

TRANSFER APPLICATION PERSONAL STATEMENT ESSAYS

General Information

All applicants to the University of California (UC) and most private colleges **must submit** a personal statement/essay. The California State University (CSU) does not require personal statement essays for application to undergraduate study at this time. Some scholarships require additional essays. Topics and instructions vary among private colleges and scholarship sources. Pay attention to specific details.

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 prompts* and build your essay content around those. UC admission professionals uniformly emphasize the importance of conveying an authentic voice and personality and viewing this writing as a chance to introduce one's self.

University of California

Transfer personal statement essays are not as important in the selection process as minimum eligibility requirements, Grade Point Average (GPA) and lower division preparation for the transfer major. Complete your essays in MS Word or another word processing program and then copy and paste it into the appropriate window in the online application. Follow the specified instructions exactly. The "Apply Online to UC" pamphlet offers the following instructions:

- Respond to both prompts, using a maximum of 1,000 words total.
- You may allocate the word count as you wish. If you choose to respond to one prompt at greater length, we suggest your shorter answer be no less than 250 words.
- Stay within the word limit as closely as you can. A little over—1,012 words, for example—is fine.

Prompt #1

Freshman applicants: Describe the world you come from—for example, your family community or school—and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

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, 2007)

Notes Regarding Prompt #1

- * Make sure that your essay addresses the prompt.
- * 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.

Prompt #2

All applicants: 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 Undergraduate Application, 2007)

Notes Regarding Prompt #2

- * Focus on ***only one! If you must, no more than two!*** Admissions professionals look for non-academic indicators of your potential for success and a sense of who you are and how you think about yourself and your life as they select from among eligible applicants for a limited number of openings.
- * Provide adequate description that conveys introspection and depth.
- * Avoid lists.

Additional Comments Section

Use this section to tell the UC anything else that is important about you and/or your academic record that has not been described elsewhere in the application. Use up to 500 words. Not all applicants will need to use this section. This section is especially important for applicants who have gaps or unusual phases in their academic records because reviewers actively look for explanations of these. If you are applying to the EOP program or have been in the foster care system, explain that here.

Notes Regarding Additional Comments

- * 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 it was at that earlier time.***
- * If discussing a dramatic experience, 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.
- * If discussing challenges, focus more on descriptions that demonstrate impressive coping, problem-solving and self-management skills than on the details of the challenge. Focus on how you ***overcame*** the challenge

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. The UC expects a sense of direction in transfer applicants not usually found in freshman applicants.

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 (and others whose education has been 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.

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 helps prevent appearing to ask 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 readers are thoroughly and carefully trained to avoid bigotry in their evaluations. The recommended approach to **how** to discuss such issues is to clarify how the issue is relevant to a specific prompt. Discussion of identity should clarify educational choices, enhance understanding of educational history (including the overcoming of barriers), or further explain **you**. 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

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 active 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 of California applications contain lists of available scholarships. Scholarships from other funding sources can be identified through the Cabrillo College Financial Aid Office, professional and community organizations, the internet (try Fastweb.org), and scholarship reference books in the Cabrillo College Transfer Center and Library. Some scholarships are merit or academically-based. For these, personal statement essays are weighed heavily, as is the quality of writing.

The Cabrillo application requires a one page statement that describes special circumstances or unusual hardships; educational & career goals; why those goals were chosen; and personal experiences that have impacted one's education. It is recommended to touch on all four points, going into depth about the topic that is most compelling in your own life.

At the universities, first-year and transfer applicants are usually in separate application pools for separate scholarship awards. As a result, personal statements by transfer applicants are not typically compared with those of first year applicants. For the most competitive academically-based scholarships, UC Scholarship 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. Private university and association scholarship committee members are more likely to seek out evidence of a match between the applicants' values and the values held 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 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 and credibility. 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.

Authenticity and self-understanding make a difference.

Myth #3: Longer is better.

Informative, descriptive and concise 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 statement will be read.

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

Effective essays require that prompts and 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.

Communicate with language you usually use. Otherwise, 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.

Each campus is different.

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

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.

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
- Strike a balance between a personal and formal tone
- Be direct
- Depth and substance are 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
- 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 so with as few words as possible
- No put-downs
- Highlight strengths and preparedness
- Follow the instructions
- Don't write a comprehensive autobiography unless you are asked for one
- 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.