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## Better than a bot: PIQs through the eyes of UC admissions

## Roadmap

- Review
- What you may know already
- What you may not know
- What we are not looking for
- Case studies
- Final things to consider



Here is the roadmap for this session. We'll be reviewing the PIQs, what you may know already, what you may not know, what we aren't looking for and we have case studies, which are always fun, and just a few final things to consider. We know many of you are here to hear about AI and we will be reviewing that towards the end of the presentation. In the meantime, we want you to think about everything we're saying as building an argument as to why ChatGPT is not currently better than a student composing their own PIQ responses.

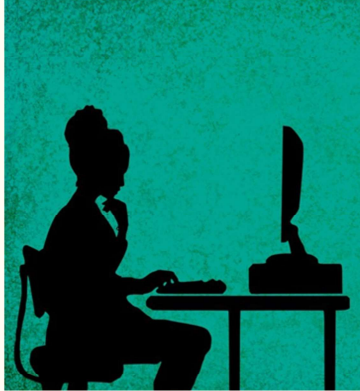


**Let's review!**

## Let's review: The basics

8 question options,  
students choose 4.

350 word  
maximum.



Choose questions  
that will give the  
most information  
about the student.

Reminder:  
No question is  
better than another.

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### Let's review the basics:

- There are 8 questions students can choose from. They must respond to 4 of them.
- There is a 350 word maximum. There is not a word minimum, however, most students respond between 250-350 words.
- We recommend students choose questions that will give the admissions reader the most information about them.
- Just a reminder, no question is better than another in the eyes of admissions. We just want to learn as much as we can about your students in the response to the questions they choose.

Note: In compliance with prop 209, UC does not use race, ethnicity, and gender in the admissions review. In light of the Supreme Court decision regarding affirmative action, we wish to remind everyone that each PIQ answer will continue to be reviewed in the same manner as before. Students should continue to share their experiences, set context to their accomplishments and provide insight into their individual circumstances. Writing in their own voice about their cultural identity, values, and/or beliefs continues to be encouraged in the PIQs.



## Let's review: The 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.
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 it 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.

Let's review the questions. These are options one through four.

## Let's review: The questions continued

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. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.
7. What have you done to make your school or community a better place?
8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?

These are options five through eight.

## Let's review: Additional comments

### Personal insight Additional comments



\* required

If there's anything else you want us to know about you, now's your chance. But remember, you should use this space only if you want to describe anything that you have not had the opportunity to include elsewhere in the application. This shouldn't be an essay, but rather a place to explain unusual personal or family circumstances, or anything that may be unclear in other parts of the application.

Now let's review the additional comments part in the PIQ sections. This is what it looks like in the UC application. The students have 550 words to use in this section, if they would like, to explain anything extra. Please remind students that this is not a place to respond to another question, to copy and paste their social media, research, websites or their resume. This is a place to add any new information or details that are not found anywhere else in their application.

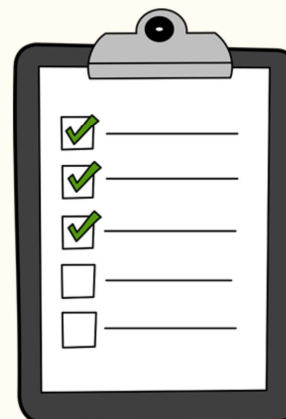


**What you may know already**

## What you may know already

### Comprehensive review

- **13 factors** that allow the Office of Admissions to evaluate students' **achievements in light of opportunities available** to them.
- Responses should provide readers with information that **add value to their comprehensive review**.
- While all UC campuses use the same factors to evaluate applications, they often **apply these factors differently**.



Beyond the course pattern and GPA, we also consider a students' academic success in the context of the opportunities available to them. This is referred to a comprehensive review. Within UC you may also hear the term "holistic review," which is one method of comprehensive review. Holistic review refers to the process of reviewing first-year applicants where there is no specific weight on a specific area.

The PIQs are essentially the interview with the UC. It can tie the student's whole application together.

### Comprehensive Review

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In compliance with prop 209, UC does not use race, ethnicity, and gender in the admissions review. In light of the Supreme Court decision regarding affirmative action, we wish to remind everyone that each PIQ answer will continue to be reviewed in the same manner as before. That is why we continue to ask you to encourage your students to write in their own voice and to set context to their accomplishments. Writing about cultural identity, values, and/or beliefs has always been encouraged in the PIQs.



**What you may not know**

## What you may not know

### Value-added responses

- Focus is on the impact on the student and/or the impact they have on others
- Centers self in the response
- Provides specific examples

### Missed opportunity responses

- Does not provide much context about the student's experience
- Focuses more on structure than content
- Centers others' narratives rather than their own



## Value-added responses

- Focus is on the impact on the student, and/or the impact they have on others
  - Students have the autonomy to choose questions that will allow them to share their experiences and details that matter to them and their journey.
  - Opportunity to maximize a student's voice and share what is unique from their perspective.
  - Helps admissions readers understand what is important to a student.
- Centers self in the response
  - Uses "I" and "my" statements
- Provides specific examples
  - These should ALWAYS include specific or tangible examples that focus on the decision, action, and impact of the student.

## Missed opportunity responses

- Does not provide much context, details about the student's experience
- Focuses more on structure than content
  - Most of the response is focused on the story or setting the scene when the student should instead focus on **how the story has impacted them**
- Centers others' narratives rather than their own



**What we are not looking for**



## What we are not looking for

- ❖ A non-academic essay
- ❖ Hardship for the sake of hardship
- ❖ Themes
- ❖ Repetition



### Non-academic essay

- We do not need nor want to read an impressionistic writing where the student writes as if we're in the moment with them. Figurative language, metaphors and similes, creative writing. We know this academic writing, but we do not need paragraphs, a hook or quotes. Please answer the prompt as direct and to the point, as if the student was talking to an admission representative.

### Hardship for the sake of hardship

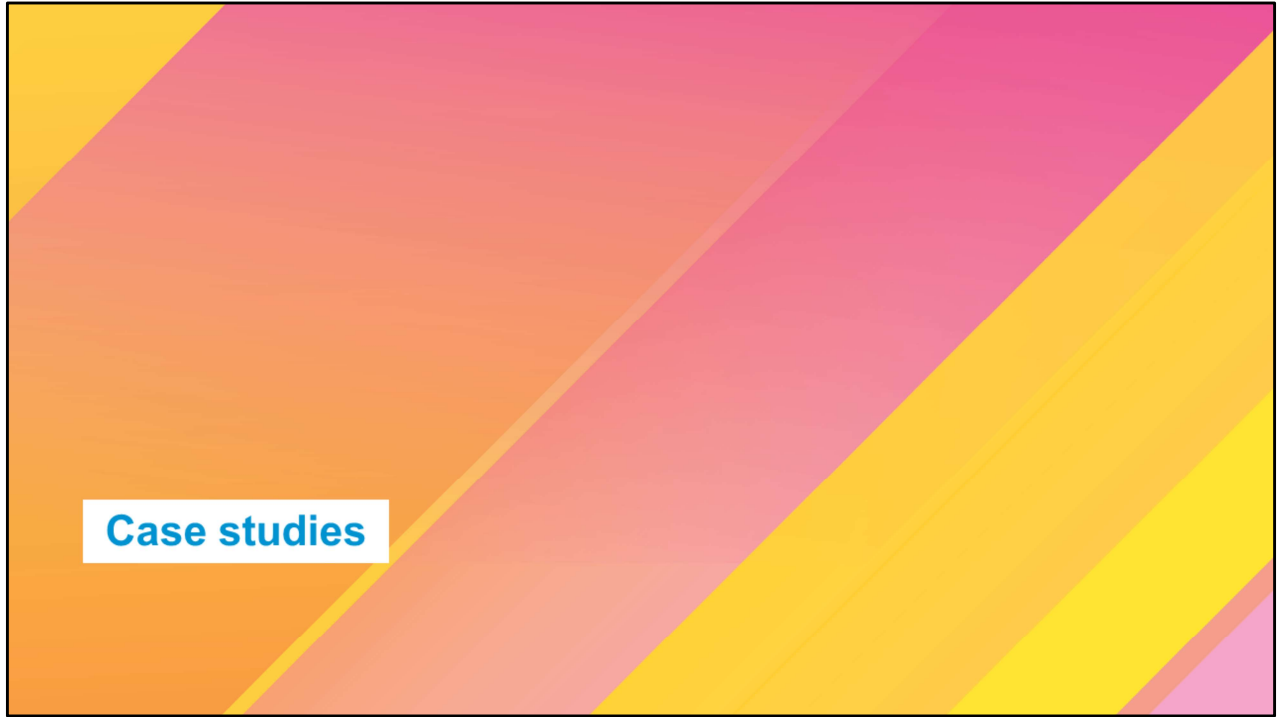
- **Break down the notion of “what we want to hear”.** Students should speak their truth regardless of what they believe is “overplayed”, “overdone”, or “stereotyped”. We are trained to take their stories at face value, not based on its persuasiveness.
  - If a student simply mentions hardship but has not processed or reflected on it yet than it may not be the best content to include.

### Themes

- A common pattern we see from students is attempting to weave all of the responses together through an overarching theme. But it **takes up word count and can create unnecessary fluff.**

### Repetition

- On the topic of repetition, students should try to **keep the content for each response fresh.**
- Sometimes an experience may have **more than one aspect or anecdote** that can be used in a response. In these rare cases, it is not deemed repetition.
  - For example: *a student talking about the mentoring aspects of tutoring (for PIQ #1) and then how the experience of mentoring has led them to develop a passion for teaching (for PIQ #6).*



## The 3 steps of responses

1

### Step 1

Present an  
idea



2

### Step 2

Answer the  
question



3

### Step 3

Share the Impact,  
“so what”

Step 1: We want students to present the idea.

Step 2: Answer the question. All parts of it. Provide clear examples.

Step 3: Share the impact, the “so what.” How has this experience impacted the student or impacted others. Tie the examples in Step 2 to the outcomes and results in Step 3.

Case studies:



## Case study #1

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

I've danced along the poverty line my whole life. The soothing melodies from a mother to her child as they drifted to sleep were mere dreams; realities you'd only see in the movies. Life was based on survival; sink or swim, one might say. Struggling to stay afloat in this ocean of a world, I quickly recognized that a comfortable life is a luxury that stands far out of my grasp. Being forced out of touch with my infantile dreams and forced to come to grips with my reality brought along one of my greatest attributes: my fortitude. Living as the product of an immigrant mother and lower class father, my aspirations oftentimes felt out of my reach. My tolerance for the harsh world grew involuntarily; I was born into destitution, facing life's hardest battles was inevitable. The countless sleepless nights my parents spent in order to keep a roof over our head demonstrated their mettle to my younger self, a mettle I had to endow myself with too.

## Case study #1 continued

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

...Just like the pale skin and singular dimple I inherited from my mother, I endeavored to grasp her strength. Both in and out of the classroom, I've possessed a deeper spirit than a great number of my peers due to the hardships I've faced. While it's difficult to stray away from the fixed mindset that tells me I cannot afford a better future, I pave the way for the life I've always dreamed of through my education. My exceptional tenacity encouraged me to take advanced placement courses that offer an advantage at a higher educational level. The extravagance of maintaining the successful life my parents could not afford excites me. Persevering through the austerity towards the sophisticated, serene lifestyle showcases my drive. Although I learned to survive off of the crumbs of society, the faith I hold for myself and my education push me closer to the elixir of the rapturous life I plan to lead.

325 words

## Case study #1

### Missed Opportunity

- Briefly mentions perseverance through hardship, but does not provide steps taken to persevere.
- The student uses a lot of space for creative writing.
  - Focuses more on writing style and structure over content and concrete examples.
- Breezes over the “so what”.
  - Student briefly mentions that they enrolled in advanced placement courses, but does not highlight how they took advantage of those courses.

- Briefly mentions perseverance through hardship, but does not provide steps taken to persevere.
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## Case study #2

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

It is a strange and enduring task, to watch something rot. When faced with rot in its most literal form, it can be a bit overwhelming. The smell will crawl up your nose and down your throat, sitting there long after you've scrubbed yourself clean. Touch any part of something decomposing and your fingers will come away dark, sticky, and wet. After working with dead animals, I've learned that more important than a strong stomach, is patience. To reap what you want from decay, you must be willing to work at its pace, and I've always abided by "good things come to those who wait." I wait in a park where my parents shuffle to explain to my brother and I that they're getting divorced. My brother is too young to understand, but I do. I wait outside of the divorce counseling where they sift through their rot and try to make sense of it, and I wait as they try to start over with new people and that too, decays. This observation teaches me the initial patience.

350 words.



## Case study #2 continued

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

...I linger at the kitchen table, watching my father cook and wondering when the Alzheimer's will come. I imagine the decay beginning now, now, now. The decay is so slow that sometimes I accelerate it and imagine him already dead. Then I force myself to rewind and grapple with the inevitable entropy as it happens. Despite my frustration, this slow rot gives me practice to accept the things I can't change. I pace around my grandparent's lemon tree, stubbornly clinging to life in the neglected garden. Its refusal to decompose interests me, enough to spend a year on its revival. I learn there is rot, but also rebirth. I learn that it's not enough to just endure the decay in my life, I must embrace the rebirth that comes after, even if I'm afraid of the change. But as I enjoy my lemon harvest, I don't think it's so scary after all. My good things have taken longer to come than most, but I wait for them dutifully, faithfully, and ever patiently.

350 words

350 words.

## Case study #2



### Missed opportunity

- Very descriptive, focuses on metaphors.
- Difficult to pull details and tie the examples provided to how they developed their talent overtime.
- There are a lot of obstacles provided and some explanation of the impact for the student – ***could be much more clear without the fluff and if student provided more clarity.***

### Case study #3

**Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.**

In 2020, I founded an underwater robotics team in my garage. We invited friends from school and the math circle we ran. Some members had no experience with robotics and others had lots of experience so I taught them by helping everyone build a land robot. In our second year, I reached out to more people in the community and grew our team from 10 to 22 members across 10 schools. We had seniors to middle schoolers on the team. I promoted returning members to lead the hardware, testing, and documentation teams. I led the software team where I taught Python, setting up Raspberry Pi computers, and streaming cameras. My mom knew someone whose nephew recently immigrated from Mexico and wanted to learn about robotics. I invited him to join the team and I walked him through setting up the robot. Now he teaches others how to set it up. When I give individual attention, people develop useful skills and pass those skills onto others.

### Case study #3 continued

**Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.**

...On the competition day, we didn't tighten our electronics chamber and water shorted our entire electronics system! But we didn't mourn, we got straight to problem solving. The hardware leader unplugged and unscrewed the parts. I tested the computers and told members to grab working parts from last year's robot. My CoCEO calmed the team. In the middle of the repairs, we gave an award winning 15-minute engineering presentation to judges. We miraculously got the robot working in time for our second pool run and we placed third! I learned that to be an effective leader, I need to understand every team member's strengths and weaknesses. The hardware leader annoyed me because he started building without planning and made avoidable mistakes. But I appreciated his instant problem solving when we needed to rapidly rebuild our robot. Now that I know what he is good at, I can give him appropriate roles for his talents. I am using what I've learned to lead our team effectively by giving everyone the chance to use their best skills.

340 words

### Case study #3



- Details, details, details. This clearly describes an actual project, the number of people in the group, their role in the group, and their problem-solving response to a mistake.
- The response provides a strong sense of the student's skill/knowledge, their leadership ability, their resilience (problem solving the waterlogged electronics) as well as sense of their commitment to diversity (they taught a recent immigrant about robotics).



**A few final thoughts...**

## AI: A tool, not a replacement

- A useful tool:
  - Organize thoughts
  - Resource, not a source
- Something to note:
  - Statement of Application Integrity
- An interview, not an essay:
  - Student's voice
  - Student's experience
  - Short, direct responses
  - Adding value



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We know that our students are already using or experimenting with ChatGPT and other AI tools. Here are some initial thoughts about this from our Directors.

First off, we believe that this may be a useful tool in planning and drafting a response to the PIQ's. It could be helpful in brainstorming and refining ideas. Some Directors noted that the tool could be a helpful collaborator and may even level the playing field for those students who cannot afford the paid consultants that some students use.

However, the Statement of Application Integrity reads that "all information must be complete, accurate and reflect their independent thinking and writing." One danger of submitting an unedited AI response is that this might be flagged for plagiarism. <https://apply.universityofcalifornia.edu/docs/StatementOfIntegrity.pdf>

Another concern is that AI tools are unable to provide the things that add the most value to the UC application: a student's own voice and a student's own experiences. How much value will we find in 350 words on leadership or resiliency or creativity that don't directly address a student's own experiences?

Finally, we ask students to write in clear, simple, direct prose---as they would in an interview or conversation. This should ease a student's concern about *needing* to use some sort of AI tool to help write their response. It may take more time to build a good ChatGPT prompt than to write a clear PIQ response.



## UC resources: PIQ resources/worksheets



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The UC has created resource pages and worksheets for both freshman and transfer students working on the PIQ's: these are VERY useful. The QR code on this page leads to the freshman resource page (which has a link to the worksheet pdf).

Here is an example of how we guide students in thinking about and drafting their response. By using our worksheets, your students should have a good idea about how to respond and what the underlying questions are for each of the PIQ's.

For our question on creativity, we use the following prompts:

*“Give an example of your creativity (do not limit yourself by conventional definitions).  
Was there ever a problem where your imagination and intuition guided you to the solution? What was the problem, how did you arrive at a solution, what was the outcome?  
Do you have a creative passion? What have you gained from this passion that has affected other parts of your life or the life of those around you?”*

*We also remind our applicants that “we do not have a definition of creativity nor do we need you to limit your own idea of creativity.”*

**Freshman:** <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-freshman/personal-insight-questions.html>

**Transfer:** <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-transfer/personal-insight-questions.html>



# Thank you!

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Thank you for your time and for everything you do to serve our students!

You are better than a bot!