

Focusing the Lens

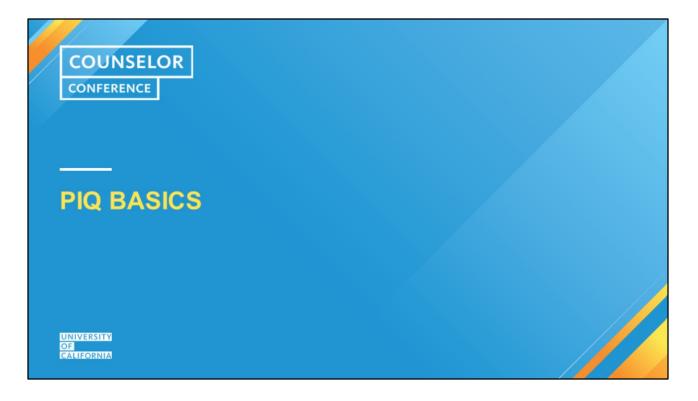
Added Value & Missed Opportunities in the Personal Insight Questions

September 2019

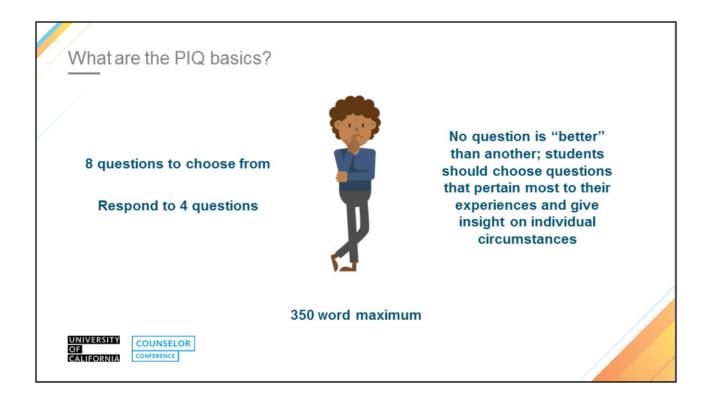
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• "PIQ" is an acronym for Personal Insight Questions.



• Here, we'll discuss the logistical components of the PIQ section of the UC application.



What are the basics?

There are 8 questions to choose from. Students must submit 4 responses to complete the UC Application.

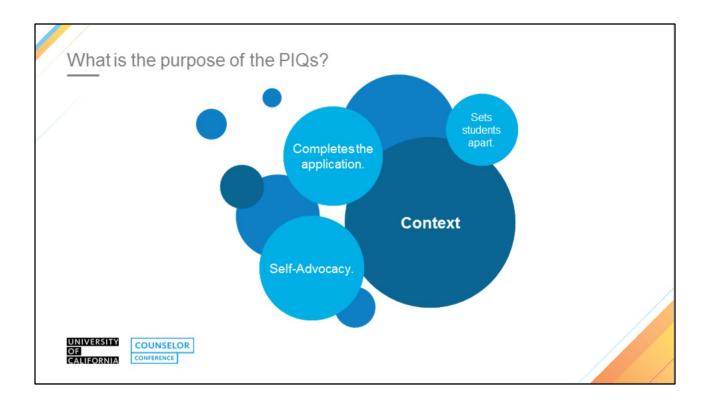
There is a 350-word maximum. There is no minimum amount to write, however, please make sure students provide a complete response. The UC application will only count up to 350 words.

All the questions are of equal value. There are no questions that are better, nor are there required questions for first-year applicants. Students to choose questions that reflect who they are and provide UC admission representatives insight on their experiences, environment and overall circumstances.



PURPOSE OF THE PIQs

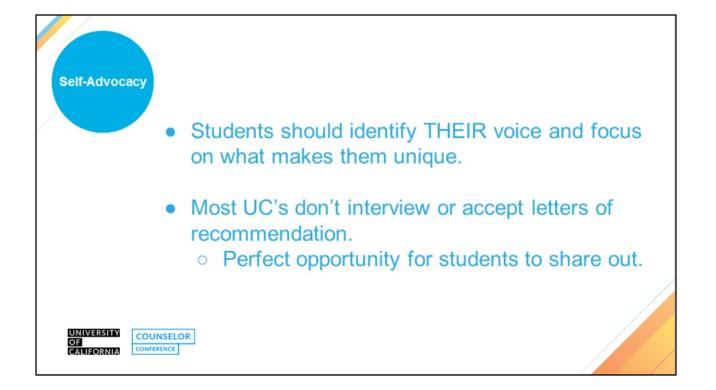
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- In the following slides we'll discuss the uses for, and importance of, the PIQ responses.
- It is helpful to keep in mind the most effective provide new information that cannot be found elsewhere in the UC application, or explain more fully something that appears elsewhere on the application (extracurricular activities, special programs, academics, etc.).

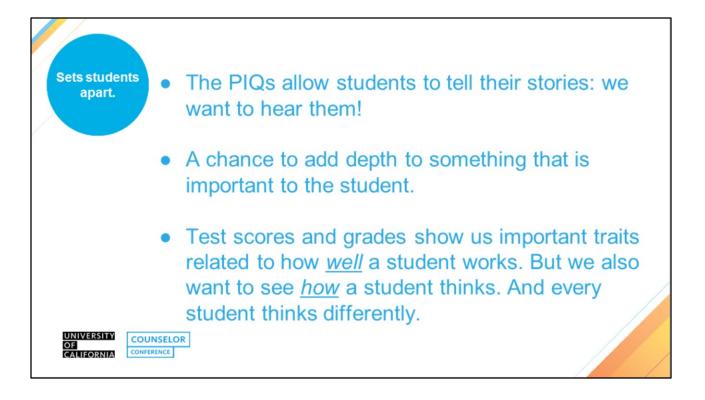
| Completes the | > About you |
|---|----------------------------|
| application. | > Campuses & majors |
| | > Academic history |
| | > Test scores |
| | > Activities & awards |
| Cannot submit application | > Scholarships & programs |
| without typing something in | ✓ Personal insight |
| | Introduction To do |
| the Personal Insight | Personal insight questions |
| Questions boxes! | Additional comments |
| | Start submission |
| UNIVERSITY OF COUNSELOR CALIFORNIA | |

- First and foremost, students begin the submission process by entering information.
- It is strongly recommended that students write/type their PIQ drafts in a separate document (e.g. Word, Google Doc, etc.), rather than typing responses directly onto the UC application. This is because there is a 20minute time-out function in the new application.

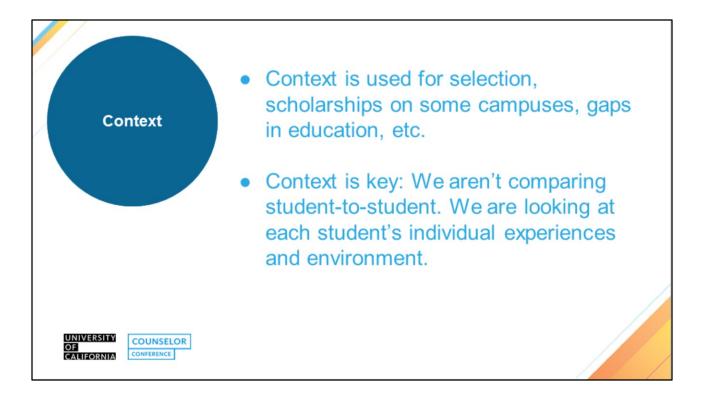


Self-Advocacy:

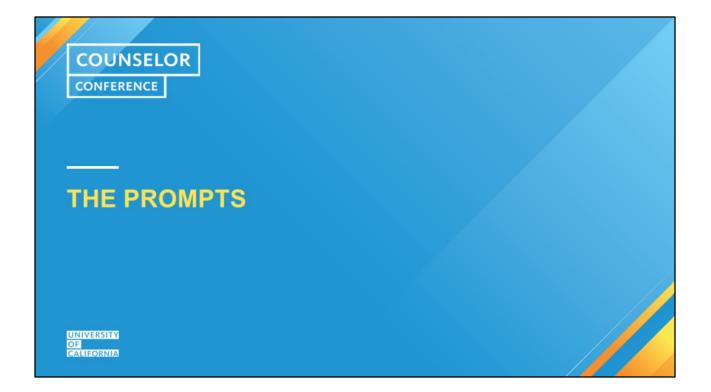
- The majority of UC campuses do not allow or consider interviews (unless required in a supplemental application process such as for fine arts majors) or letters of recommendation. The PIQs are a perfect opportunity for your students to advocate for themselves.
- Encourage your students to share their stories. Whether everyday life or a unique experience, whatever it is, make sure it reveals something about them (their character, values, life).
- UC admission representatives want to learn what the student did and WHY. What your students have learned, experienced, accomplished, or endured and how they've applied it to their academic journey or life experience will help readers better understand the context of the student.
- The focus should always be on the student who is applying, whether the impact of an experience on **them** or **their** impact on others.

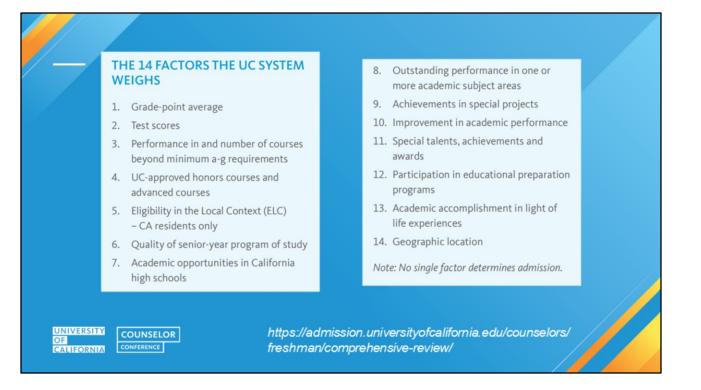


- The PIQs allow students to tell their story- and UC admission representatives do want to hear it!
- Students are more than grades and courses, and UC recognizes that. If a student chooses to come to a UC campus, they'll be spending about 4 years of their life living, learning, and contributing to the campus community. Of course, not every moment is in a classroom. Strong PIQs convey a sense of what the student might get involved in on campus, and where their interests lie.
- It is also important to note that "unique" experiences are not necessary, every *perspective* is unique.



- All UC campuses are academically selective, look for competitive applicants. Context is key.
- UC does not compare student-to-student. Each student is reviewed within their own individual experience and environment.





https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/counselors/freshman/comprehensivereview/

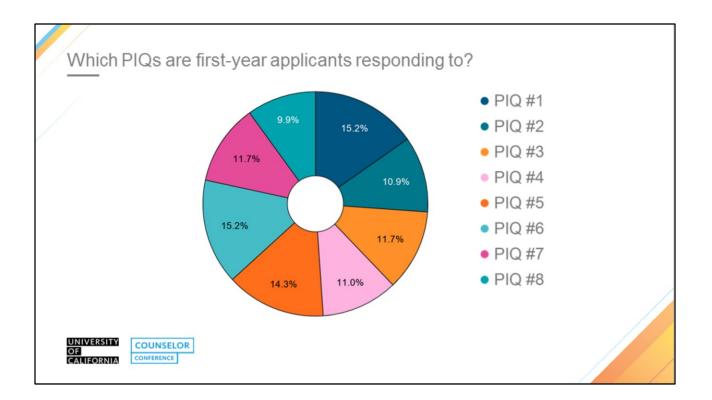
- These are the 14 factors that the UC system considers through holistic review for freshman admission. How these factors are utilized may differ from campus to campus, but they all play a role in understanding the student fully.
- Each of the PIQ prompts address at least one of these 14 factors.
- Campus faculty determine how the 14 factors are used in admission.

| | | Personal insight questions | |
|------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| <u> </u> | | Please respond to any 4 of the 8 questions below. | Personal insight questions |
| | | We realize that not all questions apply to all applicants, so be sure to select the 4 questions that you believe give us the best information about you. | Want a copy of the personal insight questions emailed to you? It's a good idea to work on these before you enter them in the application. |
| | Please respond t | to any 4 of the 8 questions below. | Personal insight questions |
| | so be sure to sel | not all questions apply to all applicants, lect the 4 questions that you believe give rmation about you. | Want a copy of the personal insight questions emailed to you? It's a good idea to work on these before you enter them in the application. |
| | application revie | are given equal consideration in the ew process. Responses to each question een 250-350 words. | Email questions |
| | | What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How hav that talent over time? | ve you developed and demonstrated Answer |
| | | Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant edu overcome an educational barrier you have faced. | ucational opportunity or worked to Answer |
| | | Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academ | |
| | | Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe inside and/or outside of the classroom. | e how you have furthered this interest Answer |
| UNIVERSITY | COUNSELOR | 7. What have you done to make your school or your community | ty a better place? Answer |
| OF CALIFORNIA | CONFERENCE | Beyond what has already been shared in your application, w as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of Cal | |

- In the newly redesigned UC application, students are prompted to respond to any 4 of the 8 questions on one page.
 - Students must input at least one letter into 4 response boxes to be able to submit their application. The application will not allow students to continue without any information submitted in the PIQ section.
- The application also explicitly states much of what has been covered in this presentation:
 - Students are encouraged to select the 4 questions that best convey their experiences.
 - All of the questions are given equal consideration.
- It is noted that responses should be between 250-350 words. Students should use the space available to them in the best way that authentically conveys their experiences. More words does not necessarily equate more context, yet brevity without context or substance may not add value.

| Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time. | Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side. | What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time? | Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced. |
|---|--|--|---|
| Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement? | Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom. | What have you done to make your school or your community a better place? | Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California? |

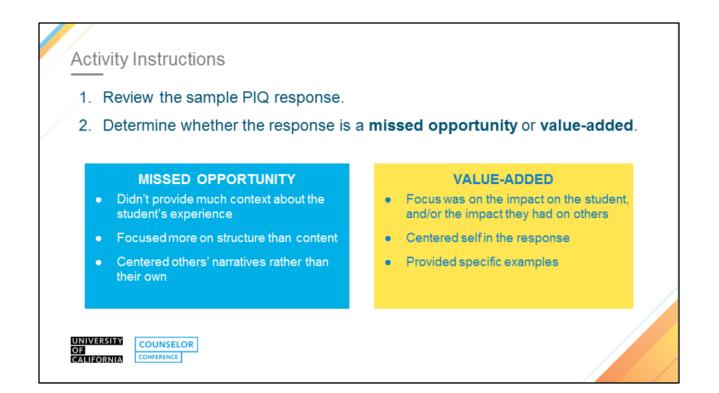
- There is no set of preferred questions.
- It is important for students to remember which questions will best highlight strengths within the Activities section and/or bring clarity to parts of the About Me section or Academic History.
- "You" or "Your" can be found in every question, so stay focused! Make sure students limit their discussion of outside influences and focus their response on their accomplishments, experiences, challenges, and contributions.



- The prompts most frequently selected are those that ask about leadership experience and an academic subject that inspires the student, while those least selected asks what makes a student stand out as a strong candidate to the UC.
- This slide demonstrates a rather balanced response rate across the prompts.
- There is no "right" or "best" way to earn admission to the UC. All questions are equally valued and students should make sure that they are answering what is best for their narrative.
- These percentages shift year to year, just as applicants change year to year.
- Ultimately, this illustrates that all of the prompts are utilized by applicants.



To provide you additional context when working with your students, we have taken elements from multiple applications as example case studies. Any similarity to reallife circumstances is purely coincidental.



There are no "bad" or "good" PIQ responses. Rather, helpful responses are those that add value to their application, for example: provide context about a student's lived experiences; provide information for Admissions to consider that is not found elsewhere in the application; focus on the impact on the student, and/or the impact they had on others; provide specific or tangible examples.

Furthermore, "missed opportunities" are those that do not provide additional information or context for Admissions to consider in the comprehensive review. "Value-added" responses are those that allow Admissions to learn more about a student. These can be entirely new topics not mentioned in the application, or new/additional information about something briefly mentioned (i.e. in the extracurricular activities, a class listed in the academic record, a special program the student participated in),

Case #1: Leadership

During the summer of this year (senior year) I applied for summer staff, a position that our school offered to seniors to help freshman transition from middle school to high school. I realized that being a leader wasn't as easy as it sounded. My time with the freshman made me realize who I am and who I want to become. Everything that I thought would go wrong went wrong. I had to understand that these freshmen were in a completely new environment that they had to adapt to. Over the next few hours, I gathered all my thoughts and tried to recall what my experience as a freshman was like and relate it back to the current situation. Now I have a better understanding of where everyone is coming from. I figured that stubbornness played a big role in their attitude so I shared my experiences of being a freshman, which got the freshman students to understand the importance of this event. This experience helped me realize that leaders have to be patient in order the get their points across.

Word count: 180

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Although the student reflects back on their freshman experience and learns that patience is necessary, they could have provided more details on their leadership role in this program as well as specify the problems that arose.

UC admission representatives appreciate tangible information and concrete examples. This student could have included an example of what she/he/they did to contribute to the experience of the freshmen in the group.

Case #2: Leadership

During the presidential election, the nation continued to deepen its polarization, resulting in a hostile political climate and unprecedented fear in those without legal status. In the midst of this crisis, I became part of an initiative to formulate a project that would help students who found themselves in this state of insecurity. For months I met with representatives from community organizations, and a few peers to come up with an efficient and prolonged solution to the issue. We began drafting a resolution to make my school district a sanctuary district. This was only part of the initiative, as I worked to gather more members of the community who would contribute to the project by helping spark public interest in the idea. Once formalizing the language to satisfy the interests of all students, my team and I moved to propose the resolution to the school board district. Beginning the campaign with a rally, continuing with public comment, and ending with reading the proposal, we made sure that we were representing "nuestra gente" every step of the way. Eventually, the resolution to make my school district a sanctuary district a sanctuary.

Word count: 191



While a 350-word minimum seems brief, a lot can still be said.



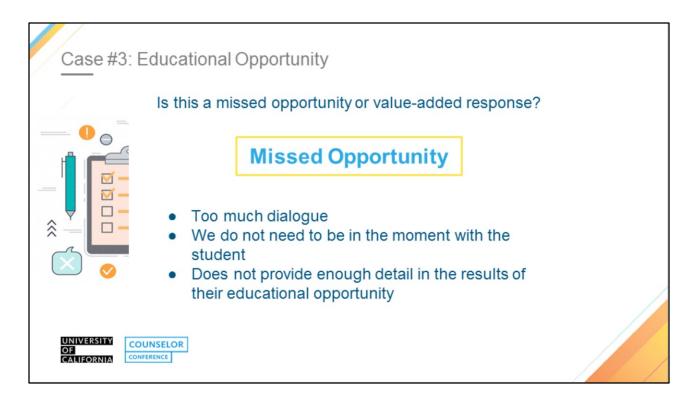
- This student is able to provide a value-added response on leadership by providing concise and specific details on the campaign process for their school to become a sanctuary district.
- Another notable point here is that students can write about whatever topic they desire, and should always return the focus to themselves. Whether they write about their values, ideologies, identity/ies, etc., the focus should always be the impact on, or importance to, them and not necessarily on the idea itself.

Case #3: Educational Opportunity

Entering my freshman year, I took part in one of history's most epic boxing matches. In my corner was an eighth grader who thought she knew everything, especially what was best for herself. In the other corner? Her parents, who actually knew what was best for her. The battle? Whether I should participate in my schools International Baccalaureate program, built on "unique academic rigour and emphasis on students' personal development". I strongly opposed it, my parents enthusiastically supported it. "DING!" The first round began. I threw my first punch. "Everyone says I'll have no life!" I won't have time for any extracurriculars!" My parents attempted to dodge: "You just need effective time management!" But my jab still connected; I claimed the first round. I launched the second round with an uppercut. "Everyone hates IB; they wish they never did it!" But this time my parents quickly deflected and fiercely counterattacked. "Don't compare yourself to everyone else! You've always been different and you love a challenge." They were right, I was extremely competitive and thrived on challenging myself. They clearly took round two. Round 3 quickly approached; I could feel myself losing strength. This time my parents struck first. "IB is a great way to make close friends!" Right hook. "IB will give you an international viewpoint!" Left hook. "IB WILL PREPARE YOU FOR COLLEGE!" Knockout. And the best decision I could've made. While IB was challenging enough (featuring an entire schedule of honors classes), we also had to complete 75 CAS (Creativity, Activity, Service) hours each year, an Internal Assessment for every class, an extended essay (a 4,000word, collegiate graduate-level research project) and special IB exams for each subject. By my senior year, only 40 hardworking students, we forged a family with an unbreakable bond. We all had to do those exhausting tasks, we struggled and pushed through them all together. That, was the beauty of the IB program.



Word count: 319



- The focus here was on the narrative and descriptive language, rather than the learning outcomes or insight as to why IB was beneficial to the student.
- Examples and specific details about the impact of IB on their academic experience, or how what was learned in IB will help them succeed at UC would have improved this response. The student could have addressed this topic in many ways, but instead the descriptive prose detracted from the information.
- Encourage students to refrain from dialogue as it does not have additive value and takes up word count.

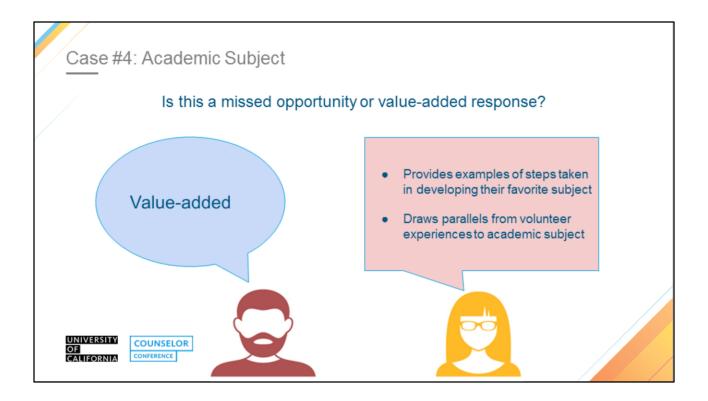
Case #4: Academic Subject

During my junior year, I took an Ethics of Philosophy class and quickly became interested in exploring the subject more. This was the first time I had been exposed to a discussion on such a topic and the first time I was able to see the varying viewpoints on social issues in the world. From the lessons I learned in this class, I have been able to establish my own world view and take an active role in being a part of my community. I learned to link my own experiences with the world and express my thoughts and opinions in a constructive way. Since taking this introductory philosophy class, I have been volunteering beyond my school's required community service hours. I was a marketing volunteer at a cancer prevention center where we reached out to the community for donations. I also volunteered at a local library helping teach people to read. This allowed me to not only connect with my community and explore different literary genres, but it also gave me a way to connect with my father who has always been an avid reader. With a philosophical outlook, I started to reflect on these volunteer experiences more thoughtfully and enjoyed them a lot. Philosophy has taught me so much about myself and how to connect with people, whether it be with my teachers and family members or with those in my local community. I've learned how fragile and broken our society is, while also learning the importance of thoughtfulness and kindness. To continue this interest, I plan to major in Sociology so I can study the application of philosophical theories and establish a career focused on helping others and making our society a better place. By focusing on a career helping others, I hope to become a mature, tolerant, patient and well-educated citizen in our society.

Word count: 308

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The student is able to provide an insightful response explaining how the philosophy course inspired specific actions taken to volunteer, how the course impacted their perspective and changed it, and how this course influenced their choice of intended major. Their detailed reflection on their experiences provides concretes examples and steps.

Case #5: Significant Challenge

by is a resilient plant that grows in some of the harshest environments; it is also my middle name. I was born to victims of drug addiction, who proved quite incapable of attaining sobriety and raising a newborn. Their time with me ceased after a few unmemorable months when my father's half-lit cigarette engulfed our small apartment in flames. As a result of the fire, my grandparents ushered me away from my father's life and the only ways I perceived the world: chaotic and unpredictable. They introduced me to homemade meals, weekend jigsaw puzzles, and "comfort". Yet, the past tremendously weighed on my grandparents, as they sought to mend the severed relationship with my mother. This became apparent when they sensed she had become sober and was ready for a life of stability. My grandparents moved me out, and throughout 2nd and a fraction of 3rd grade, I lived with my mother and younger brother in another state. For months, I was fairly content, but my mother soon became more and more absent, our home less and less of a home. My mom was using again. Through isolation and false senses of dependence, my childhood was challenging. Consistently, I blamed myself for my parents' behavior and questioned the motives of their actions. I was stuck in a state of solitude for most of my life, which affected how I saw myself and others. After regularly attending therapy in middle school though, I began developing strong relationships with my peers, school, and family. I could finally flourish. Of course, ivy grows best in warmer climates and richer soil, unlike in the winter, when its growth is halted. My situation never stunted my growth. Like ivy, I am persistently growing stronger and stronger, no matter what the environment. I've chosen a path of intellect and success, stability and hope. My winter has passed. I will never stop growing.



Word count: 316



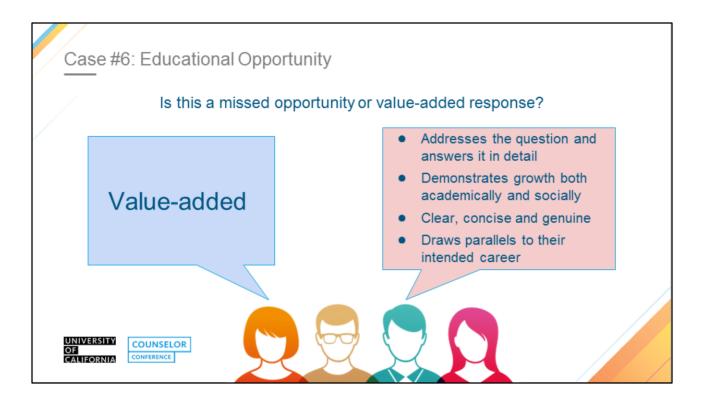
While this story was moving, and compelled strong feelings of hoping this student continues to flourish, it didn't translate into a sense of *how* what happened in middle school is relevant to the current experience of the student. UC admission representatives are interested in the current context of the student, which may include an ongoing impact of an earlier event.

More importantly, the student did not fully answer the question which asks about how the challenge impacted the students academic journey and achievement.

In summary, this response:

- Focuses on an experience in the past, without relating it to their present.
- Could have focused or provided more detail on how "developing strong relationships with my peers, school, and family" could have affected their academic achievement.

| Throughout my high school career I have taken advantage of every educational opportunity presented to me both inside and outside of school. Each educational endeavor that I participated in was greatly beneficial, in particular, Upward Bound, I joined |
|---|
| /Upward Bound my junior year after an extensive process including an application, interview, parent interview, high GPA requirements, essay, letters of recommendation ultimately granting only ten students acceptance. I have learned so much in the limited amount of time of participation. |
| Upward bound gave me the opportunity to complete Communications 101 at my local community college, receive tutoring in my challenging classes like AP calculus, visit multiple colleges, participate in enrichment classes during the summer such as calculus and physics, receive one-on-one college guidance, attend multiple SAT preparation classes, experience educational overnight trips to visit colleges, and more. These services provided by Upward Bound help me feel immensely prepared for postsecondary education. I was elected as one of three senior leaders of the Upward Bound's senior class, which helped me build leadership skills by: organizing meetings, updating peers, and providing communication between my peers and administrators. Throughout all of these experiences I was able to meet like-minded peers and learn so much about myself. |
| Not only did Upward Bound help me to excel academically, but also socially; through this program I have been able to experience various cultures and learn how to effectively communicate with people from unique backgrounds, a skill I will carry with me for life. Through discussions and interactive classes I have been exposed to different cultures contributing to my gain of cultural competence, especially regarding Latino cultures. This will benefit me greatly in the future considering I want pursue a career in the medical field and I want to be able to relate to all of my future patients no matter their ethnicity or culture. |
| Participation in Upward Bound motivates me to reach my full potential and gives me confidence that I will exceed in my college journey. |
| |

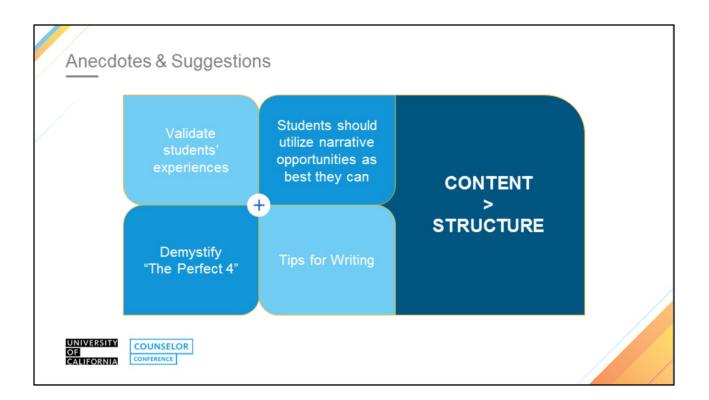


The student directly addresses the question and answers it in detail by providing specific examples of how they have taken advantage of an educational opportunity. She/he/they are clear and concise so it's easy to understand. Additionally, the student provides more depth by discussing academic and personal growth, adding more context of the leadership, and connected those experiences to the intended career in the medical field.



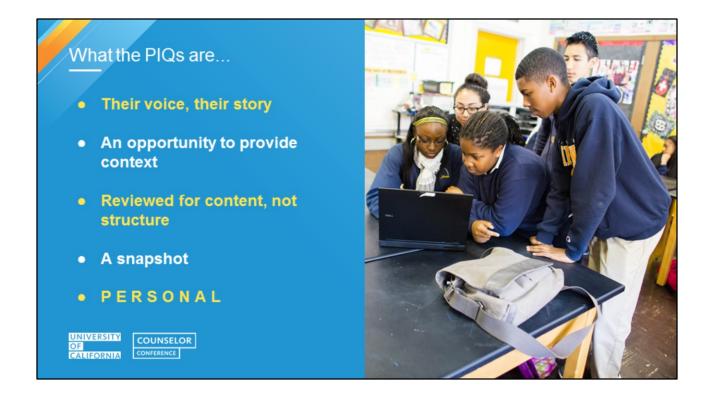
ANECDOTES & SUGGESTIONS

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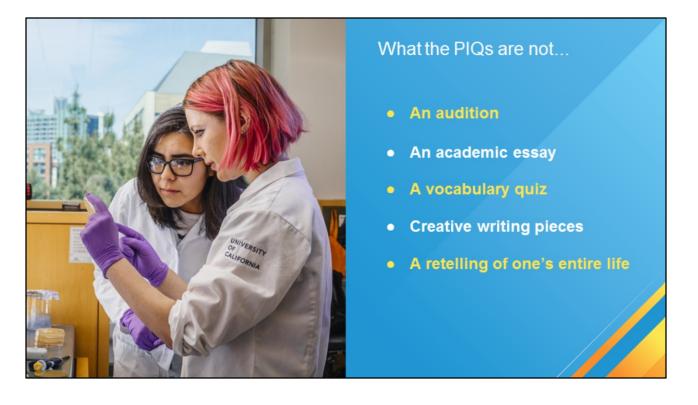


- Validate students' experiences
 - There is no perfect formula for a "strong" PIQ. Rather, students should focus on providing information and context about themselves that we don't otherwise have.
 - There is no particular topic that students "must" write about.
 - "Leadership" is broadly defined. It may be in an employment position, as a contributor to the family economic situation, as a sibling responsible for younger siblings or an elderly relative. It is not limited to school clubs and organizations, nor traditional leadership roles.
 - Students can write, within reason, using their natural voices. This is not an academic essay; it is strongly encouraged for students to speak from the "I."
- Students should utilize narrative opportunities as best they can (descriptions of extracurricular activities, awards/honors, special programs; additional comments sections; PIQs)
 - While each response is "brief," much context can be provided concisely.
 - Avoid repetition. If something has already been addressed elsewhere in the application, use the available space for: a) a different topic, b) highlighting a different perspective of the same topic.
 - UC considers content, not necessarily structure there is no need to concentrate on writing style, poetry, comedy, or even raps.

- Making use of all narrative components of the UC App
 - Topics mentioned in the PIQs that aren't mentioned anywhere else.
 - Additional comments how to utilize, not a space for PIQ #5.
 - Question #8 is not a question to summarize everything that has already been said.
- Demystify the perceived "need" to address "the perfect 4": leadership, creativity, standing out, academics
 - Not everyone has a creative side, and creativity doesn't only encompass studio or fine arts.
 - Not everyone has faced what may be deemed "a significant challenge".
 - Student may feel challenged by not pursuing a "traditional" major.
- Supporting students
 - Start their first draft by talking out loud
 - Start by writing similarly to a journal entry, without concern for word count.
 - Take sufficient breaks between drafts and reviews/proofreading.
 - The whole application should reveal good representation of their interests in and out of the classroom.
 - Provides a lens through which to understand other components of the application.
 - Students should be their own best advocate.
 - Proofread to ensure it makes sense to readers; using the appropriate language, grammar, no extra words.
 - Students can write about whatever topics they'd like
 - What's most helpful is to understand the student in their own words, from their own perspective.
 - Highlighting interests that may or may not be a class.
 - There is a misconception that students are not allowed to write about their identities, ideals, values, or beliefs. While not true, it *is* more important to focus on how these have impacted, or why they are important to, the student.
- Remind students not to focus too much on the wording of the question
 - It adds value to the application when a student provides context through their narrative components.
 - Campuses do not assess or grade whether or not, or to what extent, a student responds to a specific question.



PIQs are an opportunity for students to showcase themselves; their interests, their experiences, their highlights. While it is unlikely for students to share their entire life's story in one (or four) PIQ responses, they are able to provide a snapshot of these pieces. They are **personal** because they are about them. UC wants to know who students are when we review these responses as components of the overall UC application.



PIQ responses are not an audition or portfolio piece wherein students sample their writing styles to Admissions. They are not academic essays in which students must have topic and concluding sentences, or "hooks" to capture the attention of admission readers. They should not be a repository of SAT words and advanced lexicon akin to the sesquipedalian prose of research journals. Finally, they should not be a complex survey of a student's life; rather than listing out life events, students should focus on 1-2 examples in each as a way of providing highlights when the application is reviewed.



