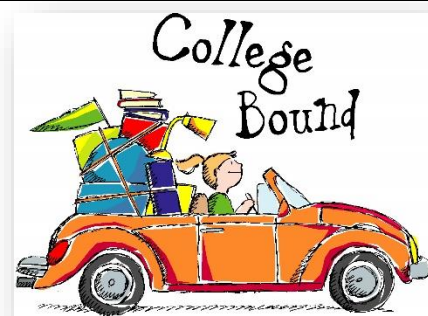


## Freshman applicants: Personal insight questions



Answer any 4 of the following 8 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 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. Describe your favorite academic subject and explain how it has influenced you.
7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?
8. What is the one thing that you think sets you apart from other candidates applying to the University of California?

-----  
---

### What are the personal insight questions?

These questions are about getting to know you better — your life experience, interests, ambitions and inspirations. Think of it as your interview with the admissions office. Be open. Be reflective. Find your individual voice and express it.

While this section of the application is just one part we consider when making our admission decision, it helps provide context for the rest of your application.

### The basics

- You will have 8 questions to choose from. You must respond to any 4 of the 8 questions.
- Each response is limited to a **maximum of 350 words**.
- Which questions you choose to answer is entirely up to you: But you should select questions that are most relevant to your experience and that best reflect your individual circumstances.
- All questions are equal: All questions are given equal consideration in the application review process, which means there is no advantage or disadvantage to choosing certain questions over others.

# Personal Statement Essay Samples

## First lines from the application essays of Stanford's newest class.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a high school student in possession of a good résumé must still be in want of a personal essay. In the best of times and the worst of times, first impressions matter. Any student who hopes to be the hero of his own life will strive to write a great opening line.

- Picture the dark and stormy nights and the rosy-fingered dawns during which college applicants for the Class of '12 took pen in hand. What would work best—a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream? A screaming comes across the sky as lines are written, then abandoned. The rewriting and editing seems to last till the clocks strike thirteen.
- But at last their personal statements for the Common App are crafted. The undergraduate admissions staff, while evaluating students on their total merit, take notice of the first lines that make essay-reading a particular pleasure. We asked them to share some of their favorite openers from those students who, starting in September, can write, Call me Cardinal.
- *Unlike many mathematicians, I live in an irrational world; I feel that my life is defined by a certain amount of irrationalities that bloom too frequently, such as my brief foray in front of 400 people without my pants.*
- Sitting cross-legged on the floor of a Bhimanagar slum dwelling in Bangalore, I ran my fingers across a fresh cut on my forehead.
- *I almost didn't live through September 11th, 2001.*
- When I was 8 years old, I shocked my family and a local archaeologist by discovering artifacts dating back almost 3,500 years.
- *When I was in eighth grade I couldn't read.*
- *The spaghetti burbled and slushed around the pan, and as I stirred it, the noises it gave off began to sound increasingly like bodily functions.*
- I had never seen anyone get so excited about mitochondria.
- *Cancer tried to defeat me, and it failed.*
- I stand on the riverbank surveying this rippled range like some riparian cowboy—instead of chaps, I wear vinyl, thigh-high waders and a lasso of measuring tape and twine is slung over my arm.
- *I have old hands.*
- Flying over enemy territory, I took in Beirut's beautiful skyline and wondered if under different circumstances I would have hopped on a bus and come here for my vacation. Instead, I saw the city from the window of a helicopter, in military uniform, my face camouflaged, on my way to a special operation deep behind enemy lines.
- *My younger sister, Jessica, arrived home one day reeling about the shirt that her friend had worn to school. It had simply read, "Genocide, Homicide, Suicide, Riverside."*
- I'll never forget the day when my childhood nightmares about fighting gigantic trolls in the *Lord of the Rings* series became a reality. Sword in hand and clad in medieval samurai armor, I dragged myself into the battleground as I faced my opponent, a warmongering giant.
- *I was paralyzed from the waist down. I would try to move my leg or even shift an ankle but I never got a response. This was the first time thoughts of death ever crossed my mind.*
- As an Indian-American, I am forever bound to the hyphen.
- *Journey to Gulu's outskirts and you will uncover the scene where education was raped 11 years ago; some Ugandan teens also lost their innocence in exchange for their lives.*
- I have been surfing Lake Michigan since I was 3 years old.
- *On a hot Hollywood evening, I sat on a bike, sweltering in a winter coat and furry boots.*
- I change my name each time I place an order at Starbucks.

# UC Essay Example – Leadership Essay - 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. (350 words)

**Step #1:** Brainstorm one anecdote in the scope of leadership When you're brainstorming about activities involving leadership, think outside the box . The notion of "leadership" doesn't mean that you have to be the captain of the volleyball team or have a leadership title... you can be a leader and demonstrate leadership abilities in so many other ways

**Step #2:** Pinpoint the conflict in the anecdote Like we already talked about, this short essay should have an underlying foundation of a story. Because stories have a conflict and resolution, we similarly need these two components in your essay. A conflict in this case can be a mistake, a challenge, an obstacle... it's literally any roadblock that got in your way that you had to resolve. So, make sure that you include this conflict in your essay.

**Step #3:** Include a resolution from your anecdote Anyone can, (in theory) tell a decent anecdote. The storytelling part of writing is not going to be the most challenging part for you.

Your biggest challenge for these UC essays is to explain succinctly what you learned from this story. Your analysis of this particular experience must therefore be insightful.

## EXAMPLE

I passionately believe in TED's mission of bringing people together with ideas worth sharing. It should come as no surprise, then, that I seized the opportunity to help organize my school's TEDx event.

We enthusiastically started contacting potential speakers who could talk about their interesting research, perspectives on societal issues, or personal experiences.

Five months later, covered in fine sheets of sweat, heads bowed to the audience, we stood victorious. Five whole months of hard work, of arguments, of frenzied emails and phone calls had culminated in this event. We had rehearsed—rehearsed until every attendee was furiously clapping.

It wasn't an easy process, though. For the first few months, our team couldn't even come to a consensus on the final speakers. Debates on the event theme spanned weeks—some fervently advocated for robotics, while others wanted psychology. Discouraged by the lack of agreement and progress, our team began to disintegrate.

With less than two months before the event, a sense of urgency set in. I decided to take a little initiative and help push the group forward, to ensure the event was the grand success I envisioned. I needed to unite my team, to help them realize why we were organizing a TED event.

I started to establish a culture—one that didn't just focus on teamwork and active listening, but one that was lighthearted and wholesome. Shared jokes and laconic humor brought the team together—we began to listen to and support each other. I strove to display confidence and authority without stifling the group's opinions. Argument by argument, responsibility by responsibility, we grew as a team. I spent many long nights working with co-organizers, helping them with their responsibilities or discussing Dr. Hayes' work on psychological flexibility.

Leadership, I realized, wasn't just about having a title—it was about bringing a team together to transform a vision into reality, to tap into the innately human desire to be part of something greater. I learned to work with people as equals, to unleash their energy and empower them to do their best. I hope to inspire people in the same way in college.

*Source: One of my students that got into UC Berkeley for EECS.*

## Essay #1 - Analysis of UC Essay Example Strengths:

### 1. Clear conflict and student's role as a leader in resolving it

This is a fantastic UC essay example, no? The student is a very talented writer.

Usually, with this essay prompt, it's most interesting to showcase a conflict or an obstacle and how you, as a leader, helped to resolve it. This is important because it allows you to show your leadership style and ability to solve problems in a team setting — this kind of attribute will show admissions officers your strengths and what you'll bring to the college campus.

### 2. Showcases student's learnings and growth as a leader

Intellectual and personal growth after an event (especially one with conflicts and obstacles) are important learnings to write about for UC and college application essays. More specifically, take this student's UC essay as an example: He does a fantastic job explaining how he evolved as a leader throughout his TED talk obstacles. Specifically, he was able to redefine what leadership meant to him after his experiences and this is the type of learning experience that colleges love to read about.

Remember, admissions officers jobs are to create the best incoming freshman year class they can. In this UC essay example, the student does a fantastic job shedding light on his strengths as a leader and his learnings from the experiences that would easily positively influence the campus at a place like UC Berkeley.

## **QUESTION #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. (350 words)

**Step #1:** Brainstorm an activity or anecdote that showcases intellectual vitality. Here are some questions for you to get your creative juices flowing:

- Are you the type of person who is constantly thinking and loves new ideas and challenges?
- Are you sort of like an Elon Musk in that way? If so, what is an event or activity that has constantly pushed you to solve problems in innovative ways?
- Are you innately curious and show your curiosity with action?
- Besides going down the rabbit hole of Googling everything, is there a subject that you've always been drawn to that you want to know everything about? If so, write about it! Are you good at challenging ideas in a thoughtful way and seeing a problem or issue through multiple lenses? If yes, what's an event or activity that showcases this?

**Step #2:** Analyze what this creative side means to you. Remember, you need to take each essay one step further — Don't just express your creative side; tell the admissions officers why this is valuable and how you'll take the learnings you've gleaned from your creative side and apply them to the rest of your life!

### **EXAMPLE**

For as long as I can remember, I've taken math classes above my grade level. I whizzed through classes, memorizing everything from constants to concepts, seamlessly applying them to problems. In retrospect, I focused more on solving problems than questioning the "whys" behind what I learnt—"why *does* matrix multiplication exist?" I sped through courses in search of cheap validation—better grades and advanced classes—and failed to realize there was a higher level of mathematical maturity to aspire to... until dr. \_\_\_\_\_ tore me down at [math program].

In a room full of aspiring mathematicians, \_\_\_\_\_ was imploring the class to prove Fourier Transforms. Hesitantly, I volunteered as tribute. Halfway through the third step, \_\_\_\_\_ interrupted me. "No! Think a little deeper... Maybe you could solve this if you knew what a trigonometric function was!" I recited the definitions I had so devoutly memorized, but \_\_\_\_\_ coolly ripped them apart.

So I opened my mind to her suggestions and began to refine my definition until it was bulletproof. I was finally able to grasp Fourier Transforms—they essentially broke a function into frequencies, then into arcs.

\_\_\_\_\_’s prodding pushed my mind back to all those years when I sped through math, relying on intuition instead of taking a step back to truly comprehend the theory. I revisited all those concepts I took for granted, building a new, rigorous understanding of math. I started solving problems in creative ways—for example, proving graph theory lemmas using concepts from linear algebra. I discovered that even seemingly insignificant concepts had much greater meaning—who would have guessed that matrix multiplication represented function composition?

I began to approach math as a fundamentally creative endeavor. I discovered that every proof, every research question, every conjecture is a problem to be solved, a vessel to express innovative thinking. The "whys" have helped me develop a new value system based on curiosity, open-mindedness, and love for learning. My quest for deeper understanding inspires me to try everything, from cofounding a startup to learning new algorithms. The "whys" have helped me cherish the nuances of not only mathematics but also the world around me.

## #2 - Analysis of UC Essay Example Strengths:

### 1. Easy-to-read, playful voice

In this UC essay example, the student does a really great job making his story easy-to-digest with a playful voice. This is noteworthy because 99% of the time, I see a lot of overly formal language in college application essays which gives off a stuffy, boring feel. Keep in mind that voice is actually pretty important with these essays — admissions officers are human beings that actually *want* to enjoy the UC essays you've submitted. Voice allows you to keep that admissions officer's interest and make you more relatable and likeable!

### 2. Showcases student's intellectual growth through a story

This UC essay example is fantastic for many reasons, one of which is that it showcases a student's intellectual growth using an anecdote. Apparently, this student had a lightbulb moment during one of his many extracurricular activities that changed his thought process about his favorite subject, math. Upon reading this UC essay example, you can tell easily that this student is extremely intellectually curious and loves to learn — both attributes that admissions officers love to hear and read about

## UC Essay Example – Educational Opportunity - Essay #4

Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced. (350)

**Step #1:** Brainstorm an anecdote showcasing the educational barrier. Overcoming barriers is almost always a stronger anecdote than taking advantage of opportunities. Actually, the ability to overcome obstacles is an attribute that is highly correlated with success in college; thus, admissions officers are on the lookout for this personal quality in your overall application.

**Step #2:** Explain how you overcame your barrier. What do you do when the going gets tough? How do you overcome obstacles? Grit and resiliency are key personal qualities that admissions officers love to see. Thus, you want to explain clearly how you solved the problem that you were facing in your response so that you can showcase these key qualities.

**Step #3:** Analyze! Yup, as always, you have to explain the significance of this experience. More specifically, describe what you learned from this experience and how you'll apply these learnings to your future.

Thus, you want to explain clearly how you solved the problem that you were facing in your response so that you can showcase these key qualities. Step #3: Analyze! Yup, as always, you have to explain the significance of this experience. More specifically, describe what you learned from this experience and how you'll apply these learnings to your future.

### EXAMPLE

Two years ago, I approached Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ for a potential research opportunity. Initially, I was a little hesitant of approaching such a renowned economics professor, but I mustered up some courage and sent him a resume. Surprisingly, he accepted me as a co-author for one of his papers, giving me the responsibility of proving theorems, finding related literature, and even writing entire sections.

The keystone of my behavioral economics research paper is the tendency to prefer instant gratification over superior, but delayed rewards—this is referred to as “hyperbolic discounting,” which often manifests as procrastination. In our paper, we argue that humans cope with uncertainty through hyperbolic discounting. As I analyzed economic models, I began to appreciate our psychological explanation of irrationality. I realized that we were asking and answering important questions about human nature.

As I explored this realization, it occurred to me that I was surrounded by the works of philosophers like Hegel and Husserl—I found myself fascinated by the idea of rational choice philosophy, which states that humans consistently make decisions that maximize their happiness. Hegel had disproved this philosophy long ago, but its imperatives still survive as the core tenets of modern economics.

I recognized that our research is part of a movement that rejects these rationality assumptions, instead aiming to create realistic models based on human behavior. I began to ask questions: What actually happens when society is composed of perfectly rational agents? Would rational people procrastinate? I started to see underpinnings of utilitarianism, a normative ethical philosophy I had encountered during debate, closely interlaced with modern economics.

By grappling with our problem and by drawing connections to other fields, I grew both intellectually and as a person. My research experience has greatly expanded my intellectual horizons—going above and beyond my professor's expectations and engaging with the problem on my own has helped me understand our paper more clearly. In the same way, this opportunity has taught me to seek connections in the intersections of fields, because innovation thrives when we allow for interdisciplinary thinking—I hope to bring this same mindset to college.

*Source: One of my students that got into Berkeley for EECS.*

## #4 - Analysis of UC Essay Example Strengths:

### 1. Short, broken up paragraphs

This is a really great (and easy) hack for the UC essays — keep your paragraphs relatively short so that your essay isn't a huge wall of text. This is super helpful because short, broken up paragraphs are more inviting to a reader; it's actually extremely overwhelming when I see huge walls of texts for these UC and college application essays. As an essay reader, it just feels more daunting and not as fun to read. A lot of students end up creating essays that are literally 1 paragraph or 2 paragraphs long, so if you can implement this small tip, it will make a world of a difference!

You'll notice that all the UC essay examples I've posted are extremely well written AND have short paragraphs like the one I've described — it works!

### 2. Showcases important extracurricular activity in-depth

Here's another tip: don't try to cover a gazillion topics in one, 350 word essay. This is an issue I see fairly often, and it really takes away from the overall story and essay when you're trying to fit everything you've ever done in your life in mere 350 words. This UC essay example does a fantastic job showcasing one particular extracurricular activity and delves deep into it and how the research contributed to his intellectual growth.

A good rule of thumb is this: Don't tackle more than two topics/two extracurriculars in one 350 word essay. 95% of me wants to actually say this, though: Literally just tackle one topic per 350 word essay, unless it's a special circumstance.

**QUESTION #3 –**

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

**Step #1:** Brainstorm your unique talent or skill

**Step #2:** Analyze - This is that part where most students will struggle. So, spend extra time analyzing why this skill or talent is significant in your life.

- What has this ability taught you?
- How has this talent/skill opened doors for you?
- Why does it matter to you?

**SHORT EXCERPT (SAME AT END OF PACKET)**

Sydney\_hack, UC Davis '20

“Then high school happened. I started taking theatre classes and film classes and I saw my friends go to college as musical theatre majors and film production majors. I saw people following their dreams. I’d entered a whole new world. I began to think of all the things that made me happy. Filmmaking stood out to me and I began to pursue any opportunity I could-I took the filmmaking class at school, I offered to help film video series for the San Diego County Bar Association and the Enright Chapter of the American Inns of Court. I’d run into this new, creative world full force, with no guide or notion of what I was to expect.” (116 WORDS)

## **How to Answer the UC Personal Insight 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?

For the most part, if this essay prompt doesn't jump out at you from the get-go, then perhaps this isn't the best prompt for you to answer. I say this because this is a slightly tricky prompt.

Let's get one thing out of the way before we start: A "significant challenge" is NOT getting an F on a chemistry test, working hard, then ultimately receiving an A in the class as a final grade. In other words, an academic challenge isn't a "significant challenge" in this instance.

So then, what are significant challenges you can write about here? Well, they can be obvious issues like family, socioeconomic, personal, and health challenges.

If you do have a personal challenge that you feel comfortable writing about in one of these UC essays, then here's the place. The trick is this: Your story cannot be a sob story.

**Step #1:** Describe the significant challenge. You can describe the issue in one of two ways: A bird's eye overview of the issue or a specific example/anecdote when the issue was at its peak.

**Step #2:** How did this challenge affect you? This is where you can explain how this challenge impacted you academically.

**Step #3:** What did you learn from this challenge?

The most important note to remember about this essay prompt is this: You must end your essay on a forward-looking note! If you don't end on a positive note, your writing will be crossing into the dangerous territory of a sob story, which is never how you want to end your college essays. Sum up your essay by showcasing how you'll take the learnings from this experience and apply them to your future.

### **SHORT EXCERPT (SAME AT END OF PACKET)**

"School became difficult for me emotionally and academically. Rumors about my brother spread like a wildfire. A majority of my friends heard about these rumors and no longer wanted to associate with me. It was not soon before I felt isolated at school. I tried my best to cope with the loneliness, repeatedly telling myself that it was a phase. It became difficult for me to focus in school without thinking about my brother or that people were afraid to be around me. This did not discourage me from making new friends; however, it made me develop trust issues. I began to take more caution of who to trust, which served to be an advantage for me because during this time I became more self-aware of myself. At that moment of self-realization, I had a clear perception of what was best for me, as well as the two options I had - to allow the emotional and academic stress to eat me away, or to see it as a challenge to overcome. (173 WORDS)

## #6 - UC Essay Example – Engineering Major Essay

Describe your favorite academic subject and explain how it has influenced you. (350 words)

**Step #1:** Introduce and show your passion for your favorite subject Don't say that your favorite subject is biology and leave it at that; you must geek out about a specific biological concept that you find intriguing. Geeking out will show your passion for learning and your intellectual curiosity

**Step #2:** Explain why you find this subject interesting Admissions officers want to understand what motivates you as a student. They want to understand WHY you find this subject interesting — do you like physics because your father is a mechanical engineer and you can have intellectual conversations with him now that you understand the concepts? Do you like economics because you can now understand how the market works and that's why you're dabbling in stock trading?

**Step #3:** Describe how the subject led you to take action to learn more The other piece of the puzzle is to explain how this academic subject has influenced you. The best way to do this is to show how you've taken action on this academic passion of yours.

I'll give you an example: I have a student who is writing about her passion in feminist theory, which is a class she took for fun at a local community college. In her essay, she geeks out about feminist theory and her views on feminism in the scope of the current presidential election. This class opened her eyes and taught her to be more self-aware of unconscious gender biases in her everyday life

### EXAMPLE

I took my first step in an environment littered with wires and monitors hooked up to development boards. Watching my dad, a firmware engineer, fidget with circuit boards that looked like tiny metropolitan cities, I became enamored with computer science and its principles. The unified and coherent languages, built around simple concepts—ifs and ands—captured my interest, and by age six, I was writing simple programs in KPL. I became lost in a world tied to reality only by strings of 0s and 1s—a world that spurred my enduring curiosity and creativity.

In this world, there are no lines between science and art. With brush strokes the colors of syntax highlights, I paint beautiful lines of code. Once every extraneous brace is removed, once the last semicolon is duly placed, once all NullPointerExceptions are fixed, and I finally let the program run—that's where true joy lies. At the same time, I've found that many CS concepts, from simple data structures to complicated algorithms, are often redolent of the abstract high-level math problems that I so enjoy.

My passion for software brought me to my first formal EECS course, where I learned concepts like logic design—in Science Olympiad, I was able to use this knowledge to build an electric vehicle. Similarly, my role as lead full-stack developer at guap, a startup I cofounded, has exposed me not only to many new languages and frameworks, but also to real-world collaborative development. My love for EECS bleeds into my everyday activities, as I tinker with Arduino schematics to make smart mirrors, or code algorithms to solve Project Euler problems.

Immersing in the world of EECS has allowed me to seek out all possible solutions to problems—both in code and in life. EECS has taught me a way of thinking that combines both creativity and pragmatism to create one cohesive problem-solving outlook. I am unfettered by unforeseen conflicts; I shape my own world, because I've come to realize there are no "unsolvable problems." Any bug, whether in code or in reality, can be solved with a little creativity, a change in perspective, and some curiosity.

*Source: One of my students that was admitted to Berkeley for EECS.*

## #6 - Analysis of UC Essay Example Strengths:

### 1. Clear passion and demonstrated interest in future major

This UC essay example clearly showcases student's interests in his future major. Here's a huuuuuge tip: If you're interested in engineering at a place like Berkeley, then it's absolutely critical that you showcase demonstrated interest in your future major through your activities list. Why? Well, the acceptance rate for UC Berkeley Engineering program is less than 9%. To even be remotely competitive for such a prestigious program, you'll have to show admissions that you're passionate about the major.

### 2. Showcases often sought-after quality in admissions: intellectual curiosity

Colleges love students who are intellectually curious. That's sometimes hard to convey through an essay, but the best way to do so is through a story with examples, just like this UC essay example. This student does a fantastic job showcasing his passion for engineering using early childhood memories and extracurricular activities in recent years.

If you're naturally intellectually curious and love to learn, make sure you convey that attribute about yourself in at least one of your UC essays, just like this UC essay example.

## **#7 - UC Essay Example – Sleep Research Essay**

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

**Step #1:** Brainstorm an anecdote showing how you've contributed to your community For this essay (especially), you must have a specific anecdote so that you can explain its significance to you. Showing the reader how the event unfolded instead of telling is always more powerful.

**Step #2:** Explain why you were inspired to act. Your internal motivation to partake in the activity is a key data point that colleges want to understand. What motivates you? What moves you?

**Step #3:** Analyze what this experience has taught you. You must always strive to complete this sentence in the most meaningful way possible: "This event taught me that..."

Once you've distilled the insightful learnings from this experience, the next step is to apply these learnings towards the future. Ask yourself this: How can you apply these learnings to your future moving forward?

### **EXAMPLE**

Within six months, four students from my school district committed suicide, shocking the community. These were our classmates and neighbors—why did they do it? As a good friend to one of the students, I knew he suffered from insomnia—and I wondered about the correlation between unhealthy sleep habits and depression.

My sorrow and yearning for clarity directed me towards sleep research—I walked into Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ leading sleep research lab at the VA Hospital, seeking to join their mission to better understand sleep. I was blessed when she took me on as an intern during my sophomore year. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_'s lab focuses on cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-i). CBT-i tackles insomnia on two fronts: cognitive therapy helps patients overcome mental sleeping blocks, and behavioral therapy ensures that the patients' behaviors enhance sleep. We investigate individual effects of the cognitive and behavioral parts.

This was my chance to learn about the science behind insomnia—especially about its effects on our overall wellness—to better understand my friend's tragic situation. My first duty was patient recruitment through marketing our clinical study to the community, but soon transitioned to data analysis and treatment. Statistical programs such as R and SAS became my best friends, and tests for cognitive ability and neuropsychological status like MOCA and RBANS were my favorite patient evaluations. I've always enjoyed science, but my time with Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ helped me gain a deeper appreciation for research.

Research and medicine are integral parts of my future—there is still ways to go in finding an effective long-term solution to teenage sleep issues and well-being. I have ideas such as marketing CBT-i sleep therapy to increase its accessibility and prevent more tragedies like the ones at my school, and the guidance of UC professors as well as the tight-knit student body gives me the best chances of pursuing my goals and contribute back to the community. An education in the University of California system would provide me with plentiful resources to continue making strides towards solving this problem.

*Source: One of my students that was admitted to Berkeley & UCLA.*

## #7 - Analysis of UC Essay Example Strengths:

### 1. Unique take on a prompt

Most essays I read that attempt to answer UC Personal Insight Prompt 7 usually delve deeply into volunteering and community service. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's always nice to read a fresh take on a prompt that gets almost monotonous. This UC essay example does a fantastic job of creating a unique take on this prompt!

### 2. Going one step further by discussing goals for the future

Many UC essays I read do a good job of telling the story of the past/present. For instance, this UC essay example does just that — it talks in great detail about the student's research and the motivation behind his research project. This UC essay however, goes one step further than most others: The student ends the essay by giving a concrete idea of how he wants to take his current research and delve deeper into it at a UC.

This idea is important because UC admissions officers love to see that students aren't doing activities for the sake of doing it — admissions officers love it when students are passionate about the extracurricular activity, and have ideas to continue pursuing it throughout college to contribute to the academic environment!

## #8 - UC Essay Example – The Creative Yoga Essay

What is the one thing that you think sets you apart from other candidates applying to the University of California?

**Step #1:** Brainstorm an anecdote that resonates with you I know, this is pretty open-ended of me to say, but use this guide about how to brainstorm college essay anecdotes to get find that perfect story. Trust me — this essay, no matter how short, will be strongest with an anecdote to carry your main message.

**Step #2:** Describe the problem or obstacle in the story All stories have some sort of conflict, right? Describe it here. The conflict is the tipping point that helped you realize and learn something from this experience. Additionally, admissions officers love to see examples of resilience, creativity, and grit in handling a problem, so this is a great opportunity to showcase these attributes.

**Step #3:** Analyze! Yup, you guessed it! You need to tell the readers what you learned from the experience. In other words, explain why this instance mattered to you. You’ve been living on this earth for 17-ish years — of all the stories you can possibly tell me, why are you telling me this one? Spend some time reflecting about this.

### **EXAMPLE:**

At the sound of the singing bowl’s ring, marking the beginning of a yoga session, I hesitantly lift both legs overhead, forming the plow pose. Immediately, I feel discomfort seeping into my back.

I begin to ponder: what’s the purpose of this pain? There has to be a reason for the uneasiness of this pose that is deeper than its face value.

“Surrender to the discomfort,” soothes my instructor.

Strange. I’ve been taught my whole life to fight pain. Why yield now?

Gradually, I give in. I fall in sync with the Ujjayi breathing. With a gentle whoosh, my breath escapes, allowing me to concentrate on the richness of the moment. As my attention turns away from my physical state, my body connects to the world and discomfort fades out of my mind.

Then, I realize the purpose: to find comfort amidst discomfort. As my thoughts are quenched by the moment, I discover that mindfulness is centered around acceptance of the present; I focus on every inhale and exhale, every mental sensation. As I yield to the present moment, with my mind concentrating on breathing, I surrendered to the pain.

I take these epiphanies from the yoga mat and carry them into the real world. I’ve discovered how to handle obstacles in life with tranquility and grace. Emotionally and physically, I am stronger.

Furthermore, I realize that this strength is uncovered in the moment. Sometimes in life, we set our sights only on our end goals, preventing us from enjoying the means of reaching it. Whether it’s learning a new calculus concept or playing an instrument, I now know that the most important skills are discovered amidst the process. Regardless of what lies ahead in college or beyond, I know that it’s the journey, not the destination, that matters.

I am unique in my ways of searching for an underlying significance in my journeys. With an unconditional love for exploration and analysis, I can better navigate the world around me. From brewing tea to creating oil paintings, I have a natural tendency to seek deeper meanings in everything I do.

*Source: One of my students that was admitted to Berkeley & UCLA.*

## #8 - Analysis of UC Essay Example Strengths:

### 1. Showcases an aspect of the student that's not apparent in any other part of her application

This UC essay example is smart because of this: Many students out there will be writing about various clubs, sports, and volunteering opportunities...so, this student wrote about an aspect of herself an admissions officer would NEVER know based on her application! If you have a hobby or interest that isn't apparent on any other part of your application that you think is an integral part of who you are, then definitely make sure you showcase that side of you in the UC essays!

### 2. Interestingly crafted sentences

I've read maaaaaany UC essays this past year, and here's a huuuuge tip for you: Change up the cadence of your writing in at least one of your essays. What I mean is, try to experiment with things like using dialogue and rhetorical questions in these short UC essays. Just think about it: You're submitting 4 different UC essays during the application process...you don't want all 4 to sound pretty similar to each other, even if the content is relatively different. Does that make sense? So, switch up your writing and take a slight risk. It'll pay off in loads by keeping the attention of your UC admissions officer!

## SAMPLE EXCERPTS

### UC Prompt #1

**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.**

**UC Berkeley 2019, UC Berkeley '19**

"As a high school student, I wondered how I can make a difference on this suburban dullness. Rather than just looking at the high school that I attended, I decided to impact something bigger, my community. More specifically, I became motivated to reach out to my entire city by hosting a carnival-themed festival called Sharkfest."

### UC Prompt #3

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

**Sydney\_hack, UC Davis '20**

"Then high school happened. I started taking theatre classes and film classes and I saw my friends go to college as musical theatre majors and film production majors. I saw people following their dreams. I'd entered a whole new world. I began to think of all the things that made me happy.

Filmmaking stood out to me and I began to pursue any opportunity I could—I took the filmmaking class at school, I offered to help film video series for the San Diego County Bar Association and the Enright Chapter of the American Inns of Court. I'd run into this new, creative

world full force, with no guide or notion of what I was to expect."

**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.**



**ClaireL**  
UCLA '20

**ClaireL, UC Los Angeles '20**

"Suddenly, a glimmer of inspiration. My gaze settled on my viola, sitting patiently in its gleaming silver case. Why not try Pythagoras' experiment for myself? I plucked the C-string, holding my finger down at exactly  $\frac{1}{2}$  of its length. Almost miraculously, the sound of a C—one

octave higher, exactly twice the frequency—rang out. Moving my finger to  $\frac{1}{3}$  its length, this time it was the G with a frequency three times the original C, one octave and a perfect 5th higher."

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



**g.carrascou4**  
UC Berkeley '19

**G.carrascou4, UC Berkeley '19**

"This was initially a problem for me, however, as I attended three different schools within the short period of my first six months in the country. The first school only saw me for one week; the second school saw me for a semester; the third school saw me finally settling in what would become my home school from elementary all through high school. This transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a more sedentary one provided me with an idea of what my goals were, where I was going to achieve them, and how I was going to accomplish them. In a sense, it was my transition from a helpless, extinct Cro-Magnon to a Homo Sapiens with a future ahead."

## **UC Prompt #5**

**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?**

**Stellaaa, UC Santa Barbara '19**

"School became difficult for me emotionally and academically. Rumors about my brother spread like a wildfire. A majority of my friends heard about these rumors and no longer wanted to associate with me. It was not soon before

I felt isolated at school. I tried my best to cope with the loneliness, repeatedly telling myself that it was a phase. It became difficult for me to focus in school without thinking about my brother or that people were afraid to be around me. This did not discourage me from making new friends; however, it made me develop trust issues. I began to take more caution of who to trust, which served to be an advantage for me because during this time I become more self-aware of myself. At that moment of self realization, I had a clear perception of what was best for me, as well as the two options I had - to allow the emotional and academic stress to eat me away, or to see it as a challenge to overcome."

## UC Prompt #6

**6. Describe your favorite academic subject and explain how it has influenced you.**



**AndyDC**

UC Berkeley '19

### AndyDC, UC Berkeley '19

"Another factor that I consider a major contributor to my personal identity is, oddly enough, a computer program that I was introduced to at age 12. RCT3, as it is called, is a 3D physics simulation game that allows users to essentially build and manage anything users dream up. For me, it offered a refreshing creative outlet for my imagination to flourish. But what enthralled me most was not the game itself, but the flowering community of users behind it. Making our home on internet forums, we were a thriving community of real-life architects, engineers, and programmers all bound by love of the game. Political and geographical barriers had never seemed so trivial to me. We discussed and

collaborated on projects and even edited the source code of the game. I was enamored by the hardware and simple code that gave rise to such a versatile platform."

## UC Prompt #7

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

### Lord of the Lords, UC Berkeley '19

I have always been someone who takes initiative. I pick up trash during trips to the beach, I spend my winter break raising money for hurricane relief, and I make anti-bullying videos in my spare time. And I always want to do more. So when I noticed all the trash that seemed to be accumulating at my high school, I decided to start a campus-wide recycling and composting program. I presented my idea to my AP Environmental Science teacher who shared my concern. She suggested starting a club to get more people involved, an idea which I loved. Thus, the AP Environmental Science (or APES, for short) Club was born.

THESE SAMPLES ARE FOR THE OLD PROMPTS, BUT THE WRITING PROVIDES SOLID EXAMPLES OF THE STYLE YOU NEED TO AIM FOR.

---

## Music for Prague 1968

BY RYAN PARK MORAGA, CALIF.

Do not judge this piece until you have performed it." Repeatedly, Mr. Benstein challenged us to look beyond the rugged atonalism which went against every concept of our musical knowledge, and convey the raw emotion that inspired Karel Husa to compose *Music for Prague 1968*. At that time I did not understand how emotions could be expressed without words nor could I comprehend the nightmarish atmosphere of a Soviet invasion. Instead I was more overwhelmed by the foreign rhythms, the harsh, squeaking notes that existed in the highest registers of my clarinet, the thunderous tempo. I hated the song.

Just as *Music for Prague* shattered my perspective of music, my mother's unsuccessful battle against leukemia shattered the stability of my life. In October of 2005, after eight years and several failed treatments, it was determined that nothing more could be done for my mother. Over the next several months I watched as she withered away, living the last of her days with the feebleness of an old woman. When my mother lay too still in her sleep, I feared that I had lost her. And when she was awake, I was haunted by the images of her shivering violently in bed, the images blurred by the tears I tried to suppress in order to be strong for her, and the demoralizing feeling of helplessness that came with my inability to comfort her. I was torn emotionally. I wanted her suffering to end, but that meant losing her forever.

May 17 was the night of the concert and however nervous I was, all I can remember about that night was my mother, still a mother despite her physical state, harassing me for not taking a shower. It was for her that I vowed I would perform the song.

Mr. Benstein raised his baton and the melody of a bird song echoed from the flutes; the audience fell silent. The peaceful aura was broken by the minor chords of my clarinet, calling forth a looming presence. His baton strokes widened, and machine guns blasted from the snare drum, adding to the roaring of the brass tanks. My instrument emanated the cries of suffering, the notes shivering off my tongue. With the final upswing, he summoned the Hussite War song, and much of the pain that had built up inside my heart over the past months was lifted. My father told me later that he was deeply shaken by the piece as well. I realized that *Music for Prague* was not about the structure or the visual images it conjured, but instead it was the very lack of structure that allowed for Husa's emotions to stand out.

She passed away only a couple of hours after the performance. For the first time in months she looked at peace as she lay still in the presence of her family and I was able to accept that she was in a better place. It was Karel Husa's ability to capture the loneliness and the pain of losing a loved one that allows *Music for Prague* to move us all. The rhythm and beat of music describe emotions not restricted by words, flowing together with the beating of the heart. WORDS: 534

## Ahmad Ashraf '17

### Lahore Grammar School, Pakistan

"Mum, I'm gay."

The horrified look on her face is my biggest fear. She's lived her whole life battling one tragedy after another. She has been caged, staying in an unhappy marriage for the sake of her children.

And now to hear this from her only son. The words terrify her. She cannot comprehend the meaning of this. She just doesn't understand; is it something she did? Is it her fault? Maybe her children did need a father after all. Maybe she could have prevented this if she'd seen the signs. Maybe she shouldn't have let him play with her *duppattas*, laughing away the concerns of her own mother.

Maybe she could have done something.

And I cry when I think of this. Because I know it may be true, even though it hasn't yet happened. I cry because she might love me less. At the unfairness of such love, based on such trivial criteria. But mostly, I cry because she might blame herself. Because it isn't her fault, if only she could understand. It's taken me years to comprehend, but it's not mine either.

I cannot really blame her. She is a Muslim. She is Pakistani. She was raised, conditioned, to hate me. What am I to say to that?

To distract myself, I fight. I volunteer at an LGBT foundation. I walk the streets, chanting for women's rights. I collaborate with the HRCP to arrange a minority rights conference at my school. I paint, I write, putting all my love, all my despair, all my thoughts onto paper. I cannot state that I am gay, so I fight for everybody else. And in that community, with those activists, I find peace. I find a history, I find lineage. In glitter, I trace my ancestors. I understand, finally, that love is made; relationships are built, not on blood, but on acceptance. Looking at those men and women, bold, brave, bright, I find my family. I realize it is our suffering that brings us together.

I think of my mother's suffering.

She too broke the rules. She is also an outcast. Against the wishes of her family, she became a doctor. Shocking society, she left a man she didn't love. Why do I look at her troubles negatively? She has transgressed as well, perhaps more than me. She would certainly understand. In our suffering, we are bound. With empty hands, we have no choice but to help each other; she and I. I underestimated my mother. Who am I to undermine her troubles? How dare I suggest she is like the rest of society when I know she isn't?

I imagine her, then, looking at me. Bemused. When I've made my big confession. "That's it?" she would say. And then she would walk off, leaving me beaming.

But even if she doesn't accept me, I have understood this: my existence is not based on one person. I have an entire tribe now, rights to fight for, slogans to shout. A whole family tree, waiting to be decked with rhinestones.

WORDS: 509

## Essays that worked!

Dane Bjorklund '10

West High School, Madison, Wisconsin

Not reveille, but the thunderous crack of a head colliding with wood woke me one early July morning. Big Mike, an eight-year old, overweight, asthmatic ball of energy had shot up like a catapult, only to receive a face full of top bunk from the overlying bed. With glossy eyes and a contused forehead, Big Mike incoherently shifted his weight and rose to his feet. I watched curiously as the class clown of my cabin unconsciously staggered over to his seedy secondhand suitcase at the foot of his bed. The frigid air coated Big Mike's skin with a layer of goose bumps as he defied all convention by dropping his boxers and turning his open suitcase into a portable urinal. The nine glasses of bug juice he drank during lunch evacuated his body and soaked the suitcase's contents. I froze, mystified and yet thoroughly amused. Should I wake him and risk his embarrassment? Or should I let him finish and deal with the situation in the morning? I decided to wait. Big Mike hoisted his boxers and dreamily returned to his bunk.

Cool morning dew blended unceremoniously with the warm stench radiating off of the musty suitcase. The aroma wafted towards my bed and hit me harder than Big Mike had hit the top bunk. As I attempted to fall back to sleep, the bugle echoed throughout camp. Morning music blared and kids were getting dressed when Big Mike shouted, "Yo Dane, somebody peed in my suitcase!" I told Big Mike and the other guys how I had mistakenly left the cabin door open over night. "A raccoon must've got in; I'm sorry dude, that's my fault." Big Mike and the rest of my oblivious campers ate breakfast as I spent the morning doing laundry.

Eight years ago I joined my second family. At Camp Minikani I, too, wet the bed and idolized wacky counselors I only dreamt of one day becoming. Now I am that wacky counselor, an unexplainable role model in worn out tennis shoes and a beat up baseball cap. I am an extraordinary combination of doctor, lawyer and teacher. Each week of the summer eighteen parents - some doubtful, others relieved - leave their most prized possessions with me: a liable, loud, long haired lunatic. I am a blender full of coach, referee and teammate. I build trust between ten complete strangers, myself included. I help reveal hidden confidence at the rock wall. I am a guide in social adjustment while I undergo my own self-discovery. Together we construct unforgettable memories just as my counselors once did for me.

Minikani's effect on me has expanded far beyond just the summer camp. It has molded me into an outgoing, mature, and effective leader year round. The positive atmosphere at camp has inspired me to give back to my own community through peer tutoring and freshman advisory. My group presence and style of creative encouragement have made me an inspiring team captain both on the soccer field and on the ice rink. I have learned to take challenging risks in school in terms of which classes I enroll in and projects I undertake. I am eager to meet new people and learn as much from them as they have to offer; I have learned that a cabin of eight year-olds can enlighten me with imaginative ideas about outer space as much as a physics teacher can. I know I would be an asset to your school because I am a well-rounded leader who thrives in a community environment. I look forward to the incredible learning opportunities as well as giving back to the campus through my extracurricular involvement and leadership.

Big Mike, my other campers, and the rest of my Minikani family have influenced my life as much as I hope to have impacted theirs. Our learning together has helped me develop into the person I am today. Camp Minikani has taught me many life skills. I have learned to trust, to respect, to receive, to give back, to love, and of course, how to do laundry.

SAMPLE

## UC Prompt #1

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.

The lamprey was appalling. With its beady yellow eyes, and its revolting grey color, the jawless fish released an odor of utter death sitting three feet in front of me on its dissecting pan. I never liked seafood, but this was horrendous on an entirely different level. Approaching the counter, the burning stench of dead sea life filled my nostrils as I pinched my nose and squinted my eyes, trying to avoid its confrontation. My hands were sweat-streaked through their plastic gloves. My heart beat like drums on a death march as I reached for the frigid scalpel beside the worksheet labeled “Dissection of a Sea Lamprey”. This was the dreaded day—our first class dissection. “But why sea lampreys?” I asked my science teacher. “Why couldn’t we dissect less parasitic animals like snails?” My response was laughter.

Not comprehending the task at hand, I reread the instructions that said, “Carefully cut your lamprey’s underside and locate the internal structures of its digestive system”. Wiping away the fog from my safety goggles, I grimaced as I made the first incision to the lamprey’s stomach. Suddenly, as its intestine, ovaries, and liver came pouring out, all traces of stench and horridness were gone. I realized that I wasn’t dissecting an atrocious parasite; it was a familiar vertebrate—just like you and me.

After passionately completing my lamprey dissection that cool fall day in 2010, I found science to be a topic that greatly interested me. My decision to go beyond taking general biology in ninth grade lead me to venture into the medical field because it deals directly with the sciences and would allow me to explore its wonders of human and animal anatomy. Before committing myself to pursue a medical career, I decided to volunteer at a hospital in order to get the gist of hospital duties and the work environment. I currently volunteer at Kaiser Permanente and absolutely love it there! My responsibilities include: transporting disabled patients from garages to destined patient rooms, getting medicine from the pharmacy for elderly patients, directing visitors to sick loved ones’ rooms, straightening up the lobby, updating the census sheet, and making

sure every individual is greeted with a warm welcome upon entering the hospital. Although it might seem like a breeze, becoming familiar with an enormous hospital was extremely challenging. With persistence, I managed to memorize all major sections of the hospital, all major towers, and most extension numbers. Now, I can help direct an injured athlete to the radiology department for an X-ray, or guide diabetes patients to obtain their laboratory test results. Unfortunately, people come in with severe illnesses that may or may not be curable. This saddens me, but also gives me reason to be thankful for something so widely taken for granted. Volunteering at a hospital has made me all too aware that good health is not given to all, yet most people who have it fail to see it as a blessing, and I am thankful for having had the opportunity to realize this so early on in life.

My passion and growing interests have taught me how to persevere through obstacles. I am certain I can meet the challenges of a four-year education, successfully complete graduate school, and ultimately attend medical school because I have the diligence to fully apply myself to any endeavor I pursue. I am excited to venture into this next phase of my life and continue my passion to investigate science, the field of medicine, and to eventually get more comfortable with seafood.

Word Count: 591