

Berkeley

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR FRESHMEN



Why is the personal statement so important?

As a vital part of your application, the personal statement—consisting of responses to two prompts—is reviewed by both the Admissions and the Scholarship Offices. At Berkeley we use the Personal Statement to:

- discover and evaluate distinctions among applicants whose academic records are often very similar;
- gain insight into your level of academic, personal and extracurricular achievement;
- provide us with information that may not be evident in other parts of the application.

What does Berkeley look for in my personal statement?

We consider:

- your academic accomplishments, beyond your transcript;
- your initiative, motivation, leadership, persistence, service to others, special potential and substantial experience with other cultures;
- any unusual circumstances or hardships you have faced and the ways in which you have overcome or responded to them;

and

- all achievement in light of the opportunities available to you.

How can I write an effective personal statement?

- Thoughtfully describe not only what you've done, but also the choices you have made and what you have gained as a result.
- Allow sufficient time for:
 - reflection;
 - thoughtful preparation;
 - several revisions;

and

 - careful composition. Your personal statement is not graded on correct grammar, spelling and sentence structure, but these qualities will enhance overall presentation and readability.

After we have read your personal statement, we will ask the question, "What do we know about this individual?" If we have learned very little about you, your personal statement is not successful.

TOPICS FOR FRESHMEN APPLICANTS

Please read the complete information about the Personal Statement provided in the application.

These are the prompts you will be asked to answer:

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.

PROMPT #2

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

Do I have a better chance of being admitted if I write about unusual circumstances or hardship?

Not necessarily; having a hardship is no guarantee of admission. If you choose to write about difficulties you have experienced, you should describe:

- how you confronted and overcame your challenges, rather than describing a hardship just for the sake of including it in your application;
- what you learned or achieved in spite of these circumstances.

What if I am applying to a professional school or college (such as the College of Engineering or Chemistry)?

If you are applying to a professional school or college, it is important that you discuss:

- your intended field of study in your personal statement;
- your interest in your specific major;
- any school or work-related experience.

What if I am applying for a scholarship?

- We recommend that you elaborate on the academic and extracurricular information in the application that demonstrates your motivation, achievement, leadership and commitment.

What should I write about if I am applying to the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)—a support program for students from low-income families in which neither parent is a college graduate?

- Discuss how the program might benefit you.
- Tell us about your determination to succeed even though you may have lacked academic or financial support.

HELPFUL TIPS BEFORE YOU BEGIN WRITING

You are asked to provide response to two prompts, both of which you must answer, using a maximum of 1,000 words total.

- You may allocate the word count as you wish. If you choose to respond to one prompt at greater length, we suggest your shorter answer be no less than 250 words.
- Stay within the word limit as closely as you can. A little over—1,012 words, for example—is fine.

Read all instructions carefully.

The most common mistake applicants make is to skim the instructions or to rely on information received from others.

Think carefully about how to distribute your word count.

- Your personal statement—consisting of responses to two prompts—is your chance to tell us who you are and what's important to you. Think of it as your opportunity to introduce yourself to the admissions and scholarship officers reading your application. Be open and honest. What you tell us in your

personal statement gives readers the context to better understand the rest of the information provided in your application.

- We do not require letters of recommendation, so use the personal statement to give us information about your achievements that you have not provided elsewhere in the application. Read each prompt carefully and be sure to respond to all parts. Use specific, concrete examples to support the points you want to make.

Think carefully about how you will respond to each question.

Each year more students apply to Berkeley than we can admit. Our selection process involves comparing your application to those of other highly qualified students who share similar experiences—serving as student body officers or leaders of organizations, chairing committees, playing sports, traveling, and accruing significant work or volunteer experience. In composing your personal statement you should:

- distinguish yourself by writing about your own experience in a way that sets you apart from other applicants;
- tell us if you have contended with a serious illness or disability, if you are the first in your family to attend a college or university, or if you have other special circumstances which may have affected your academic achievement;
- tell us how you achieved academic success in spite of obstacles faced, if any. If you have had no barriers to success in your life, describe how you have taken advantage of the opportunities available to you.

Think about your accomplishments and what you have gained from them. You may:

- write about the way in which an activity or experience changed an attitude, crystallized a conviction, or helped you to establish a goal;
- focus on your life as a student, your participation in an outreach program or internship, or the hours you must work in order to help your family;
- tell us if you were prevented from enrolling in college preparatory classes because you were required to complete vocational education, academy courses, or pre-scheduled classes that are not on the approved UC course list.

Plan for prep time.

- Begin writing early enough so that you can refine and improve your personal statement, allowing one or two days between drafts.

Write your own personal statement!

- Write a personal statement that reflects your original thoughts. Ask advice of whom-ever you like, but **DO NOT USE ANYONE'S PUBLISHED WORDS BUT YOUR OWN**. This includes "Internet" essays.
- Write in your own voice. Use vocabulary and phrasing that are comfortable for you. Try not to consult a thesaurus too often; trust your own words to convey your message.

Proof, edit, and share your personal statement.

- Ask a trusted friend, teacher, counselor or parent for comments. Ask this person: "What works? What doesn't? What sounds like me? What doesn't? If you didn't know me, would this personal statement tell you enough about me? Is it clear and understandable?"
- Get help from someone who has not previously read your personal statement and who pays attention to detail. Remember, a carelessly written essay makes a poor first impression.

Some "dos":

- Compose your personal statement in a word-processing program. Don't type directly into the application. This way, you will have the opportunity to print copies for review.
- Once you're finished with your essays, save them in plain text (ASCII) and paste them into the space provided in the application. Proofread once more to make sure no odd characters or line breaks have appeared. (If you submit a paper application, attach a copy of your personal statement. In the upper right corner of each page, write your name, date of birth, and the words "Personal Statement.")

Some "don'ts":

- Don't try to be hilariously funny or wildly creative — it's difficult to do and may not achieve the effect you are seeking.
- Avoid clichés.
- Don't experiment with varied fonts and formats — keep your personal statement easy to read.
- Don't mistake a list of accomplishments for an essay. A list repeats information found elsewhere in the application, adds little to our understanding of you as an individual, and is not helpful in supporting your application.

How do I get more information?

Help with your personal statement is also available online at: californiacolleges.edu

Please also visit admissions.berkeley.edu

Nondiscrimination Statement

The University of California, in accordance with applicable Federal and State Law and the University's nondiscrimination policies, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including sexual harassment), gender identity, pregnancy/childbirth and medical conditions related thereto, disability, age, medical condition (cancer-related), ancestry, marital status, citizenship, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran or special disabled veteran. This nondiscrimination policy covers student admission, access, and treatment in University programs and activities. It also covers faculty (Senate and non-Senate) and staff in their employment. For information on other groups, including student applicants and current students, go to the "Resolving Discrimination Issues" section of the Campus Climate and Compliance Office website at ccac.berkeley.edu/resolving.shtml.