

UC:

**PERSONAL
INSIGHT
QUESTIONS**

**“IF I WAITED TILL I FELT LIKE
WRITING,**

I’D NEVER WRITE AT ALL.”

~~ Anne Tyler

THE BASICS

- Each question aligns to one or more of the 14 comprehensive review factors (Google these)
 - Outstanding work in one or more special projects in academic field of study
 - Special talents, such as visual arts, communication or athletics, intensive study of other cultures, community service, student gov't, etc.
- Must respond to 4 of the 8 questions
- Maximum of 350 words each response
- Select questions relevant to your individual experiences/circumstances
- All questions have equal value

- NOTE: These are NOT essay prompts.
- This is like an interview, but not in person

PURPOSE OF THE PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS

- ❖ Express who you are and what guides you
 - ❖ Tell your own experience – in your own words
 - ❖ Explain your engagement with people/ideas
 - ❖ Provide insight into your motivation or drive, qualities or characteristics
 - ❖ Describe achievements
 - ❖ Provide Context – why UC, gaps in education, etc.
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- ❖ **FINAL PRODUCT: Does Admissions have a broad picture of you and your interests and abilities after reading your responses?**

GOALS OF YOUR PERSONAL WRITING:

- This is your opportunity to have admissions reps for the UC get to know YOU.
- Advance your candidacy. After reading your essay, does admissions feel you are more compelling than before?
- **Reveal what makes you human – something from your heart.**
- Be likable and memorable.
- **Maintain authentic teenage voice.**
- Provide truths instead of facts:
- Fact: I have two moms.
- Truth: Growing up with two moms made me really think of who I am in relation to those around me. I am a strong person who can handle adversity. I am open minded and welcome ideas outside the norm.

UC PIQ #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.
 - Leadership is broad (can be in school, family, ROCK, ComAcad, club, athletics, band)
 - Disputes can involve you or others
 - Peer Resource
 - Use a sophisticated vocabulary – Avoid jargon: like, very, totally, really, really, totally, very
 - Devin Williams – Travel to Mars
 - **Lisa's College & Career Center website!!!**

UC PIQ #1 - DEVIN WILLIAMS (SHORTENED)

- Two years ago, my class traveled to Mars. We built a base complete with solar panels, radiation shielding, and vegetable farms. We utilized the natural resources on Mars to the fullest, intentionally building our base near potential sources of water. We even wrote up a mock Mayflower Compact to govern our new Martian society. ... Although I was merely a high school sophomore, I was the captain of this mission. My crew members were three high school freshman – all of them inexperienced in planet colonization.
- We received new assignments every week. there was pressure to tackle our new goals at a fast pace, so we had to work fast and efficiently. Unfortunately, four people with strong opinions arguing about every detail was not very efficient.
- From my experience with the dynamics of group projects and how to make them a success, I knew that I had to step up and take lead of our team. I had already been through a year of grueling group projects, and understood how overwhelmingly stressed the freshmen were. This made it easy to empathize with them; I was able to suggest forms of compromise, because I knew what had worked for me in the past.
- Now whenever I am working within a group and we fall into dysfunctional chaos, I take a step back and remind myself that I traveled to Mars and survived. And if I could do that, anything is possible.

UC PIQ #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.
 - Know that creativity knows no bounds
 - Know you each have something creative (ask your parents or peers if you are stumped)
 - Ella Ross - ceramics

UC PIQ #2 – ELLA ROSS (SHORTENED)

- When I look at my ceramics pieces, there is a distinctive difference between my work and my classmate's smooth, uniform bowls.
- "Your vases are so...unique," my teacher kindly observes. Every blue vase leans slightly to the left, resembling the leaning Tower of Pisa more than an object meant to hold daisies.
- Regardless of shapes, ceramics is the class I look forward to every day. My hands itch to create and sculpt my visions onto a blank 3D canvas. It allows me to display my emotions through a physical medium. As a dancer, I've found the transition of performing art to physical art is a natural progression. Similar to dancing, throwing ceramics requires strength, rhythm and a sense of individuality. My quirks and humor can be just as visible through cups and mugs as they are displayed through interpretive dance. ...
- My siblings and I were encouraged to try everything: baseball, softball, soccer, dance, art, music and everything in between. I've found that art in all its forms attracts me the most, despite my leaning vases.

UC PIQ'S #3 & #4

- #3: What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?
 - Unicycle, juggling, peer relationships, commt'y service, Marin SAR, cartooning, film, baking, making friends
 - Sam Martin – rock climbing
- #4: Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.
 - Classes or programs here, COM, Internships, Independent Science Research
 - Devin Williams – Summer Internship

UC PIQ #4 – DEVIN WILLIAMS (SHORTENED)

- During the summer before my junior year of high school, I had the opportunity to work as an intern for Indoor Reality, a software startup in Berkeley, California. ...
- My primary role at Indoor Reality was to design marketing emails and communicate with prospective customers. I designed emails, sent out “mass” marketing emails, made sales calls, designed and edited videos and created graphics that were used in marketing brochures. I had very real deadlines for my assignments...I worked long days that lasted from 8 am to 4 pm. ...
- During production meetings, I was encouraged to present my design work and speak up about ideas I had for improving the company’s processes and products. It was almost a surreal experience to be treated by these professionals as a peer and not just a teenager. These meetings were the most rewarding part of my internship. They taught me how to present concise and relevant ideas to a small group, and I enjoyed being able to add value to the company.
- This internship prepared me for life after high school because I was treated like an adult with adult expectations...It has given me a strong appreciation for an understanding of what a career in a tech startup is like.

UC PIQ 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? (very similar to Common App #2)
 - Specific event in time
 - Impact of challenge – How did you see yourself?
 - Be reflective
 - Articulate the lessons learned
 - Demonstrate your maturity, humility, & resilience
- Naiya DeLaure – Driving a Stick Shift

UC PIQ #5 – NAIYA DELAURE (SHORTENED)

- There's a saying that the best anti-theft car system is a manual transmission, especially against millennials. For me, academics have never been much of a challenge, and my home life has been nothing but stable...My dad believes that being a true driver means you can drive any car anywhere, so I had no choice but to learn to drive a stick. ...
- Many times I felt like quitting, and all I wanted was to learn on an automatic. But as the summer progressed, I became more and more confident on the road. In fact, I decided to take my test in a stick despite my dad's offer to find me an automatic. It was daunting because stalling even once would be an immediate fail. In the end, I took a risk and did the test in my manual VW.
- Driving manual is so unusual that when I slipped the car into neutral and put my hand back on the wheel, the test instructor thought I was waving to someone...I'm proud to have overcome this challenge and possess a skill the majority of my generation doesn't. Driving a manual transmission requires more concentration, anticipation and awareness than driving an automatic. It requires thinking, and just as with challenging academic material, the more you put into it the more rewarding it becomes.

UC PIQ'S #6 & 7

- #6: Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this inside and/or outside of the classroom(see Letter of Rec answers for your own ideas).
 - Leo Krashinov (used for Common App #6)
- #7: What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?
 - Community Garden, DLC, Wellness Advisory, Peer Resource, Body Positive, the list is endless
 - Ella Ross – Chicken poop

UC PIQ #7 – ELLA ROSS (SHORTENED)

- There's nothing more unsettling than scooping poop off the bottom of a cement chicken coop, especially when it's raining...Nobody warns you that baby chickens don't turn directly into colorful hens. At some point in between youth and adulthood, the so-called poults begin to look less like chicks and more like scrappy, extraterrestrial hybrid teenagers...
- The benefits of manure in compost were just one of the many tips I've learned about gardening from my parents. For as long as I can remember, the garden has been their sanctuary and I feel honored to help maintain it, whether weeding the strawberries, picking tomatoes or sifting manure...
- With this in mind, I've brought my knowledge of agriculture and sustainable gardening methods to my schools' eco action club. In the garden we plant vegetables, make compost from leftover food scraps, and share our produce with the community. Anyone is welcome to access the garden and take whatever they need.
- Now, as a humble compost expert, I can confidently say that I've met some of my closest friends shin-deep in soil...and it's a bond like no other.

UC PIQ #8

- Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admission to the University of California? (Very broad & similar to Common App #1)
 - Identity: your fundamental nature
 - Background: cultural, ethnic, medical, economic, familial
 - Story: circumstance, not really fixed in time
 - Make it clear & compelling
- Blake Nelson – art (also used for Common App #1)

BEST PRACTICES #1.

- Honesty
- Brevity, not exaggeration
- Risk-taking
- Self-revelation
- Fine Writing – not flowery, be concise
- Use 'I' and 'my' not 'you' or 'people'
- TEEN VOICE – Show your character & personality
- Use four different ideas, not one idea throughout all four responses
- **No one can tell your story, so tell it yourself. No one can write your story, so write it yourself.**

BEST PRACTICES #2

- Write as much as you need to write to get your thoughts out without worrying about the word count
- Proofread before submission
- Have multiple people review (i.e., counselor, Lisa Neumaier, person you don't know well, friend)
- Use one or two concrete examples to convey ideas
- Write in 1st person (I and my statements)
- Keep it professional (no crime, therapy, sarcasm, quotations, philosophical questions, drug use or profanity)

POWERFUL ESSAY TIPS!!

ESSAYS THAT DO

- Share YOUR voice
- Show GRIT
- Show passion
- Answer the ENTIRE prompt
- Are specific & Don't repeat
- Capture your essence
- Compelling for reader
- Are w/i word count
- Are written, revised, revised...finalized

ESSAYS THAT DON'T

- Are written by your mom
- Are passive
- Say passion
- Reveal others v self
- Offend the reader
- Are repetitive
- Use cliches
- Are too long
- Have spelling & punctuation errors

UC ADVICE ON WHAT TO AVOID

- Talking about one campus: You're talking to all UC campuses you apply to in your responses
- Inappropriate use of humor
- Creative writing (poems, clichés)
- Quotations: We want to know your thoughts & words, not someone else's
- Generalities: Stick to facts and personal examples
- Repetition: Give us new info. we can't find in other sections of the application
- Asking philosophical questions: Get to the point and tell us what you mean
- Acronyms: Spell it out for us!

WAYS TO GENERATE IDEAS & PLACES YOUR TALENTS SHINE!

- Time Capsule
 - Books, Photos, Trips
 - Trinkets
 - Avocado
- Box of Important Memories
 - Photos of People
 - Places
 - Artwork, Projects
 - Pets
- Special project, job (earning college funds) or internship
- STEM, robotics club, chef, dog walking business, environmental action
- Athletics, dance, martial arts
- ROCK – talent show, collaborating, daily news
- COMAcad/SEA-Disc – editing or directing video, writing screenplay, internship, ‘greening’ a business
- Mock Trial – researching case or presenting in court
- Community Service – contributing to others, travel
- Special Talent – community theatre, a capella, blog

CHOOSE THE PROPER TONE: TRIM THE FAT!

- I now propose to elaborate upon the circumstances surrounding the collision.
- **Let me tell you how I crashed my car.**
- I can't stand Physics.
- **Physics is a mystery to me.**
- I desire so fervently to attend a UC because I believe it is the only school system that will enable me to explore my intellectual capabilities.
- **During my UC visits, I was impressed by the opportunities to join the staff of the student newspapers.**

UC PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS WORKSHEET

- Read ALL 8 Questions first
- Read them again!
- This is your INTERVIEW with the admissions office
- Choose 4 of 8 questions that best speak to YOU
- Cover all major areas (your motivations, your engagement, your achievements)
- 350 MAXIMUM for each (no more than 1400 total)
- All questions are EQUAL
- EXPRESS who you are!
- If one question isn't a good fit-move on...

THREE EASY STEPS-THAT'S IT!

- **Share a personal story from your life**-Start with one that will help highlight your core values or characteristics. Find one that involves a problem (and resolution). How did you FEEL?
- **Explain how you handled that problem**-The steps you took, what inspired you to tackle it and what you learned.
- **Explore why it matters that you learned this lesson**-weave in other examples from your life where you applied it/can apply it.

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION

THIS IS STUFF YOU DO ALONE, IN A PEACEFUL AND REFLECTIVE SETTING

- The best writing is rewriting!
- Read models
- Write ideas/outlines for the UC questions – don't limit your words until the editing process
- Complete: UC Personal Insight Questions worksheet (10-15 mins each)

UNINTERRUPTED WRITING TIME IS ESSENTIAL 😊

WRITING IS A HABIT – DO IT FREQUENTLY

- It will be messy – that's OK
- Read your essays aloud (to a friend, the dog, the mirror...)
- Revise them again
- **Wednesday tutorials in fall** to assist with ideas, draft reviews, etc!
- You will be **CALM & ZEN** instead of str***ed if you wait 😊
- We will polish them together for submission

RESOURCES/SAMPLES, ETC.

- UC Admissions Personal Insight Question info/advice: <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-freshman/personal-insight-questions.html>
- Ivy Prep: Over 20 sample essays: <https://winningivyprep.com/category/uc-essay-example/>
- College Essay Guy: <https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/uc-essay-examples-personal-insight-questions>
- Prep Scholar: <https://blog.prepscholar.com/uc-personal-statement-application-essay>
- Keep in mind that all of these (except the UC Admissions page) have FREE resources & advice, but they also want to sell you their services. You DON'T need to buy anything. We will help you (Counselors & Lisa & Drake teachers)

GO FORTH & WRITE!

GETTING STARTED IS USUALLY THE HARDEST PART...

**“You can always edit a bad page.
You can’t edit a blank page.”**

~~ Jodi Picoult

Fall: Editing sessions during Tutorial in Counseling Center.

Bring your rough drafts and an Open Mind!

