

## What is the personal statement?

The personal statement is more than just a mandatory part of your UC application; it's your one chance to explain to college admissions readers why you are a good fit for their school. This is where you become more than just another name — it's where you become an individual, and where you can share your personality, your goals, your experiences, and where you can explain any opportunities or obstacles that have affected your academic record.

**It's one element considered in UC's comprehensive review of your application.** You will not be admitted based on only one part of your application, so you need to give equal attention to all sections.

**It's an opportunity to provide information that gives readers context for your accomplishments.** The personal statement allows you to add information that you couldn't work into the other parts of the application.

Think of it this way — the personal statement:

- adds clarity, depth and meaning to information collected in other parts of your college application.
- enables you to make the best possible case for admission.

A Message from UC Faculty:

- While it is acceptable to receive feedback or helpful suggestions, applicants' personal statements should reflect their own ideas and be written by them alone.

Never let anyone "rewrite" your personal statement. Others' feedback can help you hone your ideas, but the writing should be your own.

Where do I start?

A personal statement starts with reading — reading your completed UC application, that is. Before you write your personal statement, complete the application. When you're finished, ask yourself questions about it. Starting by completing the UC application instead of jumping right into the essays helps you identify key patterns in your academic record and extracurricular choices and anticipate the inferences that readers will make about your academic profile. Use the application to help you:

- **Think critically** about the application's content. Your life story is so familiar to you, it's hard to have perspective on it without analyzing it.
- See your personal and academic experiences as **worthy of reflection and analysis**.
- **Connect the issues** raised by the application to the responses provided in the personal statement.
- Find the questions that your readers might ask. This will help you fulfill the **reader/writer pact**. You as the writer have a responsibility to try to answer your readers' questions.

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## The Instructions and Prompts

Two questions allow you to explore different areas of your life, your education, your goals and your aspirations:

Your environment — family, school, community — and how it has shaped who you are; and the talents, contributions, personal qualities or characteristics that make you who you are as a student, a scholar and an engaged citizen.

You will write two essays in response to these prompts. The length of each response is up to you, but neither one should be less than 250 words and the combination of both responses should not exceed 1,000 words.

Below are this year's prompts. When you finish reading through a prompt, ask yourself some of the questions provided below it to start your brainstorming process. Remember that you will be writing two essays.

### Prompt #1

- [Freshman Applicants] Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how has your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.
- [Transfer Applicants] What is your intended major? Discuss how your interest in the subject 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.

#### Ask Yourself:

- What one word best describes my family, my community, or my school?
- What opportunities have been available to me in my community or at my school?
- What is the major issue confronting my family, school or community and what has been my role in addressing it?
- How have I changed as a result of addressing this major issue, and what impact has that change had on my dreams and aspirations?
- Why did I choose to do what I did to address this issue?

### 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 relate to the person you are?

#### Ask Yourself:

- What one word describes me best and captures my most important personal quality? Why is this the appropriate word to describe me?
- What talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience has best allowed me to express my most important personal quality?



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## Exercise:

Look at each prompt, and write down a quick answer to each of the "Ask Yourself" questions. When you are finished, consider your answers. What was the most compelling information you came up with in your answers? Which questions led you to offer important information that was not covered in your application?

## Writing for College

The UC personal statement is a preview to the kind of writing you'll be doing in college and on college placement exams.

- **Unknown Audience:** You will be writing for a community of strangers.
- **Writer-Determined Topic:** You will pick the topic for your response.
- **Dig Deeper:** Analysis and reflection are key.

## Ask Questions Before Writing

The Levels of Questions strategy described below can help you ask the kinds of questions to ask about your completed UC application that will give you insight into the how to approach your personal statements.

**Level One Questions (L1)** Answers are evident in the application. (What does the application say?)  
Answers to L1 questions provide **detail in your personal statements**.

**Level Two Questions (L2)** Answers are open to interpretation using the information provided the application. (What does it mean?)  
Answers to L2 questions are **topic sentences for your personal statement paragraphs**.

**Level Three Questions (L3)** Answers address larger issues not evident in the application but supported by the application. (Why does it matter?)  
Answers to L3 questions are **thesis statements for your personal statements**.

## Step One Activity: Ask Questions

As you read through your UC application, write down questions about yourself that apply to the information you've included. Try to find a variety of questions of all levels. For example:

- What sorts of classes do I get the best grades in? (Level 1)
- Why am I interested in science? (Level 2)
- How can I use my interest in science to make a contribution to our understanding of the health care needs of the elderly? (Level 3)

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Consider whether you asked deep enough questions. Are there interesting things about your record that you missed because they are too familiar to you?

Look back at the prompts. How are you going to choose how to answer each prompt?

## Step Two Activity: Organize

Look at the questions you came up with and sort them according to which prompt they best fit. Here's an example of how you can organize your questions:

- **Prompt #1 Examples:**
  - Why is developing my fluency in my family's native language important to me? [Home]
  - How did my student government experiences shape my perspective on the political process and how I want to participate in shaping that process in the future? [School]
  - How has my experience working in a nursing contributed to my understanding of and desire to work on health care issues? [Community]
  
- **Prompt #2 Examples:**
  - How did my focus on martial arts impact my grades? [Talent]
  - What did I learn about myself as a scholar by participating in a small learning community at school? [Experience]
  - How did my military service contribute to my educational choices? [Accomplishment]
  - Why is personal leadership so important to me? [Quality]
  - What impact has the service club I started at my school had on student morale and achievement? [Contribution]

Now that you've organized your thoughts a little better, you can start thinking about how you will answer each prompt. Consider the following points:

- **What topic** will each response focus on? Because these are relatively short essays, you should focus on one topic per prompt.
- Will the topic you have chosen for each prompt give you the opportunity to make the most persuasive argument? Does it answer the most pressing questions related to this prompt?
- You may be wondering about the length of your responses. If you have a similar number of questions from your application for each prompt, consider making both responses equal length. If you have more questions for one prompt than the other, think about responding to the prompt with the most questions associated with it in a longer essay. The prompt with **the most questions** associated with it is likely to be the one that you have the most to write about.

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## Step Three Activity: Decide on topics for your responses

Now it's time to decide on your focus for each prompt. Since you don't have many words to spare, you'll want only one topic for each prompt. Write a descriptive sentence for each prompt that details what you'll be writing about. Consider whether you have chosen the most persuasive and compelling topic for each prompt. Then make sure you have chosen the topic with the most questions associated with it for your extended response.

### Writing Strategies

Before you begin writing, check out the tips and strategies below for each of the responses. Admissions readers will be looking for the following when reading your short responses:

- **Write responses that get right to the point.** These are short essays, so there is little room for wandering. Don't worry about being abrupt — you need to get your information out there.
- **Use specific, concrete examples and language.** Avoid generalities like "being on the track team was fun" and go right for the details. Make sure your response directly addresses the prompt, avoid a collection of facts or examples, and expand on — don't simply repeat — information contained in your application.
- **Adhere to word restrictions.** Keep to the word count as closely as you can — a few words over or under the limit is okay, but be careful.
- **Ensure that the responses complete the application.** The personal statement answers are an extension of your application. They should give new information, not repeat things you've already put in your application.

### Tips for the longer responses

If you choose to write a longer response to one or both prompts (500 or more words), you will have a short essay of about six paragraphs. When reading your extended responses, readers will be looking for:

- **organization and clarity provided by a persuasive thesis, analytical topic sentences, and well-chosen examples.**  
Return to your Levels of Questions exercise to help guide you. Remember - the information you have decided to include to your thesis (Level Three questions), topic sentences (Level Two questions), and examples or details (Level One questions).
- **a response that supports - by clarifying and provide context for - the information in the application.**  
Your longer response is where you can make a persuasive argument for yourself. Make sure that it directly supports the information on your application.

The admissions readers will expect your longer response to contain a thesis that you will argue in the body of the essay. Here is a table that breaks down the different parts of a thesis, followed by some example theses for each prompt.

### Structure of Thesis Statements

Concession (Optional)	The "but" to the "yes": <i>Although ...</i>
Assertion	The argument: <i>This ...</i>
Reasons	The synthesis of supporting points: <i>Because ...</i>
Significance	The "so what" of the argument; implications: <i>As a result ...</i>

### Activity: Write a thesis statement

You should now have chosen a question you will answer as your thesis statement. Using the samples above as a guide, write a thesis statement for your topic. Reread your thesis statement and ask yourself whether you followed the structure above.

### Your Writing Process

Look at the process below. Do you follow all these steps when you write? If not, try to follow them as you're working on your personal statement.

1. **Brainstorm** using levels of questions.
2. **Write** a first draft.
3. **Get feedback.** Give readers at least a week to respond.
4. **Revise** for organization, clarity and meaning.
5. **Proofread your close-to-final draft** to ensure there are no errors.

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