

THE UC PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS

Keep in mind that most students who apply to the UC are already academically selective, so they are looking for students to go beyond that. Context is key in the UC application because they are not comparing student to student, they are looking at each student's individual experiences and environment.

You will have to answer 4 out of 8 questions and are given 350 words for each response.

- **Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.**
- **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.**
- **What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?**
- **Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.**
- **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?**
- **Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.**
- **What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?**
- **Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?**

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS SECTIONS

Purpose of the additional academic section right after course entry:

It should be used to explain gaps in education, curricular choices, repeated grades. This section is intended to give insight into the academic history of the student that is not made clear in the coursework section. For instance explanation of: an unusual low grade, course choice, BHS school community etc.

Purpose of the Additional Information question after the Personal Insight Question:

This is an opportunity to add additional information that has not been mentioned anywhere else on the application. Students can input information however they wish, bullet points, short sentences, short paragraphs. Students may use it to include a short comment about a specific honor or award, include a research abstract from their own work, or clarify a work or volunteer experience.

DO'S

- All questions state “you” and “your” so the responses should be “I” and “my”.
- Read the questions carefully and answer it! Don't worry about a thesis statement or topic sentence! Be clear, focused and direct.
- Don't repeat yourself.
- Address separate experiences/examples in each response.
- Discuss recent events, or events that may have happened in your past that continue to impact you in your daily academic or home life.
- Only discuss past events as they are relevant to your current situation.
- Use concrete and specific examples in the response to show the reader what you are trying to convey.
- Have multiple people read your responses: a person you know, another person you don't know well and an English teacher who can review grammar.

DON'TS

- Avoid descriptive, general language in favor of speaking in detail about your experiences.
- Avoid acronyms.
- Avoid quotations or dialogue.
- Avoid philosophy, instead make your responses direct and personal.
- Avoid using poems, clichés, haikus.
- Don't repeat the prompt.
- Avoid flowery language.
- Avoid story telling and scene setting.
- Don't use jokes and sarcasm since everyone has a different sense of humor and a reader may not understand or agree with your humor.

EXAMPLES

1. LEADERSHIP

I have had the unique opportunity to be an instructor at my family's martial arts school since the age of nine. The role as a black belt instructor has allowed me to work well with others while developing qualities such as maturity, patience, and attention to detail. Through teaching, I've learned to communicate with a wide variety of individuals from the ages of four to eighty-two.

Every student develops at his or her own pace, and being an effective instructor means understanding the individual needs and teaching the individual in a way in which they can learn best. As a young instructor, I have gained confidence and respect by overcoming a cultural barrier. In the martial arts world, rank supersedes age in the standard of hierarchy. Whereas, society dictates the contrary. Thus, it is daunting to instruct a student who is, for example, twenty years older than me. However, I realized that it is my duty to earn the respect of the students who are older than I am, but of a lower rank. I work diligently to earn my students' respect by keeping a positive attitude and by helping them with any confusion they experience. I learned the values of building relationships with other people who may differ from me physically, mentally, and ethically.

As an instructor in martial arts, I was able to experience both being a teacher and a student. As a teacher, I learned to see the perspectives of other teachers who instruct me. By experiencing this relationship as a teacher, I learned to better understand my role as a teacher and better fulfill my role as a student. This experience has given me a sense of confidence to overcome obstacles in the face of adversity. Through the unique experience of teaching at a young age, I learned to become a hard working and heedful student that can capitalize on viewing multiple perspectives. This has given me a sense of confidence to overcome obstacles and a depth of experience by working with a diverse set of people.

2. CREATIVITY

Music has been my longest running passion, my lifelong best friend, and my deepest connection with my family and myself. When I was 11, I stated taking violin lessons to prepare to join the orchestra when I stated middle school, and it wasn't until about halfway through 7th grade that I realized this love for classical music was going to stick. I spent my entire middle and high school career under the musical direction of Mark Wardlaw. The discipline, care and sharpness that his class required formed me in ways that nothing else could have.

There is no feeling parallel to that of sitting among bandmates on a hot stage under blaring lights, about to play the first note of the piece you have all slaved over for the past three months. The hours of sounding terrible, not getting it, going to rehearsal every day and practicing every night, all come down to this moment. This first note that acts as the passage into your communication with the audience all of the work, hours, and love you have put into doing this piece of music justice.

It feels like an eternity of anticipation, staring into the stage lights as your conductor introduces the piece, as you hold the seed of your labors in waiting hands. Then, it happens. The first note, then the second, and suddenly you're putting your everything into playing this piece one last time. The only way to describe this feeling is that the music carries you. Your personal relationship with your instruments, your bandmates, and the music itself are telling a story beyond words. It is in this moment that I feel my soul shining, that I feel my truest self, that I feel pure joy.

3. SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE

Throughout my life, peers from Palo Alto classrooms to Sunday school halls have assumed my identity based off of my blond hair and hazel eyes, telling me I was lying when I said that I was Muslim. Growing up, I never felt that I truly fit into one category because while I don't look "Muslim" enough for the media, my French-Algerian and Swedish background sets me apart from most of the people in my classroom.

As a young child, I wanted to share my uniqueness with everybody and anybody, but after receiving too many "I don't believe you" responses and judgemental looks, I began silencing myself in order to fit in. However, after noticing just how many innocent people were being subject to discrimination, I recognized that my silence was detrimental to my community and took it upon myself to begin using my voice and my privilege as a white Muslim.

Sophomore year, my teacher asked us to create a presentation on a topic we feel passionate about. I immediately thought of Muslim discrimination. I made a video where I highlighted how, regardless of your religion, it's important to speak up for yourself and others. When presenting, peers from elementary school weren't surprised by my topic, but newer faces were shocked. Looking into my classmates' eyes, I challenged them to educate their peers, referencing America's current divide. Their facial expressions said it all. Teary eyes and open mouths told me I had made a positive impact on my class. While I'm still continuing to develop and understand my own faith, I am proud of my individuality and background, never muting myself.

The initial struggle but ultimate embrace of my identity has led me to feel comfortable in my own skin and made me eager to speak up. During class my strong sense of individuality has pushed me to speak up and ask more questions. Outside of class, I've embraced my own unique perspective by confidently spreading my feminist ideals through art. In addition, my childhood fearlessness is now also reflected through my immediate and improvisational style.

4. STAND OUT

Growing up, finding one's self and what one wants to achieve is a journey unique to each and every one. Growing up can be difficult and there comes a point where one hears, "Who's our role model?" or "Who is the person you want to be like when you get older?" When we are children our response would be "mom or dad or even an older sibling", I grew up thinking of the reality of the situation and not having that many "fantasy" jobs. I knew that I would not be able to be the best doctor in the world or achieve my wildest dreams. "You can do anything you want in life" is a usual phrase one hears adults say to encourage them to explore their dreams and pursue endless possibilities. Not so much in my family. I grew up hearing that everything in this world is expensive and that it is going to take hard work to be able to achieve a goal you want. As we transition into making our own decisions, one looks to a person for guidance.

My parents were not raised in the United States; therefore, they do not know the difficulties of school and don't know how to be of help. My older sister took a different path in life, and she wasn't able to guide me because she never had to experience it herself. Not having anyone to help me, I had to reach out to school for help and took every opportunity that came my way. I had to go through all of the high school journey trying to figure out what is the best choice and what is the right option. I created a path where I want to do the best I can and sometimes it fails or takes a long time but I know that all my hard work and long hours will pay off. Not having that someone to look up to has made me work harder because I know if I accomplish my goals it is going to mean so much more to me.

5. STAND OUT

Living in both a remote village of seventy people in northern Sweden and the bustling metropolis of Los Angeles has cultivated two different versions of me, each with a unique perspective on the world. The political climates of my two homelands seem to contradict. Sweden values health care, the environment, and democratic socialism, whereas the United States is a hub of global activity and economic might. This dichotomy fostered my interest in government and politics from a young age as I witnessed my incredibly liberal American family bemoan the Bush administration while my ultra-conservative Swedish family complained about the near-socialist agenda of their mother country.

My Swedish relatives consistently challenge my own beliefs. They have caused me to understand the logic and reasoning behind opposite opinions, rather than blindly rejecting them. With hopes for a career in politics, being able to step into another's shoes and consider the rationale behind whatever viewpoint they may hold is a valuable skill that I've begun to adopt as a result of this duality.

This helped me realize that the disparity between these two nations is not so noticeable beneath the surface. While the language may be different, the problems are universal. Whether I'm arguing with my hyper-religious grandfather in Swedish or getting into disagreements in the comment section of a friend's Facebook post, the underlying issues bear resemblance. It's the way that these problems are addressed that draws the distinction between these nations, and seeing these differences has caused me to develop a multi-faceted view of life and politics.

Sweden is an integral part of my identity, it has shaped who I am and guided me to discover my passions. These contrasting aspects of myself have allowed me to develop a mentality of open-mindedness that is essential to the learning experience at the University of California, which attracts students from a myriad of backgrounds representing a multitude of viewpoints. Through my Swedish heritage, I've cast off a one-sided mindset and learned to view the world and its flaws as more nuanced than merely right and wrong.

6. STAND OUT

What makes me a stand-out candidate for admissions to the University of California is, I am not afraid to cross boundaries and take chances. The rest of the candidates rather fall into the same category, with me the beauty of my aura is, you can't place me into a specific category. Academically I have improved tremendously unlike any other, my future is far different, you can't pick an applicant who wants to use all their future salary to start their own foundation. To help at-risk youths, aid economically disadvantaged teens receive scholarships, low-income families, and animals of all kind.

Simply put it, I am the complete package the University of California has been looking for to put on those brochures, I know some students have higher test scores than me, but doesn't take away from my credibility. I make up for that mistake in how I elevated my coursework from my freshman year to my junior year, the adversary I have overcome and I'm the only one who can succeed out of my comfort zone. Put me in any situation, have me stranded with no source of hope, I guarantee you I will make you regret your decisions. IF it's a quiz I haven't study for, trying to complete a last-minute project example, I go up against three stand out debaters from UCLA and I hadn't had any practice and my admissions ticket is on the line, I'm taking on that challenge full throttle, and don't be surprised if I turn some heads in the process (take chances).

In terms of crossing boundaries, in ninth grade I tried out for the lacrosse team without ever playing and no knowledge of the game, I had to go up against highly skilled athletes. I went home battered and bruised, but I do not regret crossing that boundary and trying something new. All in all, I'm the complete package who desperately wants to prove the doubters wrong, give me a chance!

RESPONSE EVALUATION

1. This is a successful response because:

- It is insightful on what it means to be a leader.
- It demonstrates growth.
- It connects the experiences back to being a student.
- It is clear, concise, and genuine.
- It shows leadership

2. This response needs improvement because:

- It lacks connection to creative outlet or problem solving.
- It focuses more on practice instead of creativity.
- It is too descriptive with not a lot of reflection.
- Used “you” instead of “I”

3. This is a successful response because:

- It is focused on him/herself.
- Student learned to stand up for self and others.
- It demonstrates growth.
- It connects their experiences back to being a student.
- It is genuine, succinct and purposeful.

4. This response needs improvement because:

- It has too many broad statements and 3rd person perspective instead of writing in 1st person.
- It has too many rhetorical questions.
- The topic is unclear until the very end.
- It doesn't focus on their personal life and their experience enough.
- It is too vague.

5. This is a successful response because:

- Student is focused on depth of topic versus breadth.
- Student's experiences challenge the applicants thinking and helped inspire future goals.
- It draws parallels between contrasting experiences and cultures.
- It stayed focused on applicant.

6.

This response needs improvement because:

- It has too many ideas and examples in one response.
- It is difficult to follow their thoughts.
- It has a lack of depth and follow-through on examples.
- Grammar and spelling mistakes makes it difficult to understand.
- It doesn't focus on own achievements and compares self to others.