

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. Some scholarships require additional essays. Topics and instructions vary among private colleges and scholarship sources.

In preparing to write, 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 emphasize the importance of conveying your authentic voice.

University of California

Transfer personal statement essays are not as important in the selection process as minimum eligibility requirements, Grade Point Average (GPA) and completion of lower division coursework for the transfer major. Complete your essays in a word processing program and then copy and paste it into the appropriate window in the online application. When ready to write your essay, ***do not rely on the instructions in this handout alone. Instead, check the application instructions in the current year's UC application.*** The 2008 "Apply Online to UC" pamphlet says:

- Respond to both prompts, using a maximum of 1,000 words total—[***NOT*** 1000 words each]
- 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. ("Apply Online to UC" pamphlet, 2008)

Notes Regarding Prompt #1

- * Make sure that your essay addresses the prompt and does not include material not relevant to 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 backgrounds 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? (“Apply Online to UC” pamphlet, 2008)

Notes Regarding Prompt #2

- * Focus on **only one!** Admissions professionals consider non-academic as well as academic indicators of your potential for success. They seek 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 you are a person capable of introspection and depth.
- * Avoid lists.

Additional Comments Section

Use this OPTIONAL 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 a war veteran or have otherwise served in the military and have not found that relevant to your responses to prompts #1 or #2, consider discussing that here. 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 or community 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 on how you **overcame** the challenges more than on the details of the challenges. Use descriptions that demonstrate impressive coping, problem-solving and self-management skills.

Other Considerations Unique to Transfer 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.

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. While ethnicity and socioeconomic status, for example, are usually perceived of as relevant to one's identity, your challenge is to spell out that relevance with words. 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 reveal more of value about yourself. 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 admission applications offer lists of eligibility categories and you should specify all that are relevant. Scholarships from other funding sources can be identified through the Cabrillo College Financial Aid Office, professional and community organizations, the internet (students recommend Fastweb.org), and scholarship reference books in the Cabrillo College Transfer Center and library. Some scholarships are need-based and some are merit or academically-based. For the latter, personal statement essays are weighed especially heavily, as is the quality of writing.

The Cabrillo College scholarship 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. Go into greater depth about the topic that is most significant 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*.

UC Application Essay Suggestions

- Seriously, follow the instructions
- Make each sentence count
- Strike a balance between a personal and formal tone
- Be direct
- Remember that depth and substance are more persuasive than quantity or length
- Use examples and description to underscore your most important points and include what you have gained from your experiences or accomplishments
- Use active and descriptive words, rather than passive and general ones*
- If discussing hardships, focus more on how you overcame the challenges and less on the details of the hardships themselves--convey impressive coping, problem-solving and self-management skills
- Don't try to fake out your readers (with big words that you don't usually use or overdramatized stories of hardship, etc)
- Don't over-generalize or assume readers will agree with you
- Don't convey a tone of apology or desperation
- Don't "teach" about any topic other than yourself (unless asked to)—avoid sounding like you're lecturing
- Say everything you need to say to answer the question and paint a picture, but do so with as few words as possible
- Watch out for put-downs
- Highlight strengths and preparedness
- Don't write an autobiography unless you are asked for one
- When evaluating the effectiveness of your personal statement, consider whether it is conveying, as a whole, positive qualities about you and that you are someone who college instructors would like to have in their classes
- Proofread

* "Help" is a generic word that is often used ineffectively in essays. For example, essay writers frequently discuss wanting to help people, the environment, or their community. "Help" could mean *heal, teach, empower, feed or organize*. The writer might intend to *build shelters, serve as an advocate or translate for people*. Hopefully, this incomplete list of possibilities conveys the difference between the general word "help" and more active and descriptive words. Word choice influences how well or poorly the readers can form a picture of who you are. Many resume guides provide lists of active verbs and adjectives.