



The University of California Essay Guide

The University of California (UC) Personal Insight Questions are an entirely different beast from the Common Application Personal Statement. The UC application has eight prompts, and students must answer **four** of them. Each answer must be a maximum of 350 words. For these essays, the prompts DO matter; put simply, this is a less creative, more direct task than writing a Common Application essay.

Here are our Top Tips for writing successful UC Essays:

- *Clearly and completely* answer the prompt. Many of the UC prompts have two parts (e.g. “What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?”). A good essay must answer BOTH parts of the prompt.
- GO DEEP! It’s okay to write about what’s in your resume/activities list, but don’t just tell us what you did — tell us how you grew and learned from these experiences. How have these lessons been applicable elsewhere in your life?
- Recycle your Common App Essay! Though the tasks are different, it is often possible to condense the Common Application essay (removing some of the more story-driven components) and adapt it to fit the confines of one of the UC Prompts.
- Recycle your Supplementals! There’s a good chance that you can adapt supplemental essays you write for Common App schools to fit into the confines of a UC prompt. (Or, if you write the UC essays first — adapt your UC essays to fit the confines of your Common App supplementals.) The point is, get the most mileage out of the best essays you’ve written.
- Remember: These essays are your ONE chance to show the UC system your personal qualities since the UC schools do not conduct interviews and many UC schools do not accept letters of recommendation. Make them count! Don’t wait until the last minute — give yourself ample time to write multiple drafts, revise, and polish.