



UC PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS

Monterey Peninsula College
Counseling &
Career Transfer Resource Center

WHY PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS?

- ❑ This is your opportunity to present yourself in more depth, to add your personal voice to your application
- ❑ Think of it as your opportunity for an interview
- ❑ The responses add clarity, depth, and meaning to your applications
- ❑ It allows you to explain the various factors in your life that have led to your academic success, or at times, academic hardships
- ❑ Lets you stand out from the crowd
- ❑ Showcases your ability to think analytically and write critically
- ❑ Will be used for scholarship consideration



WHAT MAKES A GOOD RESPONSE TO A PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTION?

- ❑ A good response is personal. It is not an essay, but it should be well designed and follow a good structural guideline
- ❑ It is honest, thoughtful, and reflective of the person you are
- ❑ It compliments the information in your application without repeating it
- ❑ Transforms negatives into positives
- ❑ Shows confidence, not arrogance

THE RULES

- You need to answer 4 out of 8 questions
- 1 question is required to answer, the other 3 are your choice
 - All have equal value in admission selection process
- Each response limited to 350 words
- Do not go over!
 - You will not be allowed to continue with the application if one prompt is over 350 words
- Don't come up short
 - It is best to come as close to the 350 word limit as possible



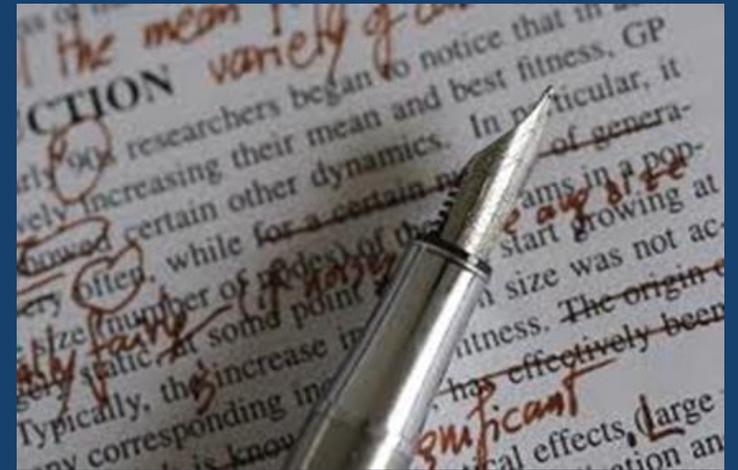
THE QUESTIONS — REQUIRED PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTION

REQUIRED

Please describe how you have prepared for your intended major, including your readiness to succeed in upper-division courses once you enroll at the university.



THE QUESTIONS (YOUR CHOICE — PICK THREE OUT OF SEVEN)



Question One

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

Question Two

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.

Question Three

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

THE PROMPTS (YOUR CHOICE — PICK THREE OUT OF THE SEVEN

Question Four

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

Question Five

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?



THE PROMPTS (YOUR CHOICE — PICK THREE OUT OF THE SEVEN

Question Six

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

Question Seven

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?



REQUIRED QUESTION CONSIDERATIONS

How did your interest in the major develop?

How/When did you discover you were interested in the major?

Were you inspired by someone? Was there a specific experience that led you to that choice? Examples can include classes you've taken, family, culture, community, previous experiences

What experience do you have in this field?

What have you done to develop/explore this interest? i.e. classes, volunteer, work, internship, attending lectures, travel, etc.

If you have not explored the major beyond major coursework preparation, explain why

What have you gained/learned?

How has it motivated/inspired you to continue to pursue this field?

What do you want to do with it in the future?

How has it built your character/contributed to your personal development?

How is the major tied to your long term goals?

What do you plan to do after you have earned your degree?

Do not just repeat your major preparation courses!

OPTIONAL QUESTION #1 CONSIDERATIONS

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

- How do you define “leader”? List three words that you think describe what a leader is.
- Do any of those words describe you?
 - Explain how they describe you in your prompt.
- Is there a time in your life when you displayed any of those traits?
 - Explain that experience and how it shaped your leadership skills overall

OPTIONAL QUESTION #2 CONSIDERATIONS

“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.”

- Was there a problem where your imagination and intuition guided you to the solution?
- Do you have a passion for music, theater, visual art, dance, etc.? What have you gained from it that has affected other parts of your life?
- Was there a time when your viewpoint was unique compared to others? What was the issue or problem from your perspective? How was it different from others'? What did you learn about yourself in comparing the conflicting perspectives?

OPTIONAL QUESTION #3 CONSIDERATIONS

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

- List three of your talents or skills.
 - Were these talents or skills the same a few years ago? What changed? What improved?
 - Which of these talents or skills is the most meaningful and important to you, and why?
 - Does the talent come naturally or have you worked hard to develop it?
- Try not to use a shocking or highly unusual talent or skill; do not scare off your reader
- The talents and skills you write about should reflect you as a person, not those that are just a one off talent and don't relate much to who you are

OPTIONAL QUESTION #4 CONSIDERATIONS

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

- Can choose opportunity, barrier, or both to write about
- For opportunities:
 - What programs or additional classes have you taken advantage of that have better prepared you for college (example: Puente, Summer Bridge, UC Berkeley’s TAP, etc.)
 - How did you find out about those opportunities? How did you take what you learned and apply it to your schoolwork or other aspects of your life? What did you gain from those experiences?
- For Barriers:
 - Barriers can include a disability, educational barriers, financial, family, social, etc.
 - Focus on how you overcame the barrier. Write about your personal characteristics or skills you have that you used to overcome the barriers
 - Describe the challenge and how it impacted you and your academics
 - Describe your response to the challenge – it should be a positive response about how you grew and developed from that challenge

OPTIONAL QUESTION #5 CONSIDERATIONS

“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?”

- Have you had a difficult experience in your life?
- How did you get through it?
- What did you learn going through this experience?
- If you're currently working your way through a challenge, what are you doing now and does that affect different aspects of your life?
- Focus on what you have done to overcome the challenge – emphasize your resiliency
- Highlight how you have been successful despite the challenge(s) you faced

OPTIONAL QUESTION #6 CONSIDERATIONS

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

- Why were you inspired to act?
- What steps did you taken to accomplish this?
- What did you learn from your work and effort?
- Does this relate to your future goals at all?

OPTIONAL QUESTION #7 CONSIDERATIONS

“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?”

- Don't be afraid to brag a little
- You can write about:
 - Your unique personality traits
 - What you value in life
 - What you are passionate about
 - What possessions you cherish
- You are a unique person – so in what ways will your uniqueness benefit the UC campus you are applying to?
- Why should the UC campus accept you? What will you bring to them that other applicants will not?

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

REFLECT, REFLECT, REFLECT

Start early. An effective essay takes time

Be yourself – it's personal!

Be honest. Use your voice – have it read like a conversation

Proofread, and get others to proof

Seek Feedback from people who can be objective or who know the UC requirements

Use vivid, specific details and examples. Help the reader gain a better understanding of you.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Explain “what” statements with “why” and “how” details

It’s better to focus on one concept and expand on it, than three and be general

Be concise and succinct – Admissions Evaluators spend approximately 7 minutes to read responses

Don’t ramble; Say more with fewer words;
No/limited scene setting

Focus on your personal growth and development;
how have you become the person you are?

Show your passion!



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Four guiding principles to writing an effective personal insight question responses: opportunity, authenticity, differentiation, effectiveness

- ❑ **Opportunity:** This is your opportunity to “interview” with the UC campuses
- ❑ **Authenticity:** Admissions evaluators can tell if it was not written by you, or if you exaggerated the truth. You should not use a thesaurus when writing your response, your voice should echo throughout. Read your paper aloud and make edits when anything does not sound like you.
- ❑ **Differentiation:** Admissions counselors read hundreds of essays, make yours stand out. Avoid clichés and overused themes (parent’s divorce, service trips, etc.)
- ❑ **Effectiveness:** Written well, free of grammar and spelling mistakes. Avoid negative language; it should be a positive piece about you

COMMON MISTAKES

Repeating what's already in other parts of your essay, or in other prompts

Prompts will be read with application, so no need to repeat. However, it should explain what is in your application

Listing accomplishments – it's repetitive and offers no depth

Complaining about your circumstances

Obstacles are good to share if you can show how you grew and developed in overcoming them. You can also highlight how you took advantage of resources available to you

Talking about someone else

They want to know about YOU!

COMMON MISTAKES

Grammatical errors; not proofread

Too many errors are distracting to the reader,
you want them to focus on you and your story
Could look like you PROCRASTINATED!

Telling the university about itself

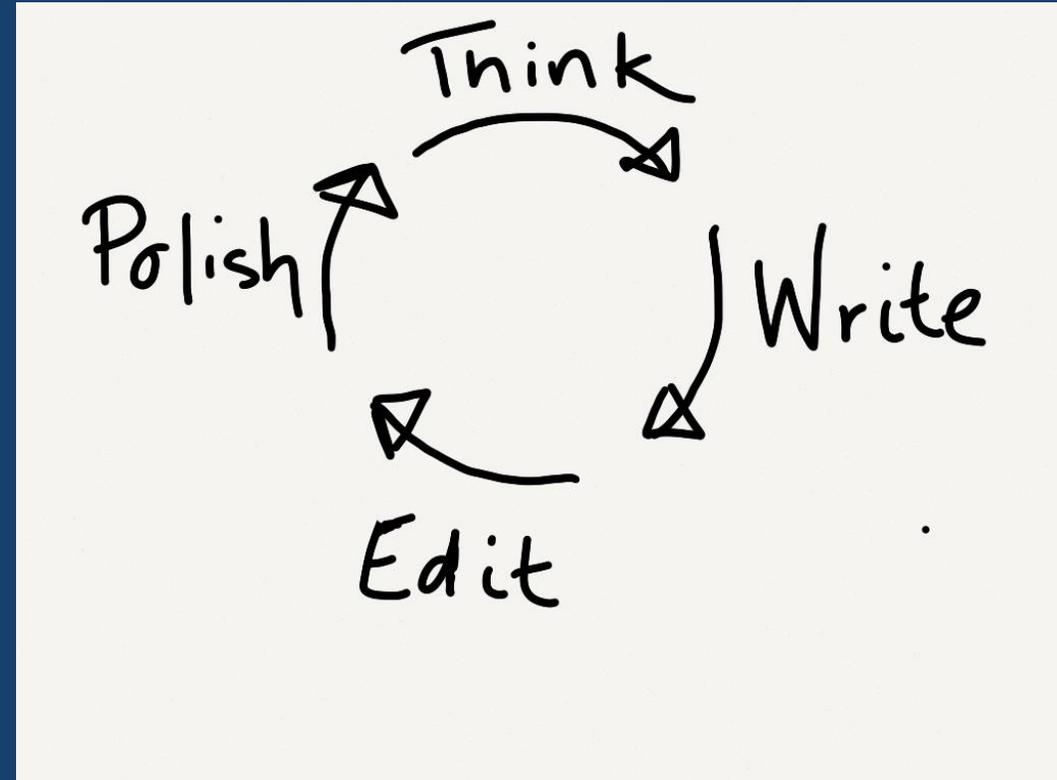
Ex: "UCLA has an excellent film department"

Too general or theoretical

Stick to facts and specifics you want the UC to know about you

Creative writing (poems, clichés, scenes)

This is not a creative writing assignment



COMMON MISTAKES

Writing an essay and not your Personal Insights

Inappropriate use of humor

Leaving important information out that can make a difference

- The reader does not know you; you must explain the whole situation .
Imagine you are writing to a stranger, because you are!
- However, you must also be concise. Use your words carefully to add context and depth without adding too much space

Keep it respectful, pretend it is an interview on paper

Typing directly onto the application

- Type it into a word processing program and copy and paste your response in.



PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS CHECKLIST

- Did you answer the questions?
- Are your responses supported with details?
- Did you avoid repeating content already in the application?
- Grammar and spelling
- Conciseness
- Originality

Have several people look this over and prepare to do several revisions
– this is not a “last minute” endeavor!



WE ARE HERE TO HELP!

[UC Personal Insight Questions website](#)

MPC Counseling Office: (831) 646-4020

Career & Transfer Resource Center: (831) 645-1336

