



The UC Personal Insight Questions: How Students Can Share Their Story Effectively

**ENSURING
TRANSFER
SUCCESS 2018**

**UNIVERSITY
OF
CALIFORNIA**

Agenda

- Purpose of the personal insight questions
- Basics of the personal insight questions
- General tips for writing the personal insight questions
- Sample responses
- Strategies for effective writing
- Resources

Purpose of the Personal Insight Questions

Purpose

- Beyond academics or what is already listed on the application, allows students to **express who they are, what matters to them, and what they want UC to know**
- Allows the student to tell **THEIR OWN story**, such as their aspirations, talents, obstacles, accomplishments, and inspiration
 - Extracurricular Activities
 - Employment
 - Research
 - Home Environment
- Can be used for **selection** and **scholarships**, depending on the campus
- Provides **context**; allows students to elaborate rather than list
 - Experiences
 - Gaps in education
 - Grade trends
 - Unusual circumstances



Basics of the Personal Insight Questions

Basics

Each question aligns to one or more of the **nine comprehensive review factors** for transfer students that campuses consider in their admission decisions.

- Transfer applicants must respond to **one required question**, then choose **3 additional questions out of 7**
- Maximum of **350 words** for each response
- All questions have **equal value**; there is no advantage or disadvantage to choosing certain questions over others

General Tips for Writing Personal Insight Questions

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.

Required Question - Tips

- How did interest in the major develop?
- Describe any experience related to the major outside the classroom- volunteer work, internships, etc.
- If no experience in the field, include classroom experiences such as research, projects and/or work with faculty
- If applying for different majors at multiple campuses, approach from a broader perspective to encompass the majors or field chosen
- Remember that all campuses read the same response – students should ensure they answer the question without focusing on one campus

Select 3 from the following

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.
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.
3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?
4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.
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?
6. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?
7. 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?

Tips on each question



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.
 - **Effective:** Pick 1 or 2 times in life where the student took the lead. Leadership can be expressed at home, at work, in the classroom, or in the community. What came from their leadership? Can they connect this outcome to their chosen major or career interest?
 - **Less Effective:**
 - i. Talking only about another person. A grandfather/professor/teammate isn't the one applying—the response should address the student.
 - ii. Using acronyms or quotes is not as helpful as using the student's own words.

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.
 - **Effective:** This question isn't just for those applying to an art degree. "Creativity" can be a unique idea or viewpoint that resulted in something positive, an innovation at work, or simply creating something new.
 - **Less Effective:**
 - i. Choosing a hobby or unrelated activity that doesn't have a connection to the major or future career. Creating connections provides better context for the reader.
 - ii. Creative writing. Students should focus on how they have developed, expressed or been recognized for their creativity. We're not reading for style, but for substantive information about the student.

Tips on each question

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

- **Effective:** Describe talent or skill within context of college experience vs. high school.
- **Less Effective:** Staying vague and excluding concrete examples (i.e., the “when”). Succinct details are better!

4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

- **Effective:** Staying within the parameters of the educational experience, and choosing either the opportunity OR the barrier. Focus can be on providing enough detail and context to the response.
 - Educational opportunities may include transfer preparation programs, internships, research opportunities, international experiences, or community service.
 - Educational barriers should reflect anything that has impacted ability to access and success throughout the educational journey. *Past responses have included but are not limited to:*
 - i. commuting time
 - ii. a traumatic event
 - iii. medical challenges
 - iv. family circumstances
 - v. full-time employment
 - vi. times when well-being was compromised
 - vii. an undiagnosed or severe learning difference
 - viii. financial challenges
- **Less Effective:** Not including what was learned from the opportunity or how the student overcame the barrier. Students must answer the full question.



Tips on each question

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?

- **Effective:** How and in what ways did encountering a challenge impact the transfer journey? How did it shape who the student is today? *The question is meant to encompass all life's challenges in and out of class. Past responses have included but are not limited to:*
 - i. Being successful in a particularly challenging course or opportunity
 - ii. Discussing how the students' culture/sexual orientation/gender impacted academic achievement
 - iii. Discussing the effect of incarceration or being system-impacted
 - iv. Circumstances surrounding gaps in education
 - v. Poor grades or withdrawing from an entire academic term
 - vi. Returning to college after 'long' absence
 - vii. Military service
- **Less Effective:**
 - i. Only describing the obstacle and not how it was resolved or what was learned from it
 - ii. Focusing on others rather than on oneself (i.e. growth of another instead of the student's)

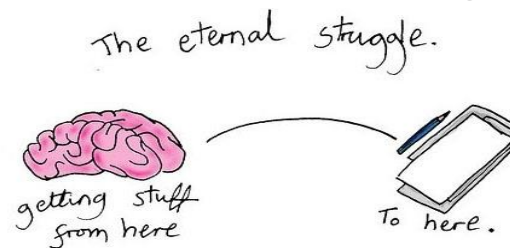
Tips on each question

6. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

- **Effective:** Even small changes can make a big impact! What inspired the student to act? If a group effort, what was the student's specific role?
- **Less Effective:** Taking credit for, but not citing a clear example of, how the student created change

7. 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?

- **Effective:** Is there something the University should know but the student hasn't addressed yet? What is the student looking forward to at UC? Why UC and why now? What is the student especially proud about that may not stand out in the application?
- **Less Effective:** Repeating points already fully addressed, academically or otherwise. Using very general statements without specific examples and comparing oneself to ALL other applicants.



Select Examples of PIQ Responses

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.

Student A

Primary Majors Selected: **Pharmacological Chemistry, Biology**

Work Experience

None Reported

Extracurricular Activities

Activity & Description	Years	Hrs	Wks
IVC'S Honors Program The Irvine Valley College Honors Program is designed to meet the needs of academically talented and highly motivated students with coursework and opportunities.	12th+ (1)	10	16
Eco Club Eco Club recycles, gardens and attends eco-friendly competitions. I've held positions as Secretary and Historian. I managed the garden and capture our work.	10th 11th 12th	2	30
HOSA: Future Health Profs. HOSA is a nat. student org. recognized by the U.S. Dept. of Edu. and the Health Sci. Edu. Div. of ACTE. I held position as Historian for Region 5: Apple Valley.	11th 12th	3	39
PEER Helpers PEERs help students stay focused on their schoolwork. We guide and counsel students through their own personal struggles and engage in active listening skills.	12th	2	39
Youth Advisory Board YAB budgets , troubleshoots and manages after school programs. Since I'm the Spiritorian Officer , I also promote any after school clubs , activities or events.	12th	2	30

Value-Added Response

My eight-week long internship at Baldwin Park's Kaiser Permanente In-patient Pharmacy developed my interest for academic disciplines regarding pharmacy. I became intrigued by the tasks that pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and supervisors would conduct throughout the In-patient Pharmacy. **My experience with shadowing the work of the pharmacy staff furthered my interest once I was permitted to handle and distribute medications with automated med stations, prepare chemotherapy solutions of arsenic trioxide, and arrange intravenous solutions in the completely sterile IV room.** Once I completed my internship in August of 2016, I began to think about pursuing a career in the pharmaceutical field. Being a junior in high school at the time, I immediately began researching universities that offered a major in pharmaceutical studies as well as the career opportunities available once I could attain a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree. With this information in mind, I applied to Irvine Valley College after high school with the intent to save money and transfer to a four-year university as a pharmacy major. To achieve this goal, **I continue to converse with career counselors at IVC as well as with representatives of undergraduate pharmacy programs that universities such as UC Irvine and UC San Diego offer.** I even refer to the network of healthcare professionals I established from my internship at Kaiser Permanente by acquiring their feedback about the educational path I intend to take for my career goal. **My readiness to succeed in upper-division courses at a university has been established from the new knowledge and support I have gained at IVC while completing my major-preparation courses. My preparation at IVC has also helped me achieve a mindset that is ready to accept the next challenge and ultimately embark on the next chapter of my educational journey at a university that would consist of completing upper-division courses and applying to a pharmacy school.** All these steps that I have taken and continue to take have prepared me to pursue my major in pharmaceutical studies at a University of California campus.

Value Added

1. Addresses interest in major or field

“My eight-week long internship at Baldwin Park's Kaiser Permanente In-patient Pharmacy developed my interest for academic disciplines regarding pharmacy.”

2. Connects extracurricular preparation to major

“I became intrigued by the tasks that pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and supervisors would conduct throughout the In-patient Pharmacy... applied to Irvine Valley College after high school with the intent to save money and transfer to a four-year university as a pharmacy major. To achieve this goal, I continue to converse with career counselors at IVC as well as with representatives of undergraduate pharmacy programs that universities such as UC Irvine and UC San Diego offer.”

3. Reflects on past experiences in preparation for upper division courses

“My preparation at PCC has also helped me achieve a mindset that is ready to accept the next challenge and ultimately embark on the next chapter of my educational journey at a university that would consist of completing upper-division courses and applying to a pharmacy school.”



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.

Student B

Primary Majors Selected: **Astrophysics and Physics**

Work Experience

Title & Responsibilities	Years	Hrs	Duration
Mental Health Peer Educator Promote mental health and increase awareness through tabling, social media, classroom presentations. Receive training on various topics related to mental health	12th+ (2)	15 (Sch)	02/2016 - present
Intern ASSURE REU from Space Sciences Laboratory at UC Berkeley. Collaborate with the Megamovie Solar Eclipse project while improving programming and research skills	12th+ (1)	8 (Smr)	06/2017 - 10/2017
Cashier Taking and cashing orders, attending customers, phone calls, and online orders, maintaining the establishment organized and clean, packing meals.	12th+ (1)	22 (Sch)	08/2016 - 09/2016
Summer Camp Counselor During 9 days the campers (6 - 8 y-o) were guided through the activities, such as games, workshops and quests, learning about values and morals, all in English.	12th+ (1)	162 (Smr)	07/2016 - 07/2016
Administrative Assistant Greeting customers, providing information about products and services, taking phone calls, scheduling appointments, answering emails and translating documents.	10th 11th 12th	4 (Sch)	06/2013 - 07/2015

Extracurricular Activities

None Reported

Neutral Response

I have prepared for the upper-division classes at the university by looking at each particular university and seeing what classes I would take. I then will look the class up on youtube and see what the class takes. For instance how much does the upper division thermodynamics class require you remember from the first physics course you take your freshman year. I also look at the previous test posted by the professors online and see what I do and do not know, I also look at how the test are graded and which methods the professors want the students to utilize to solve the problems. This gives me a head start on what could potentially be upcoming in the future classes. **I go on YouTube and try to see if I can kind the class and correlate it to the test to see if I can tie a connect from a lecture to the test.** I also use that as a gateway to gage to see if I like their style of teaching, or if I can understand the professor because some of them can have a really difficult accent to understand. **I have visited every UC campus that I am applying for so I know what the campus looks in person and I know exactly what I am getting myself into for each unique university. I am not going blindly in, I have the tools that I will need to succeed at any university I choose to go to. I will have all my lower division preparation completed and I have followed assits.org course pattern as much as I possibly could.**

Neutral Response

1. Missed opportunity to address major or field of interest.

Student discusses preparation for upper division coursework but is unclear on what major or field she is interested.

2. Vague or limited discussion of other experiences.

Response could be strengthened with additional context from activities or other experiences that contributed to interest in major.



Student didn't "unmask" herself

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.

Student C

Primary Majors Selected: **Anthropology**

Work Experience

Title & Responsibilities	Years	Hrs	Duration
Warehouse Equipment Manager Starway Productions owns vast amounts of concert equipment requiring precise management, maintenance, tracking, and loading in the warehouse facility.	9th 10th 11th 12th 12th+ (1)	40 (Smr)	06/2011 - 08/2016

Extracurricular Activities

Activity & Description	Years	Hrs	Wks
Marching Band Marching Band included playing my saxophone while marching into distinct formations with the other members. This sport is intense and competitive.	9th 10th 11th 12th	20	22
Swimmer To be a swimmer requires intense workouts both before and after school and the commitment to continue long past when your body starts to shut down.	11th	25	24
Track and Field Athlete Freshman and sophomore year, I excelled in hurdles, high jump, and long jump. I excelled due to my above average height and self discipline.	9th 10th	20	20

Value-Added Response

I place extraordinary value in the people I surround myself with and in the people I am inspired by. Thus, my creative side is most infatuated with the conversations I have with the people in which I perceive to be intriguing and with the stories and lessons learned through my ever-expanding abundance of literature. You can find me surfing, hiking, camping, or traveling in some exciting moments, but my real infatuation lies within the study of various philosophies of the human condition. This intrigue is only quenched with a mad immersion of knowledge. Though, more than almost anything, I endear my time spent splurging in original and innovative thinking. As 20 year olds often do, I spend much of my time focused on the BIG questions - you know them - the meaning of life, what it means to be human, etcetera; though, I have found that there are other, more applicable questions that are worth pondering. Questions involving the origin of an individual's motivation and how I can better this world with my time spent on earth. It is my belief that thinking is more than just an action - it can be a vision for the future. The great leaders and champions of this world are visionaries. They have become masters of envisioning a goal and applying progressive actions to ensure that they attain them. The way in which I facilitate progressive action towards my goals is through my writings. Within recent years, I have found the benefit of doing what is called a "mind dump" -taking a few minutes to write every passing thought on a piece of paper - and then later expanding on those thoughts to formulate more comprehensive writings. Human brains do not have the capacity to retain nor organize every bit of information received in a day, but I have found that I can better coordinate my thoughts when I take the time to write them down. So, thinking, to me, is more than just a past-time, but rather it is my way to ensure that my goals are more than mere dreams.

Value Added

1. Creativity expressed in a unique way

"I place extraordinary value in the people I surround myself with and in the people I am inspired by. Thus, my creative side is most infatuated with the conversations I have with the people in which I perceive to be intriguing and with the stories and lessons learned through my ever-expanding abundance of literature."

2. Intellectual Curiosity

"Questions involving the origin of an individual's motivation and how I can better this world with my time spent on earth. It is my belief that thinking is more than just an action - it can be a vision for the future."

3. Application of thinking as a process

"So, thinking, to me, is more than just a past-time, but rather it is my way to ensure that my goals are more than mere dreams."



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.

Student D

Primary Majors Selected: **Mathematics**

Work Experience

Title & Responsibilities	Years	Hrs	Duration
Math Tutor Guiding and assisting fellow students who have troubles in mathematics.	12th+ (4)	10.5 (Sch)	08/2017 - present
Cashier Taking orders from the front and from the drive thru.	12th+ (2)	10.5 (Smr) 10.5 (Sch)	12/2015 - 05/2017

Extracurricular Activities

Activity & Description	Years	Hrs	Wks
Intercollegiate Badminton My teammates and I train and condition for the Fall and Winter Semesters and compete during season in Spring.	12th+ (3)	2.5	40

Neutral Response

My creative side comes from all artistic and crafty ways. I am always eager to learn new crafts. **I started from simple drawings, then my grandmother taught me how to crochet.** I recently **expanded my crocheting skills and crocheted bags, cellphone cases, and slippers.** I also learned how to knit as I saw one of my family members knit at a family gathering. She taught me the basics, **then I bought my own needles and made my very first scarf.** I also got hooked into loom bands and remember that I bought almost all the colors the rainbow loom brand came out with. I created countless bracelets and gave them away as gifts. **I also express my creativity through makeup.** I like to see myself beautiful and know that I was the one who made it. **I started doing my makeup 5 years ago and I can say that I have improved so much.** From the girl who can't even do her eyebrows to the woman who slays a winged eyeliner.

Neutral Response

1. Disjointed information

The PIQ is an opportunity to demonstrate how a student's skills/talents connect to their personal/academic goals; it's not simply listing things

2. Not a clear picture of student's experience

Student does not share substantial experience that illustrates passion or connection with how creativity can help them achieve goals.

3. No connection to academic potential



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?

Student E

Primary Majors Selected: **Sociology**

Work Experience

Title & Responsibilities	Years	Hrs	Duration
Auto Detailer I specialize in auto detailing mainly in removing paint scratches and scuff marks with a high powered buffer and applying wax on vehicles with a polisher.	9th 10th 11th 12th 12th+ (3)	54 (Smr) 25 (Sch)	10/2010 - present

Extracurricular Activities

None Reported

Value-Added Response

The most significant challenge I have faced have come from the past years at Ventura College. **Coming from a family with no prior experience in college made this process for me very difficult.** Because of these I had to take extra steps to make sure I would be successful. I reached out to my professors, counselors, and the student support programs on my campus. Doing this allowed me to understand the expectations for a college student while also giving me avenues to receive help when I needed it. **I was also expected to provide more for my family. This meant that I would have to get a job and help my mom raise my brother.** Thankfully I was eligible for work study and got a job through that. While it did help with my problems at home, **it also made me pull back from activities at school.** Mainly, I wasn't able to be involved in clubs or participate in other extracurricular activities. **It became very difficult to find a balance between school work and family, and I'm still having problems with it.** Having a larger role at home has helped make life more secure than before, but I often put too much of an importance at home. **While it is a challenge to balance my home responsibilities with my college responsibilities I have learned to prioritize.** I communicate with my mom more to explain what I have to do for college assignments and she is understanding. My community college experiences have developed my personal character more as I transitioned into adulthood.

Value Added

1. Explains the struggle of a 1st generation student

“Coming from a family with no prior experience in college made this process for me very difficult.”

2. Addresses the gaps in the extracurricular section

“I was also expected to provide more for my family. This meant that I would have to get a job and help my mom raise my brother. Thankfully I was eligible for work study and got a job through that. While it did help with my problems at home, it also made me pull back from activities at school.”



3. Highlights responsibilities & time management

“While it is a challenge to balance my home responsibilities with my college responsibilities I have learned to prioritize.”

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?

Student F

Primary Majors Selected: **Economics**

Work Experience

Title & Responsibilities	Years	Hrs	Duration
Economics tutor I instilled economic concepts for students who came to Fullerton College's tutoring center for help	12th+ (1)	6 (Sch)	10/2017 - present

Extracurricular Activities

Activity & Description	Years	Hrs	Wks
Economics Club President I founded the Economics Club on campus where I explored economics with other students	12th+ (1)	4	16
One Book, One College I was on the student panel for this event and did a presentation on the essay for the book Just Mercy.	12th+ (1)	1	1
Diamond Bar High School swim I practiced and participated with The Diamond Bar swim team where we competed against other high schools at swim meets.	10th 11th 12th	10	16

Neutral Response

"I'm not ready," I muttered. I was 9, and my parents shipped me to Iraq to serve local humanitarian churches and orphanages. I had no voice in these yearly mission trips; the year before I was sent to Turkey. I was missing school, but my parents decided it was for the best. Like any child placed in a new environment, I was reticent at first, unwilling to interact with the Kurdistan community we visited. They looked unusual, spoke an alien language, and lived in drastically different conditions compared to the U.S. I struggled to adapt to another culture. But over time, I grew acquainted with the carefree lifestyle of rustic Iraq. Once I came back home, a barrage of homework welcomed me. My absences accumulated and it was difficult for me to stay on top of my schoolwork. **My parents and teachers expected me to be exceptional in school when I was spending most of my time preparing to travel in and out of the country. I was told to work on my English skills while learning an entirely new language. Similarly, I had to master mathematical formulas as I picked up how to convert U.S. dollars into Dinars. But worst of all, I never knew when I would be sent off on another mission trip.** This seemed like a barrier at first. I couldn't dedicate my time or effort in school, and it showed in my grades. I couldn't understand why I needed to excel in school if my parents also wanted me to be an active missionary. My motivation to shine academically slowly diminished. The same dying flame was rekindled, however. I realized that the failures in my youth were beneficial. My shortcomings allowed me to refine my study habits and problem-solving skills. **I grew up having to juggle multiple projects at once, and as time passed, my dexterity became my greatest skill. Adapting to new environments was no longer a chore, but a way of life.** I wouldn't consider myself nomadic, but I am prepared to serve in a new location - The University of California.

Neutral Response

1. Time frame is not current

If the student had connected the experience to present day, or mentioned that he still participates in these missions, and how he has developed as a person, it would have added more value to the response.

2. Not enough context and tie in to current self

The response leaves more questions than it answers. Did the parents come along? How long did he participate in these mission trips? The gap between when the trips started and current day is quite long, with nothing to tie together the person they were and who they are now.

3. Surprisingly, many students write responses similar to this one.



Strategies for Effective Writing

Effective Strategies

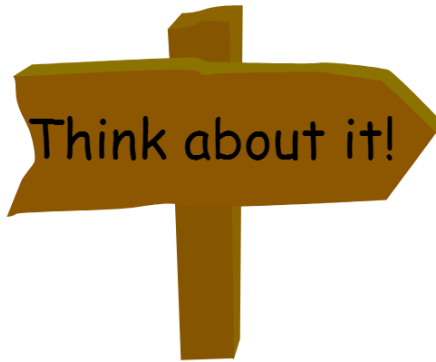
Students should...

- **Start early and brainstorm topics**
 - Experiences inside/outside the classroom, leadership opportunities, strengths/special skills, educational opportunities or barriers, personal triumphs or challenges, examples of engaging with community, etc.
- Be **specific** in responses (who, what, when, where, how)
- Choose **quality over quantity** of examples
- Write from the **first person perspective** (I, me, my)



Less Effective Strategies

- Overuse of humor
- Writing a treatise
- Asking rhetorical questions
- Using quotes
- Having others write for the student



Resources

Resources

- Video - How to Respond to the Personal Insight Questions
<http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/index.html>
- Personal Insight Questions Worksheet – Transfers
<http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/transfer/>
- General Writing Tips for the Personal Insight Questions
<http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/writing-tips/index.html>

Thank You