

# PERSONAL STATEMENT GUIDE FOR FRESHMAN APPLICANTS

UNIVERSITY  
OF  
CALIFORNIA

## What is the personal statement?

The personal statement is your opportunity to introduce yourself to the people reading your application. Think of it as your interview with the admissions office. Be open, be honest and be yourself. The personal statement should add clarity, depth, and context to the information you present in other parts of the application.

### The basics

- The personal statement is made up of two required prompts.
- You have up to 1,000 words to answer both required prompts.
- You may allocate the word count as you wish, but each response should be a minimum of 250 words.
- Use a word processing program to write your responses—don't type them directly into the application. This way, you can keep track of the word count and print copies for review. When you're ready, copy and paste into the application.

### Personal statement prompts

#### Prompt #1:

Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

**SUGGESTIONS** You don't need to write about family and community and school. Whatever you choose to write about, be descriptive. Keep your response relevant. Focus on events that happened during high school.

#### Prompt #2:

Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

**SUGGESTIONS** Choose a topic that has not been addressed in detail in another section of the application. Keep the information relevant to your personal experiences.

## Suggestions for writing the personal statement

**Start early.** Give yourself plenty of time for preparation, careful composition and revisions.

**Brainstorm topics.** When you're composing your personal statement, consider including:

- Personal triumphs or challenges — Tell us about your achievements in light of the opportunities available to you. If you choose to write about challenges you've faced, how did you overcome or strive to overcome them?
- Leadership opportunities — Define your leadership role, your accomplishments, and what you learned from the experience. Remember, a leader can mean more than being elected to a position. Consider describing a time when you had to be a leader in your family or community.
- Experiences outside the classroom — Consider experiences that have made an impact on your life (e.g., your family, youth groups, work, church/temple, or travels).
- Culture—Describe the influence culture has had on you. Don't define the culture. Instead explain what you have learned because of that culture.

Once you've narrowed down your topics, start thinking about what you learned from your experiences and how they shaped other aspects of your life.

**Write persuasively.** Making a list of accomplishments, activities, awards or work will lessen the impact of your words. Expand on a topic by using specific, concrete examples to support the points you want to make.

**Use "I" statements.** Talk about yourself so that we can get to know your personality, talents, accomplishments and potential for success on a UC campus. Use "I" and "my" statements in your response.

**Proofread and edit.** You will not be graded on grammar, spelling or sentence structure, but make sure your writing is clear. Review content and overall message. You may not have space to tell us everything so make your words count.

**Finally, relax!** This is one of many pieces of information we consider in reviewing your application. Your response can only add value to the application. An admission decision will not be based on your personal statement alone.

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## Worksheet: Get started on the personal statement

This worksheet is designed to help freshman applicants start the writing process for the personal statement. Additional hints and suggestions can be found on UC's admissions website at [ucal.us/personalstatement](https://ucal.us/personalstatement).

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### Prompt #1

Describe the world you come from—for example, your family, community or school—and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

*Things to consider before responding to prompt #1:*

- What are the opportunities and/or challenges you find in your community?
- What role do you play in your family, and how has that influenced your decisions in and out of school?
- Do you identify with one or more cultures? Can you speak more than one language? What has that allowed you to do in life?
- What is a typical day or week in your life, and how do you manage to accomplish everything?
- What is your school like? Are you in a magnet school, academy or other specialized program? Describe the program and why you enrolled.
- How are you challenging yourself in school to prepare for college? Is attending college common for students at your school?
- If you hold a leadership role: Are you a leader in your school, community or family? What does that role mean to you? How did you personally grow from this experience?
- Do you have a major or career in mind? What is it and why are you interested in it? Are there any courses and/or extracurricular activities you have completed to get you started in this area?

### Prompt #2

Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

*Things to consider before responding to prompt #2:*

- What do you consider one of your strengths?
- What activities, awards or honors do you wish to discuss?
- Make a list of four things that describe you (e.g. a leader, first in my family to go to college, athletic, started a club, own my own business, etc.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Now ask a friend or family member to do the same thing:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Did anything overlap? Can you see areas where you want to share more information? If so, consider using this topic to respond to prompt #2.

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### What about “Additional Comments?”

After you complete the two prompts, you will see a third section called “Additional Comments.” This is an optional section and **should not be used as a continuation of your personal statement**. Instead, you should use this section to:

- Provide additional clarification or expand on an honor, award or activity.
- Share information regarding a nontraditional school environment or unusual circumstances

- Describe anything else that you HAVE NOT had the opportunity to include elsewhere in your application.

**Ready, set...apply!** The UC application is available online at [universityofcalifornia.edu/apply](https://universityofcalifornia.edu/apply).