



WRITING CENTER

Library and Academic Resource Center (LARC 229)
www.lavc.edu/tutor | 818-947-2810

Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logos

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT/ ADMISSION ESSAY

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT:

- Serves as a comprehensive review process that enriches and completes your application and allows you to make the best case for why you should be admitted to a University.
- Clarifies the information you have written to distinguish you from other applicants, providing richness and meaning to your application.
- Introduces your by providing an understanding of you as an individual through the context of your family, school, and community.
- Provides an opportunity to explain any information that might not be evident in any other part of the application.

Depending on which school you are applying to, you may either be asked to write a general, comprehensive personal statement or to respond to specific questions. The following suggestions can be applied to either type of statement; however, for those schools requesting a response to specific questions, the applicants' response should be adjusted accordingly.

UC PROMPT INFORMATION:

- You have 1,000 words or less to answer the first two prompts and 500 words or less to answer the "Additional Comments" section.
- You may wish to divide the word count between the first two prompts, but neither response should be any less than 250 words.
- You can write up to 1012 words.

QUESTIONS AND POINTS TO CONSIDER FOR UC PERSONAL STATEMENTS:

#1: 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.

- Generally, you should focus on recent activities and experiences; however, most Universities are also interested in any special circumstances that may have had a significant impact on your earlier life that have been instrumental in deciding on a particular major.
- Use specific, concrete examples when explaining how your interest in the subject developed. Avoid general statements that lack detail and personal experience.

#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?

- Include thoughtful, incisive reflection, providing some sense of who you are. This selection may include personal qualities including but not limited to, leadership, self- discipline, tenacity, maturation, and commitment to others.
- If you are involved at your community college, or volunteer in your community, do not just list these activities as part of your statement; write about how these activities have enhanced your educational experience.

#3: Enter Additional Comments

- If there are any circumstances not evident in your application that may have affected your academic performance, explain these circumstances and discuss how you responded to them.
- For example, if you work full-time to support yourself and/or your family, are married and have children, are a first generation college student, or a single parent, describe how that experience has affected your educational process. If you haven't been able to get a class due to budget constraints and cancelled classes, you can make note of it in this section.

UC PROGRAMS WITH HIGHLY SELECTIVE MAJORS:

If you are applying to the following schools and majors, UC recommends dedicating 750 words to question # 1, so you can explain in detail your interest in the major. For these programs, admissions decisions are determined by the department rather than the general admissions office.

UCLA:

- Theatre
- Film/TV
- Majors in College of Arts and Architecture: Architectural Studies, Art, Design/Media Arts, Ethnomusicology, Music, World Arts/Culture
- Engineering
- Communication Studies
- Nursing

UCSB:

- Engineering
- Creative Studies

UCB

- Engineering
- Environmental Design
- Haas School of Business
- Chemistry

USC PROMPT INFORMATION:

- **Essay:** There are 3 writing prompts to choose from where you will be asked to write an essay of 500-700 words.
- **Short Answers:** The second part consists of answering 3 questions, and a fourth question is optional to answer.
 - A. Tell us about an activity that is important to you and why.
 - B. Describe your academic interests and how you plan to pursue them at USC. It is important to address your first and second choice major selections.
 - C. Why are you planning to transfer to USC?
 - D. If you believe there is any information relevant to our consideration of you as an applicant that is not already contained in your application, feel free to explain on an additional sheet.

- **Quick Takes Section:** You will be asked to respond to **each** of the following topics in one sentence or less, and single word answers will suffice. Be sure to fill out this section completely. USC representatives have indicated that this is an important section of the personal statement since it will provide the reader's with a more developed understanding of the application.
 - three words that describe you
 - favorite leisure activity
 - favorite food
 - last book you read for pleasure
 - role model
 - best movie of all time
 - favorite musical performer/band/composer
 - favorite quote
 - most prized possession
 - dream job

Activity Summary: Describe your activities briefly. You will only have one side of a single page to answer all of the prompts. For each activity, use this format: name of activity, grades you were involved in it, number of hours per week, number of weeks per year, description of the activity, and your role.

- activities and organizations participated in and offices held
- honors and awards received
- work experience
- summer experience, travel experience, and/or conferences/special events attended
- unusual hobbies or other special background experiences
- gaps in education since high school, providing a chronological list of activities since then
- Your courses in progress including fall, winter, and spring semesters. Also include unit values.

For all sections: You are required to affix one of your personal barcodes to each page. If you don't have a bar code, write your name and USC ID number at the top of each page.

MISTAKES TO AVOID FOR ALL PERSONAL STATEMENTS:

- Failing to recognize the importance of the personal statement.

- Waiting until just before your deadline to begin work on the statement.
- Submitting a statement that is more generic than personal.
- Filling your statement with clichés.
- Using the same examples for both prompts.
- Submitting your essay with typos and grammatical errors.
- The personal statement is not an exhaustive list of activities, honors, and awards but rather a judicious selection of important achievements.
- The personal statement is not an exaggeration of problems but an acceptance of responsibility for choices and behaviors.

SOME ADVICE FOR ALL APPLICANTS:

- Start on your personal statement as early as possible to allow enough time for revisions.
- Read the instructions very carefully and answer the prompt. Make sure to follow the directions.
- Concentrate on your opening paragraph, as this is generally the most important in grabbing the reader’s attention.
- Be specific, use concrete language, show, rather than tell, using specific examples to illustrate your ideas.
- Write in your own voice, speaking honestly about yourself and where you have come from. The school wants to know who you are.
- Be careful with humor.
- Be focused, clear, and organized in order to avoid confusing your reader.
- Do not “manufacture” hardship or whine—instead, show how you confronted and overcame.
- If you haven’t had any significant obstacles or hardships, explain how you have taken advantage of your situation.
- After writing the first draft, allow the essay to sit, and then come back to review it with a fresh perspective.
- Show your draft to a tutor, counselor, or a UC representative. Ask for a critique of your writing.
- Complete all of the required classes by the end of the Spring semester. If possible, complete critical thinking and transferable math courses by the end of the winter session.

- For highly competitive majors, complete “recommended” classes by the end of the Spring semester.
- If you are a veteran, be sure to include some mention of this in the personal statement as UC is taking this into consideration.

REMEMBER:

- No single perfect personal statement exists. There is only the personal statement that is right for the person who is submitting it.
- The personal statement is one of the many pieces of information considered in reviewing your application; an admission decision will not be based on the personal statement alone.
- If the reader has learned little about you after reading your personal statement, then it has not been effective.

COMPELLING PERSONAL STATEMENTS INCLUDE DISCUSSION OF:

- Personal or academic recognition, activities, talents, and abilities.
- Initiative, motivation, leadership, service to others, and/or experience with other cultures.
- Achievements despite the lack of opportunities available to you.
- Unusual circumstances, challenges, or hardships you faced and what you have learned from such experiences.

The questions for generating ideas are based on the following source:

Writing the Personal Statement. 9 September 2003. Purdue Online Writing Lab. 15 September 2003.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html

Rev: 6/14/18

PERSONAL STATEMENT WORKSHEET

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE WRITING TO GENERATE IDEAS

1. What are your career goals? How did they develop over the years?
2. Why might you be a stronger candidate and more effective in the profession than other applicants?
3. What have you learned about your major through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences or conversations with people already in the field?
4. What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that improve your prospects for success in the field of your profession? What examples can you provide to prove that you have these characteristics?
5. What's special unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your own life story?
6. If you worked throughout your college years, what have you learned (leadership, managerial skills, etc), and how has the work contributed to your growth?
7. What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people, or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
8. Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (like a distinct pattern in your GPA if it was only at the beginning)?
9. Have you had to overcome any hardships or unusual obstacles (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
10. What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admission committee to be interested in you?

Note: Questions 1-4 correspond to UC question #1. Questions 5-7 correspond to UC question #2. Questions 8 and 9 correspond to the "additional comments" section of the UC application.