

Guidelines for Writing Your Fall 2017 UC Personal Insight Questions (for Fall 2018 Admission)

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- **Be sure to look at these important websites before you get started:**
 - Palomar College Transfer Center website:
 - <http://www.palomar.edu/counseling/transfercenter/>
 - Video about the Personal Insight Questions done by the UC system:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v620ZAeTOo8>
 - Tips from about the writing process:
 - <http://admissions.berkeley.edu/personalstatement>
 - <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/transfer/index.html>
 - <https://www.ucdavis.edu/admissions/undergraduate/apply/personal-insight-questions>
 - <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/writing-tips/index.html>
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- **Starting in Fall 2016, the UC's have moved away from longer essays and now are requiring four shorter responses for transfer applicants**
 - Each transfer applicant has to write about one required question, and then can choose to write about 3 out of 7 other questions.
 - **Each response is limited to 350 words maximum.**
 - They are *not* meant to be actual essays any more.
 - The UC reps who did a workshop for two-year college counselors said to think of each response as “a long Tweet.”
 - **Purpose of the UC Personal Insight Questions:**
 - The UC questions are used as part of the Comprehensive Review process. The Admissions Office uses your statements to take into account you as a whole person – not just your GPA and academic preparation.
 - Your responses basically help answer the question: “What do we know about this person?”
 - As of fall 2011, only three schools use the questions in the admissions process: Berkeley, UCLA, and Irvine. They are otherwise used for decisions regarding impacted majors and scholarships.
 - The readers of your essays are UC faculty, local high school and community college counselors, and local high school and community college teachers/instructors.
 - When asked for advice to give writers, the UC faculty who read the responses said this:
 - “While it is acceptable to receive feedback or helpful suggestions, applicants’ personal statements should reflect their own ideas and be written by them alone. . . . Be honest, relate your ideas to your current goals, and use *recent* experiences.”

▪ **In your responses, the UC's are trying to learn more about you as an individual:**

- The UC schools that look carefully at your responses want to understand the circumstances under which you have or have not yet fully achieved your academic potential.
- They want to know more about your character, your educational values, and your life goals, especially as they relate to your major.
 - They want to see your personal characteristics, such as creativity, intellectual curiosity, initiative, ability to overcome hardship, motivation, leadership, service to others, exceptional activities, academic recognition, etc.
- The UC schools also want to know what and how you will add to the diversity of the entering transfer class.
- In particular, they want to see that transfer students have been *working* or have taken on *responsibilities*.
- As you begin to write your statements, think about the lessons you've learned from your hardships, challenges you have faced, and obstacles you have faced.
- As mentioned on the UC application website, "There is no right or wrong way to answer these questions: It's about getting to know your personality, background, interests and achievements in your own unique voice."

• **Important general strategies:**

- Before you begin writing, remember your audience -- an admissions reader who does not know about you and your background.
 - Thinking of this will help you try to answer and address any questions a reader might have about your background and qualifications.
- Even though you'll be writing about yourself, you need to try to step back and look at your experiences from the outside – ask yourself *why*?
 - As a first step, look at your application from an outsider's perspective and write down as many questions as you can think of about yourself.
 - Be sure to look carefully at those areas that may seem too familiar to you; to an outside reader, they could provide interesting, unique information.
 - Ask yourself these questions: *What kind of image of myself do I want to present? What areas of my life seem weakest? Strongest? Most unique?*
 - Again, if you're having trouble with this, ask your closest friends and family members to describe what they think are your most unique qualities and experiences.
 - Do your application and personal statement responses together portray who you are, or do they leave unanswered questions?

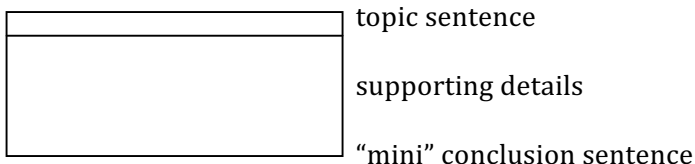
- As you write, try to paint a picture of your unique qualities. Focus the unique qualities and experiences that make you stand out from the next student. These qualities are what you want to emphasize in your essays.
 - Don't just *list/tell* us about your characteristics; rather, *show* them!
 - *Showing vs. telling*
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- **Pre-Writing/Brainstorming/Planning Your Essays:**

- Be sure to choose questions where you won't be repeating information about yourself. Make sure that the three open questions you choose allow you to showcase different aspects of your personality, talents, and skills.
 - As noted on the UC transfer website, "All questions are equal: All questions are given equal consideration in the application review process, which means there is no advantage or disadvantage to choosing certain questions over others."
 - If you're having a hard time coming up with information about yourself, try doing some brainstorming (use a worksheet designed for this purpose) or ask your closest family members and friends for their outside perspective.
 - How do they view you? What do they think your greatest strengths or most unique experiences are?
 - As you plan your essays, think of vivid, memorable examples that you can use.
 - Don't just list accomplishments, activities, awards, or work experiences.
 - Instead, expand on one topic in depth by using specific, concrete examples.
 - Avoid a collection of facts or examples; instead of just listing a bunch of your experiences, take the time to explain one or two of those experiences in detail/depth.
 - A well-explained example of a club you participated in will be much more memorable than a general, vague list of a bunch of clubs.
 - When doing your rough draft, try some freewriting/"vomit on the page" to get your ideas out of your head and flowing onto the page.
 - The idea is to *vomit on the page, and then clean it up afterwards.*
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- **Make the structure of each paragraph clear for your readers:**

- Think of each paragraph you write as a sandwich:
 - Your topic sentence and your "mini"-conclusion are your layers of bread.
 - Your supporting details are the filling.



- Start each body paragraph with a topic sentence that states the main idea or main point of that paragraph and that also makes a claim – *what does this mean?*
 - Fill each body paragraph with vivid, interesting details and examples. You want your examples and details to be *memorable* – they should stand out in your readers' minds.
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- **Other practical tips for writing your responses:**

- As a piece of advice, write your responses in a word processing program first, save them in a plain text format, then cut/paste into the essay area when your responses are in their final drafts.
 - Your application will time out after 40 minutes of inactivity, and the page you're working on will not be saved, which is why it's a good idea to write them in a word processing program first.
 - Remember that each response should only focus on *one topic*. Don't try to squeeze two or more topics into one essay.
 - Remember that you should be writing in a persuasive way – to convince the UC schools that you are the perfect fit for their system.
 - Do use "I/me/my" when writing your essays. If you don't use these first-person pronouns, your writing will sound odd.
 - Avoid clichés and filler words:
 - Avoid predictable phrases like "I learned a lot," "I learned to work with others," or "It was a fun and challenging experience."
 - Also avoid fillers like "basically," "really," "goals and dreams."
 - Use active verbs – use grammar check to help you catch passive voice:
 - original: My love of science was fostered by my biology instructor.
 - revised: My biology instructor fostered my love of science.
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- **Required Question: Please describe how you have prepared for your intended major, including your readiness to succeed in your upper-division courses once you enroll at the university.**
 - Things to consider:
 - How did your interest in your major develop?
 - Do you have any experience related to your major outside the classroom — such as volunteer work, internships and employment, or participation in student organizations and activities?
 - If you haven't had experience in the field, consider including experience in the classroom. This may include working with faculty or doing research projects.
 - Some questions to help you brainstorm topics for this essay question include:
 - What experiences have you had that have led you to your choice of major?
 - What have you done that has led you closer to your goal?
 - What opportunities have been available to you? Why have you chosen to do what you have done? How have you grown as a result of these opportunities?
 - What choices have you made and what have you gained from those choices?
 - If you have participated in any projects or activities or clubs that are related to your major (such as The Pre-Med Club, English Majors Group, EOPS or TRIO) or if you have participated in any projects and activities related to your major (such as lab experiences, internships, special opportunities to do field work or experiments, etc.), then definitely discuss those experiences in detail!
 - This is especially important to do if you don't have any work or volunteer experience.
 - As mentioned on the UC website, "If you're applying to multiple campuses with a different major at each campus, think about approaching the topic from a broader perspective, or find a common thread among the majors you've chosen."

- **Choose to answer any three of the following seven questions:**
 1. **Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.**
 - Things to consider:
 - A leadership role can mean more than just a title. It can mean being a mentor to others, acting as the person in charge of a specific task, or taking lead role in organizing an event or project. Think about your accomplishments and what you learned from the experience. What were your responsibilities?
 - Did you lead a team? How did your experience change your perspective on leading others?

- Did you help to resolve an important dispute at your school, church in your community or an organization?
 - And your leadership role doesn't necessarily have to be limited to school activities. For example, do you help out or take care of your family?
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2. 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.

▪ Things to consider:

- What does creativity mean to you?
 - Can you think of a time when your viewpoint was really unique?
 - Do you have a creative skill that is important to you? What have you been able to do with that skill?
 - If you used creativity to solve a problem, what was your solution? What are the steps you took to solve the problem? How did your imagination and intuition guide you to help you solve that problem?
 - How does your creativity influence your decisions inside or outside the classroom?
 - Does your creativity relate to your major or a future career?
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3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

▪ Things to consider:

- If there's a talent or skill that you're proud of, this is the time to share it.
- You don't necessarily have to be recognized or have received awards for your talent (although if you did and you want to talk about, feel free to do so).
- What talent, experience, contribution, or personal quality best expresses your character? Why is this talent or skill meaningful to you?
- Does the talent come naturally or have you worked hard to develop this skill or talent?
- Does your talent or skill allow you opportunities in or outside the classroom? If so, what are they and how do they fit into your schedule?
- How does it define your ability to contribute to the campus community?

- Here are some examples of what you can discuss for Question 3:
 - Older students might mention the significance of your life experiences relative to your educational goals.
 - Military vets may talk about military service.
 - First-generation college students can discuss how being at Palomar has shaped you.
 - If you are working to pay for all or part of your education, you can discuss that, too.
 - You can also discuss how you overcame problems related to grades or gaps (missing time periods) in your education. For instance, if you took a few years or semester off, admission readers will wonder why that was, so you should try to address that issue.
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4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

- Things to consider:
 - An educational opportunity can be anything that has added value to your educational experience and better prepared you for college. For example, participation in an honors or academic enrichment program, or enrollment in an academy that's geared toward an occupation or a major, or taking advanced courses that interest you — just to name a few.
 - If you choose to write about educational barriers you've faced, how did you overcome or strive to overcome them?
 - What personal characteristics or skills did you call on to overcome this challenge?
 - How did overcoming this barrier help shape who are you today?
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5. 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?

- Things to consider:
 - A challenge could be personal, or something you have faced in your community or school. Why was the challenge significant to you?
 - This is a good opportunity to talk about any obstacles you've faced and what you've learned from the experience. Did you have support from someone else or did you handle it alone?
 - If you're currently working your way through a challenge, what are you doing now, and does that affect different aspects of your life?

- For example, ask yourself, “How has my life changed at home, at my school, with my friends, or with my family?”
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6. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

- Things to consider:
 - You can look at even small things you’ve done that have had an impact on your community.
 - Think of “community” as a term that can encompass a group, team or a place – like your high school, hometown, or home. You can define community as you see fit, just make sure you talk about your role in that community.
 - Was there a problem that you wanted to fix in your community?
 - Why were you inspired to act? What did you learn from your effort?
 - How did your actions benefit others, the wider community or both?
 - Did you work alone or with others to initiate change in your community?
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7. What is the one thing that you think sets you apart from other candidates applying to the University of California?

- Things to consider:
 - As the UC website says for this question, “Don’t be afraid to brag a little. Even if you don’t think you’re unique, you are — remember, there’s only one of you in the world.”
 - From your point of view, what do you feel makes you belong on one of UC’s campuses?
 - When looking at your life, what does a stranger need to understand in order to know you?
 - What have you not already shared in your responses that will highlight a skill, talent, challenge, or opportunity that you think will help us know you better? The UC’s are not necessarily looking for what makes you unique compared to others, but what makes you YOU.
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- **For military veterans:**

- The University of California gives priority consideration to **qualified** veterans who apply for admission
 - applicants are encouraged to use the personal statement to:
 - (1) describe how military service has been instrumental in developing their educational plans
 - (2) indicate if s/he is entitled to educational benefits as a result of military service or the service-connected death or disability of a parent or spouse, or
 - (3) indicate if applicant is affiliated with the military such as, but not limited to, the spouse or dependent of someone who is on active duty or a current participant in an ROTC-type program.
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- **Where to get additional help with your responses here at Palomar College:**

- The English Writing Center located in Humanities-102
 - The Tutoring Center at the library
 - The Transfer Center
 - Located by the Counseling Front Desk
 - At the various application workshops hosted by the Transfer Center each fall
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Be sure to get started early, and good luck with the process!

** Some examples and information on this handout were taken from the UC Gateways website.*