

TRANSFER APPLICATION PERSONAL STATEMENT ESSAYS

General Information

All applicants to the University of California (UC) and most private colleges **must submit** at least one application essay. Some California community college transfer students also write essays to apply for scholarships. Topics and instructions for essays differ among private colleges and scholarship sources. Pay attention to specific details and, if necessary, write separate essays. The California State University (CSU) does not require an essay as part of its application for undergraduate study at this time.

In preparing to write your essays, brainstorm for interesting and impressive experiences you've had. **Identify the stories that are most relevant to the designated essay topics and build your essay content around these ideas.** This essay is yours. UC admission professionals uniformly emphasize the importance of conveying an **authentic voice and personality.**

University of California

Transfer personal statements are never as important in the selection process as minimum eligibility requirements, Grade Point Average (GPA) and lower division preparation for the transfer major.

- Follow the specified instructions.
- State which question you are answering.
- Make sure the presentation of your responses is not visually overwhelming to university readers. Don't cram too many words on a page. A standard margin is one inch in width.
- Remember that evaluators are reading hundreds, if not thousands, of essays. Make it easy for them to read yours.
- Short essay (200 words) format: Zero in on *one* main point immediately. Specific details and examples are still best! No lists!

UC Personal Statement Prompts

Question #1 and Rationale

1) Academic Preparation

Rationale: The University seeks to enroll students who take initiative in pursuing their education (for example, developing a special interest in science, language, or the performing arts; or becoming involved in special programs including summer enrichment programs, research or academic development programs such as EAOP, MESA, Puente, COSMOS or other similar programs). This question seeks to understand a student's motivation and dedication to learning.

- Freshman and DAP applicants only: How have you taken advantage of the educational opportunities you have had to prepare for college?
- Transfer applicants only: 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. (UC Undergraduate Application)

Notes Regarding Prompt #1

- * Check to make sure that your essays address the rationales.
- * Explain the reasons for your choice of major. This can make a difference when admissions professionals must choose between two applicants with similar academic preparation and performance to fill a single opening.
- * Avoid two common shortcomings by *describing* your relevant experiences and discussing *what you gained*. Only experiences that are relevant to the choice of major should be highlighted and explored in depth.

Question #2 and Rationale

Potential to Contribute

Rationale: UC welcomes the contributions each student brings to the campus learning community. This question seeks to determine an applicant's academic or creative interests and potential to contribute to the vitality of the University.

- Tell us about a talent, experience, contribution or personal quality you will bring to the University of California. (UC Undergraduate Application)

Notes Regarding Prompt #2.

- * Focus on *only one or two examples* that are *most relevant*. Admissions professionals look for non-academic indicators of your potential for success and your potential for contributing as they select eligible applicants for a limited number of openings. This is the primary use of Prompt #2 essays!
- * *Relate* your accomplishments to a university setting.
- * Provide adequate description that conveys introspection and depth.
- * Avoid lists.

Question #3 and Rationale:

Open-ended

This question seeks to give students the opportunity to share important aspects of their schooling or their lives—such as their personal circumstances, family experiences and opportunities that were or were not available at their school or college—that may not have been sufficiently addressed elsewhere in the application.

- Is there anything you would like us to know about you or your academic record that you have not had the opportunity to describe elsewhere in this application? (UC Undergraduate Application)

Notes Regarding Prompt #3

- * Discuss personal responsibilities, challenges, and experiences that have influenced your academic history. If there is a weak period in your history, use concrete explanations and examples *that reassure readers that success at the university is likely to be greater than at that earlier time*.
- * Focus primarily on yourself and your own role—more than on the experience of your family as a whole. This can be challenging for those who come from cultures that do not recognize or encourage the concept of “self” as separate from family.
- * Focus more on descriptions that demonstrate impressive coping, problem-solving and self-management skills than on the details of experiences themselves.

Considerations Unique to Transfer Applicants

Choice of Major

Essay content that conveys your understanding of what is involved in the study of your chosen field is especially helpful. Volunteer, internship, and work experience that affirms your choice of major is persuasive, too.

Maturity

Maturity is communicated through stories that demonstrate some combination of:

initiative	introspection
commitment	resilience
self-awareness	responsibility
assertiveness	self-reliance
resourcefulness	receptivity to challenges

The best stories reveal these characteristics without using these words in the text.

Omission of Transcripts

The UC wants to see that you have not withheld any academic records. Readers actively look for explanations of time periods after high school for which you have provided no records.

Suggestions Specific to Re-entry Students--Education Interrupted

There is no need to worry or feel apologetic about having taken time off from school. Focus on the reasons for **resuming** your education. Re-entry students, including homemakers, contribute significantly to the richness of the university. The views and skills of people who have experience in the non-academic world are seen as irreplaceable during classroom discussions and in the context of university clubs, events, committees and governance. Your **description** of non-academic experience is crucial in conveying your potential value to the university. When re-entry students have early academic records that reflect poor performance, a discussion of **how** that performance changed is essential. Re-entry students with rusty writing skills should make sure to take English classes to ensure they are writing at university level.

Hardship and Trauma

The key to deciding whether or not to talk about a challenge is whether or not you can put into words how the challenge has influenced your academically-related choices, opportunities, or performance. The discussion should be about your **responses** to the hardships, not the hardships themselves. A focus on **overcoming** hardship not only emphasizes your strengths, it circumvents the risk of appearing to be asking for admission based on pity. Applicants should realize that made-up or **exaggerated stories of hardship are highly transparent**, especially when compared to authentic accounts.

Discussions of Ethnicity, and Other Aspects of Identity that have been Targets of Discrimination

The UC asserts that applicants need not fear bigotry in the selection process and that readers are thoroughly and carefully trained to avoid it in their evaluations. The recommended approach to **how** to discuss such issues is to clarify how the issue is a relevant part of your response to a specific prompt. Discussion of identity **should clarify educational choices, enhance understanding of**

educational history (including the overcoming of barriers), or explain your potential to contribute. While ethnicity and socioeconomic status, for example, are often relevant, your challenge is to spell out that relevance on paper. There is no “right” or “wrong” answer as to whether or not to discuss these issues—the bottom line is that you must make your own decision because it is so personal in nature.

Discussion of Membership in Student Programs

Merely namedropping regarding program participation is wasting a chance to highlight impressive personal characteristics. If you choose to mention involvement in a program, do so in the context of discussing how you have sought out unique opportunities facilitated by the program, mastered or demonstrated a skill or achievement through your participation, or otherwise benefited. ***An exploration of your own participation should dominate any mention of student programs.***

Essays For Scholarships

Private and public universities and alumni, professional, service and community organizations all offer scholarships. Scholarship amounts, eligibility and application requirements, deadlines, and essay instructions vary. University applications often contain lists of available scholarships and information on how to apply. Scholarships from other funding sources can be identified through financial aid offices, professional and community organizations, the internet, and scholarship reference books in college, career, or transfer center libraries. Some scholarships are merit or academically-based. For these, personal statement essays are usually weighed heavily, as is the quality of writing.

Usually, first-year and transfer applicants are in separate application pools for separate scholarship awards. As a result, personal statements by transfer applicants are not typically compared with those of freshmen/women. For the most competitive academically-based scholarships, UC Admissions staff tend to look for ***clarity of thought, writing and critical thinking skills, imagination, focus both in writing and in life choices, and indications of the potential for success.*** Alumni scholarship committees tend to emphasize leadership, initiative, and the context in which the applicants have achieved success. Staff at private universities and association scholarship committee members, meanwhile, are more likely to seek out evidence of a match between the applicants’ values and the values espoused by the universities and associations.

Essays for Private and Out-of-State Colleges and Universities

One factor that can be counted on among ***private*** universities is the high value that is placed on ***strong writing*** in transfer essays. In addition, both private and out-of-state universities typically do want applicants to ***explain their choice of university.*** Otherwise, there is a lack of consistency regarding essay considerations among private and out-of-state universities. Essay topics range tremendously in content, seriousness of tone and opportunity for creativity. Similarly, essay lengths and instructions vary. Many out-of-state public universities have distinct essay topics for transfer applicants. Most private schools require transfer applicants to write an additional essay describing their academic goals and explaining ***how they think the transfer institution will help them reach those goals.***

Myths and Rumors Reported by UC Admissions Professionals

Myth #1: Perfection is required.

In fact, an essay that is too slick and refined may raise the question of authenticity giving the essay less weight. Random checks on claims made in essays are occasionally performed.

Myth #2: Stories of hardship, drama, trauma, and tragedy make the difference between an impressive personal statement and one that is ignored.

Myth #3: Longer is better.

Myth #4: You don't have to include the personal statement in the application.

Applications without personal statements may not be read. You can't anticipate with certainty whether or not your statements will be read.

Myth #5: A Strong personal statements can be produced in one sitting.

Effective essays require that the prompts and personal ideas are mulled over well in advance of the actual writing. You should allot time for proofreading and further review later on.

Myth #6: Big quotes and big words are impressive.

If you don't usually communicate this way, the lack of sincerity will be obvious. Worse, it may leave an impression of immaturity and poor judgment.

Myth #7: The personal statement is usually the most important deciding factor regarding an offer of transfer admission.

For transfer students who meet eligibility requirements, GPA and lower division major coursework are more important.

Myth #8: All campuses use the personal statements in the same way.

Myth #9: UC admissions readers are looking for something unstated.

Rationales are now included for each prompt in the application. There is no hidden agenda. Applicants who try to second-guess what the readers "want to see," are wasting time and energy. Given that each campus is different in how it uses the essay, and that even readers at the same campus may walk away with different impressions of the same essay, second-guessing is pointless. It is appropriate and important that you make your own decisions in writing your essays, even if doing so is, at times, uncomfortable.

General Writing Suggestions

Following is a list that summarizes additional writing suggestions.

- Don't repeat unless expanding upon points made elsewhere in the application
- Make each sentence count
- Don't write a comprehensive autobiography unless you are asked for one
- Depth and substance are usually more persuasive than quantity
- Don't emphasize creativity, originality, or humor if doing so is at the expense of answering the question or communicating important information about yourself
- Strike a balance between a personal and formal tone
- Be direct
- Don't over-generalize or assume readers will agree with you
- Proofread
- Don't convey a tone of apology or desperation
- Don't preach or lecture
- Say everything you need to say to answer the question and paint a picture, but do it with as few words as possible
- No put-downs
- Highlight strengths and preparedness
- Follow the instructions
- Use active and descriptive words, rather than passive and general words

“Help” is a generic word that is often used ineffectively in essays. For instance, applicants frequently discuss wanting to help people. In this context, “to help” might mean to *heal, teach, empower, feed or organize*. The writer might intend to *build shelters, serve as an advocate or translate for people*. Although this list of possibilities is not complete, it hopefully conveys the difference between the general word “help” and more active and descriptive words. Word choice influences how well or poorly readers understand you. Many resume guides provide lists of active verbs and adjectives.