



**OCEAN
DISCOVERY
INSTITUTE**
young lives transformed through science

PERSONAL STATEMENT WORKSHOP

Christina Contreras. September 23, 2020

TODAY'S GOALS

- Ocean Leaders will gain admissions essay writing techniques that can be later used with mentor in developing college applications.
- Ocean Leaders will select one prompt and begin to develop a response.

AGENDA

- Intro to Personal Insight Questions
- Choosing the right PIQs for you
- Writing an excellent essay
- Breakouts
- Wrap Up

INTRO TO PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS

FROM UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA ADMISSIONS

Directions

- You will have 8 questions to choose from. You must respond to only 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.

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

PIQ TIPS

DO

- Demonstrate your character, the qualities required to succeed in college (persevere, overcome obstacles, grit, resilience).
- Define motivation you are passionate about.
- Show maturity and ability to think globally.
- Use “I” and “my” statements.
- Consider your AUDIENCE, how can you tailor your response?
- Paint a picture/ tell a story with a beginning, middle, end, and be specific.
- Write with honesty, sincerity, authenticity.
- Be upfront about feelings/ anxieties.

DON'T

- Complain, EXPLAIN! Don't be negative, but asset-focused
- Talk in generalities, be personal.
- Choose a broad, complex issue to discuss, keep it local.
- Wait until the last minute to write your responses.
- Use clichés, epiphanies, road less traveled, creative writing, quotes/dialogue, scene setting, asking questions—think of your audience!
- Use abbreviations, acronyms—this is a formal writing sample.
- Leave inconsistencies unaddressed.

ACTIVITY: ACCEPTED OR DENIED?

Case #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.

ACTIVITY: ACCEPTED OR DENIED?

Case #1

Would this response be deemed as successful or needs improvement?

Successful

- Insightful response on what it means to be a leader
- Demonstrates growth
- Connect their experience back to being a student
- Clear, concise, and genuine
- Leadership Qualities



ACTIVITY: ACCEPTED OR DENIED?

Case #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 your 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 that if I accomplish my goals it is going to mean so much more to me.

ACTIVITY: ACCEPTED OR DENIED?

Case #4

Would this response be deemed as successful or needs improvement?

Needs Improvement

- Too many broad statements and 3rd person perspective instead of writing in 1st person
- Too many rhetorical questions
- Topic unclear until very end
- Doesn't focus on their life and their experience enough

ACTIVITY: ACCEPTED OR DENIED?

Case #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.

ACTIVITY: ACCEPTED OR DENIED?

Case #5*

Would this response be deemed as successful or needs improvement?

Successful

- Student focused on depth of topic vs breadth
- Experiences challenge the applicants thinking and helped inspire future goals
- Draws parallels between contrasting experiences and cultures
- Kept it focused on applicant



PIQ TAKEAWAYS

- Write essay in first person instead of third
- Don't drag it out
- Focus on your story while writing, don't worry about the editing too much because you will get editing support
- Don't just say it, give them more, make them feel it
- Give them the whole journey with the right details

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PIQ'S FOR YOU

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT YOU?

What do you want colleges to know about you?

What adjectives describe those qualities?

What is Special About You?

College Application & Scholarship Essay Prep

WHAT ADJECTIVES DESCRIBE YOU?

Highlight the terms below that describe you. You may also add your own.

Adaptable	Direct	Kind
Altruistic	Easy-going	Logical
Ambitious	Encouraging	Mature
Appreciative	Energetic	Open-minded
Artistic	Enterprising	Original
Athletic	Enthusiastic	Productive
Authentic	Even-tempered	Reflective
Bold	Focused	Responsible
Brave	Friendly	Self-assured
Bright	Generous	Self-reliant
Caring	Genuine	Sensible
Cheerful	Grateful	Sensitive
Compassionate	Gregarious	Spiritual
Complex	Happy	Studios
Confident	Honorable	Talented
Consistent	Imaginative	Thorough
Cooperative	Independent	Thoughtful
Courageous	Industrious	Tolerant
Creative	Ingenious	Tough
Dependable	Intelligent	Trustworthy
Determined	Intuitive	Unusual
Diligent	Inventive	Upbeat
Diplomatic	Joyful	Wise

WHAT DO YOU WANT COLLEGES TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

Choose three adjectives from the list above that describe you well and that you want a college or scholarship committee to know about you. Make sure each adjective highlights a different part of your personality or abilities.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT YOU?

With the adjectives you chose, describe a true story of when you demonstrated those qualities.

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TURNING YOUR ADJECTIVES INTO ESSAYS

Adjective	True story or specific example that shows you demonstrating this quality

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AQA BAHIA, College Readiness: BUA 11
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CHOOSE A PROMPT

Choose the prompts that best allow you to tell your story!

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. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.
7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?
8. 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?

WRITING AN EXCELLENT ESSAY

BRAINSTORM

- Prompt at a time, jot down as many thoughts as you have answering the prompt.
- Organize the list of thoughts into categories of like-ideas.
- Identify the 2-3 themes that are emerging. These will be your main ideas for each supporting paragraph.
 - Ensure that the main ideas are answering all parts of the prompt (typically multi-part prompts).

Example prompt: “the best ways to annoy your teacher”

- bring toys to school, play with them during lessons
- talk when the teacher is talking
- be obnoxious
- yell out answers
- pick your nose
- lean back in your chair
- interrupt
- run in the classroom
- hit other students
- bring things that beep, watches, games, etc.
- mimic the teacher
- burp, or make other loud, rude noises
- goof off during a test
- get up and walk around when the teacher is talking
- pull the chair out from under someone
- play in the classroom, especially when you have lots to do
- mess with the teacher's hair
- throw paper planes or other projectiles
- forget your homework all the time
- eat food in the classroom
- tell lies
- have a sloppy desk
- pick on other kids
- scare the teacher
- mess with other people's stuff
- talk during videos

OUTLINE AND FREE WRITE

Outline

Insert themes into essay structure. (see “Write An Excellent Essay Worksheet”)

Develop thesis

This is your answer to the question.

Does this statement answer the question?

Free write

Free write for about 5-10 minutes nonstop.

Be Yourself. Admissions officers want to learn about you and your writing ability. Write about something meaningful and describe your feelings, not necessarily your actions. If you do this, your essay will be unique. Many people travel to foreign countries or win competitions, but your feelings during these events are unique to you.

BREAKOUTS

ROLE OF MENTOR IN ESSAY DEVELOPMENT

- Figure out mentee's "story".
 - What is the consistent portrait mentee is painting of their character, their goals, and their ability to reach them?
- "Narrow thoughts" on question/topic selection.
 - What are the 4 most important and/or unique aspects of your mentee's life?
- How to think about the audience and their reaction to essays.
 - What will pique an admissions officer's interest?
- Edit essays using learnable moments
 - Do they include imagery and details? Are they starting with what the audience knows? Is there reasonable organization to the essay? Do they have grammatical errors and can sentences be phrased better?
- Prioritize researching best-fit colleges
 - Writing experts to help with reviews.
 - Have they considered colleges' academic/social/financial characteristics? How do they know it's a best fit college?



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Start by mainly providing “comments” and grammatical fixes.
- After 1-2 revisions, begin to edit sentence structure and syntax; continue to make grammatical fixes.
- Finally, provide a heavy edit, getting the essay to a near final state of completion.
- Send to Christina to receive expert review.
- Meet to discuss final revisions.

WRAP UP

NEXT STEPS

- Submit rough draft PIQs to Christina for an expert essay review.
 - Refer to [College Access Portal](#) for presentation and personal statement resources
 - Clear prompt selections with Christina FIRST!
 - Request expert review, begins in October
 - College Applications DUE: **November 30**
- Create UC and CSU application accounts
 - UC, opened Aug 1
 - CSU, opens Oct 1
- Additional deadlines to be on the lookout for:
 - FAFSA, opens Oct 1
 - EOP application
 - Institution specific scholarships
- Next Workshop: UC Applications
 - Oct. 14 @ 5-7 on Zoom



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THANK YOU.

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