essays:
 - The UC application package consists of the application itself, along with the two essays that you have to write.
 - Read the Personal Statement instructions thoroughly before writing your essay, and make sure you understand what is being asked of you. (See below for the actual questions.)
 - As a piece of advice, write your essays in a word processing program first, save them in a plain text format, then cut/paste into the essay area when your essays are in their final drafts.
 - When you paste your essay into the Application, you can click "view word count" to track the size of each essay.
 - Your application will time out after 40 minutes of inactivity, and the page you're working on will not be saved, which is why it's a good idea to write them in a word processing program first.

- You have 1,000 words total to use for the two essays:
 - You CANNOT go over the 1,000-word count, even if it is just by one word. If you go over, the computer program will not let you enter any more characters/words and it will give you an error message.
 - It is your decision on how you want to divide up the word count, but keep in mind the following points:
 - Your most compelling answer should be at least 600 words. (The UCs recommend that this be about 6 paragraphs long, but this seems rather long to me, so I would suggest keeping your longer essay to about 4-5 paragraphs. Your longer essay should have a introduction paragraph and thesis statement, analytical topic sentences, good examples, and a conclusion.
 - Your shorter response should be at least 250 words. The UCs recommend that this shorter response should be only 1-2 paragraphs long.
 - Even though you'll be writing about yourself, you need to try to step back and look at your experiences from the outside – ask yourself *why*?
 - As a first step, look at your application from an outsider's perspective and write down as many questions as you can think of about yourself.
 - Be sure to look carefully at those areas that may seem too familiar to you; to an outside reader, they could provide interesting, unique information.
 - Ask yourself these questions: *What kind of image of myself do I want to present? What areas of my life seem weakest? Strongest? Most unique?*
 - Again, if you're having trouble with this, ask your closest friends and family members to describe what they think are your most unique qualities and experiences.
 - Remember that each response should only focus on *one topic*. Don't try to squeeze two or more topics into one essay.
 - Only use standard American English characters (the numbers 0 through 9 and the letters A through Z) and symbols (! @ # \$ % ^ & * () _ + - = [] \ { } | ` ~ ; : ' " , < . > / ?) found on a standard English keyboard. No accented characters or foreign language characters are allowed.

- Question 1: What is your intended major? Discuss how your interest in the field 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.
 - The most important parts of this question are: *What have you gained from your involvement? What motivated you to choose this major? What is your dedication to learning about it?*
 - Some questions to help you brainstorm topics for this essay question include:
 - What experiences have you had that have led you to your choice of major?
 - What have you done that has led you closer to your goal?
 - What opportunities have been available to you? Why have you chosen to do what you have done? How have you grown as a result of these opportunities?
 - What choices have you made and what have you gained from those choices?
 - If you have participated in any projects or activities or clubs that are related to your major (such as The Pre-Med Club, English Majors Group, EOPS or TRIO) or if you have participated in any projects and activities related to your major (such as lab experiences, internships, special opportunities to do field work or experiments,

etc.), then definitely discuss those experiences in detail! This is especially important to do if you don't have any work or volunteer experience.

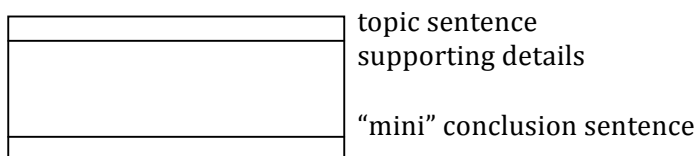
- Question 2: Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?
 - Some questions to help you brainstorm topics for this essay question include:
 - What talent, experience, contribution, or personal quality best expresses your character?
 - How does it define your ability to contribute to the campus community?
 - What challenges and hardships have you faced? What have you learned from those challenges?
 - Here are some examples of what you can discuss here:
 - Older students might mention the significance of your life experiences relative to your educational goals.
 - Military vets may talk about military service.
 - First-generation college students can discuss how being at Palomar has shaped you.
 - If you are working to pay for all or part of your education, you can discuss that, too.
 - You can also discuss how you overcame problems related to grades or gaps (missing time periods) in your education. For instance, if you took a few years or semester off, admission readers will wonder why that was, so you should try to address that issue.

- Question 3: (New) Describe anything else that you have not had the opportunity to include elsewhere in your application.
 - This is an optional third question that you do not have to answer.
 - You can use this Additional Comments box for clarification of any unclear points or for expansion on important details.
 - For instance, you can use this section to discuss additional names, Visa issues, additional IB exams, etc.
 - However, do *not* use this space to respond to the previous personal statement questions; this space is only here to help you clarify any parts of your application that might be unclear.
 - There is a 500-word limit for this section.

- For military veterans:
 - The University of California gives priority consideration to **qualified** veterans who apply for admission
 - applicants are encouraged to use the personal statement to:
 - (1) describe how military service has been instrumental in developing their educational plans
 - (2) indicate if s/he is entitled to educational benefits as a result of military service or the service-connected death or disability of a parent or spouse, or
 - (3) indicate if applicant is affiliated with the military such as, but not limited to, the spouse or dependent of someone who is on active duty or a current participant in an ROTC-type program.

- Allow time to take your essays through the writing process
 - UC Santa Barbara has a really useful worksheet that walks you through the writing process: www.admissions.ucsb.edu/Pdf/PersonalStatement.pdf
 - Be sure to take your essays through the steps of writing:
 1. Do some pre-writing (brainstorming, clustering, or freewriting) to get ideas about what to write about.
 - When you are finished, go back and look for the most compelling information you came up with in your answers. If you have a hard time choosing what is most compelling or interesting, ask other people for feedback
 2. Write a rough draft for each response.
 3. Get feedback on your rough draft; in addition to the workshops that the Transfer Center is offering, you can also bring your essays to the English Department Writing Center to get feedback and help.
 4. Produce the final draft, and be sure to run spell check and grammar check one last time.

- Make the structure of each body paragraph clear for your readers
 - Think of each body paragraph you write as a sandwich:
 - Your topic sentence and your “mini”-conclusion are your layers of bread.
 - Your supporting details are the filling.



- Start each body paragraph with a topic sentence that states the main idea or main point of that paragraph and that also makes a claim – *what does this mean?*
 - Fill each body paragraph with vivid, interesting details and examples. You want your examples and details to be *memorable* – they should stand out in your readers’ minds.
 - Your extended answer (600 words) should have an introduction paragraph that sets up your essay and also a clear, analytical thesis that sets up *why this matters*.
- Sample thesis for Prompt 1 as the extended essay:
 - Although my school does not offer Advanced Placement Spanish, I wanted to master Spanish so that I could enrich my understanding of the literature of Latin America and prepare for my eventual career goal of becoming a diplomat. I prepared on my own for the Advanced Placement Spanish exam, and as a result have become a more disciplined and engaged student in all of my classes.
 - Sample thesis for Prompt 2 as the extended essay:
 - Although I do not plan to major in veterinary science, my experiences raising and caring for animals have helped me understand how important animals are to human well-being. Because I have seen the result of human disregard for other forms of life, I am better able to appreciate the importance of ethical treatment for all. As a result,

I will be able to contribute my knowledge of animal preservation and my skill as an organizer to the campus environment.

- Sample thesis for Prompt 2 as the extended essay:
 - Although my parents are now both employed, my family has had to struggle in order to survive. I am the oldest of six and, because our family income does not support us adequately, I work part-time to provide food and shelter for us. Working has taught me to stay disciplined and to use my time appropriately. As a result, I have been able to maintain high academic achievement while supporting my family.

- Other tips for writing your essay:
 - Miscellaneous tips:
 - Make sure each sentence advances the argument or point you're trying to make
 - Avoid a collection of facts or examples; instead of just listing a bunch of your experiences, take the time to explain one or two of those experiences in detail/depth. A well-explained example of a club you participated in will be much more memorable than a general, vague list of a bunch of clubs.
 - Use concrete details and make them clear, rich and meaningful; make your paragraphs vivid so your readers will remember you and your stories/experiences.
 - Use transitions to guide your reader from one idea to the next:
 - For a thorough list of transitions that you can print up, see this website: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_transition.html
 - Avoid clichés and filler words:
 - Avoid predictable phrases like “I learned a lot,” “I learned to work with others,” or “It was a fun and challenging experience.”
 - Also avoid fillers like “basically,” “really,” “goals and dreams.”
 - Use active verbs – use grammar check to help you catch passive voice:
 - original: My love of science was fostered by my biology instructor.
 - revised: My biology instructor fostered my love of science.

- Where to get additional help with your personal statement here at Palomar College:
 - The English Writing Center in room BE-1
 - The Tutoring Center at the library
 - The Transfer Center
 - Located by the Counseling Front Desk
 - At the various application workshops hosted by the Transfer Center each fall

** Some examples and information on this handout taken from the UC Gateways and UCSB admissions websites.*