Mastering the University of California application

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Overview of the University of California system

The University of California (UC) network is one of the strongest public education systems in the world, with nine undergraduate campuses that span the length of the West Coast — from Berkeley's Bay Area to the beaches of San Diego. Together, the UC schools receive over 200,000 applications annually. It's no mystery why they remain popular; in addition to the beautiful location, this unique network of colleges represents one of the most competitive systems in the country for students seeking to pursue a rigorous education across various fields, from STEM to the arts.

What makes applying to the UCs unique, however, is their streamlined approach to submission.

Curious to learn more?

Here are a few things that set the UC application experience apart from other schools:

- **No letters of recommendation** are required, which shifts the focus to your academic history, activities, and essays.

- **4 Personal Insight Questions (PIQs),** instead of a single long essay, present you with a chance to write different aspects of your life story.

- **A holistic admissions process** will consider your application in the context of your personal life circumstances, academic rigor, and other achievements.
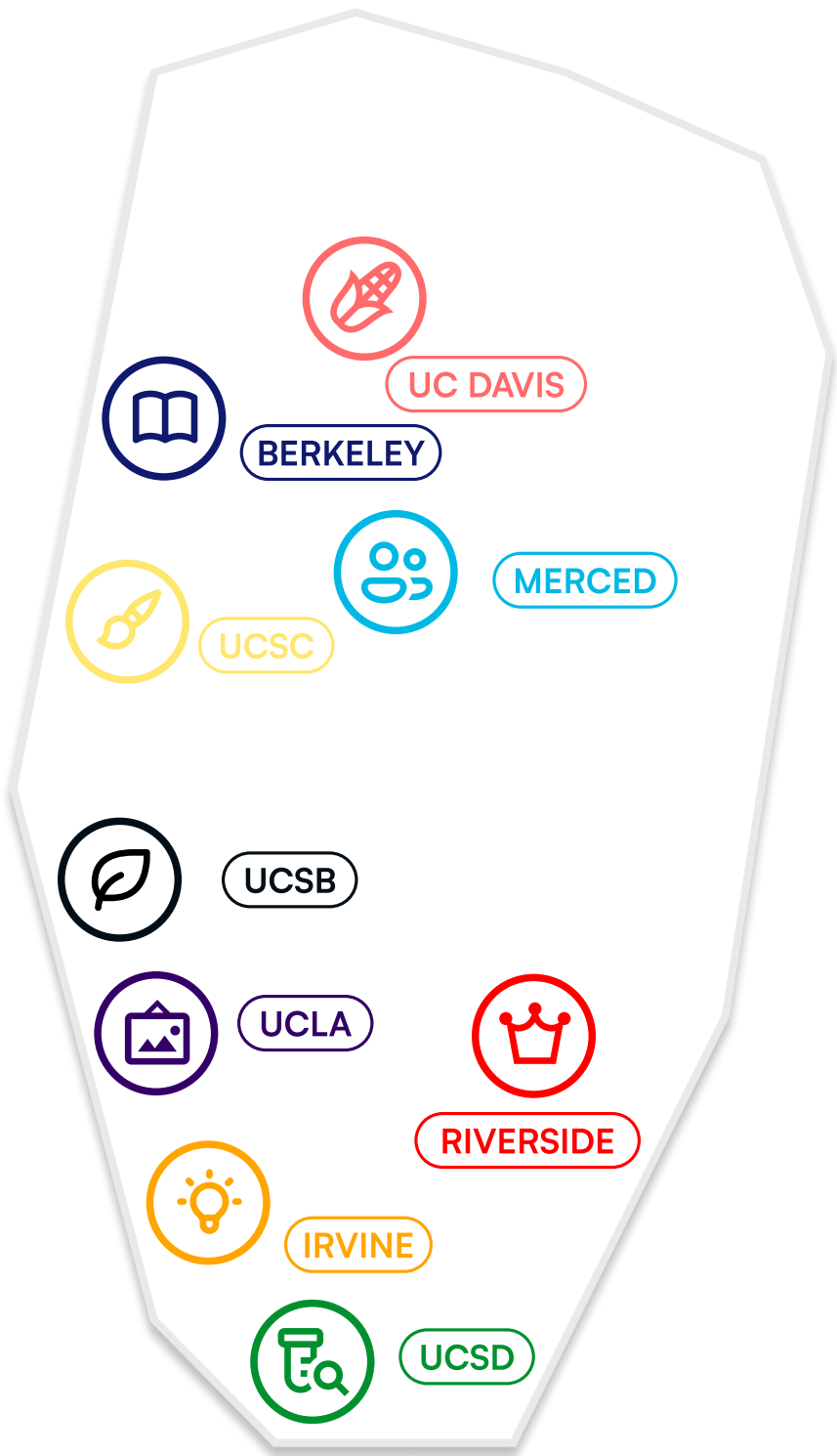
At Empowerly, we help students navigate the subtleties of the UC system so that they can strategically highlight their strengths and stand out.

We've done this successfully with our students, year after year:

- Empowerly students have a **54% acceptance rate** across all UCs, while the average national acceptance rate is 30%.

- In particular, Empowerly students are accepted to UCLA and UC Berkeley at **3.2 times the national acceptance rate,** due to our deep understanding of how UCs differentiate their applicant pools.

Aligning your application with UC campuses

UC Berkeley
Research & intellectual rigor

UCLA
Arts, athletics & leadership

UC San Diego
STEM innovation & research

UC Santa Barbara
Sustainability & community

UC Davis
Agriculture & environment

UC Irvine
Innovation & global perspective

UC Santa Cruz
Creativity & social impact

UC Riverside
Leadership & entrepreneurship

UC Merced
Community & collaboration

UC DAVIS

BERKELEY

MERCED

UCSC

UCSB

UCLA

RIVERSIDE

IRVINE

UCSD

Targeted UC Insights

Let's get to know the contenders. Each UC campus has its specific culture, academic strengths, and priorities that make it necessary to strategically align your application.

UC Berkeley is the flagship campus of the California system and maintains a strong reputation for intellectual rigor, research, and activist culture. Candidates who demonstrate independence in academics, leadership in research, and connections to intellectual curiosity might align with Berkeley's values.

UC Los Angeles (UCLA) is a well-known, prestigious school and has a vibrant, urban, and competitive environment. Candidates who are successful at this campus typically demonstrate leadership in diverse environments, successes in the arts (and athletics), and an eagerness to be challenged.

UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) offers strong academics in a laid-back coastal town with a spirit of collaboration and connectedness on campus. It fosters community service, interdisciplinary learning, and balance between academic and non-academic life. UCSB looks for applicants who take initiative and engage both inside and outside the classroom.

UC Davis is known for its agriculture, environmental sciences, and veterinary medicine, but most importantly, it is known for its welcoming, community-oriented culture. Students with a demonstrated commitment to sustainability, public service, or applied research will align well with the UC Davis mission.

UC Irvine (UCI) is a modern and career-focused campus in Orange County that is known for its outstanding research, particularly in health sciences and engineering, as well as strong business programs. Candidates at UCI typically seek applicants who illustrate innovation, career readiness, and a global perspective.

UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) has brought together rigorous academics with a progressive and socially conscious community within a beautiful coastal landscape. UCSC values innovation, creativity, environmental sustainability, and social impact. Applicants with unique passions for knowledge and a sense of purpose generally blend well with the UC Santa Cruz culture.

UC Riverside and UC Merced are advancing research and community engagement. Riverside is known for diversity, STEM, business, and public policy, while Merced emphasizes innovation, sustainability, engineering, and biology. Both highlight resilience, leadership, and academic growth, making them strong options for students seeking impact and opportunity.

UC San Francisco (UCSF) is technically part of the UC system, but does not accept undergraduate students. It is a graduate and professional-level institution that is world-class in medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, and health sciences research. Many undergraduate students at other UC campuses go on to pursue graduate study or some type of professional training at UCSF.

As you prepare your application, consider how your experiences may relate to and reflect the campus environment. If you have participated in leadership roles for environmentally-focused activities, for example, your profile might naturally align with the sustainability value at UCSB. If, however, you had a very deep research project or academic competition experience, those qualities may correspond to Berkeley's emphasis on scholarship and inquiry.

Major Considerations

While you have the option to remain undeclared, most students select an intended major concentration for their studies. Choosing a major at this point in your application certainly doesn't lock you in, but still pay heed: UC campuses may evaluate applications differently depending on your choice of major.

STEM and engineering majors:

UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, and UC Los Angeles have STEM and engineering programs that are extremely competitive. To overcome the odds at these schools, you will likely need to demonstrate a combination of research or technical project experience, advanced coursework in math and science, and other extracurricular work related to the majors on your application (Science Olympiad, robotics, etc). For aspiring engineers, it's always a good idea to give examples of problem-solving in your essays.

Arts and humanities majors:

UC Irvine and UC Santa Cruz are both focused on exploring creativity

in their arts and humanities majors, so if you apply here, make sure your application aligns directly with the school-specific prompt for applicants aiming for the visual arts or design majors. When possible, leverage your essays to write about problem-solving, creative challenges, artistic growth, and a body of work with an interdisciplinary focus.

Performing arts majors:

Though rare, UCLA and UC Irvine may request auditions or recorded performances for dance, theater, or music majors. Be mindful to prepare your audition materials early and/or reflect on all participatory performance experiences in your application.

Business and social science majors:

Any business program offered through the College of Social Sciences or the College of Business (like Berkeley's Haas Global Management, or business administration at UC Riverside) will always favor applicants who can best illustrate their entrepreneurial projects, leadership roles for clubs, or internships from any business-related work experience.

	Berkeley	UCLA	UCSD	UCSB	Davis	UCI	UCSC	Riverside	Merced
Research	✓		✓			✓			
Sustainability				✓	✓		✓		✓
Creativity		✓					✓		
Leadership	✓	✓						✓	✓
Entrepreneurship						✓		✓	
Community Service				✓	✓			✓	✓
Innovation			✓			✓	✓		✓
Global Perspective						✓			
Arts & Athletics		✓							

Understanding the UC admissions review process

The admissions process for the University of California is holistic and comprehensive. This means the process takes into account the context of each applicant's achievements, opportunities, and challenges. But what information, exactly, do the admissions officers consider?

Let's break it down. If you understand these 13 comprehensive review factors used by UC campuses, you can be more strategic in preparing your application materials.

1 **GPA in required courses:** Overall academic performance in the core subjects.

2 **Honors/AP/IB/college courses:** While your AP/IB scores are not directly considered in the admissions process, they can be used to demonstrate rigor with a high difficulty ratio (comparing course load to what is offered) and subject competency for class placement.

3 **ELC (top 9% at high school):** This refers to Eligibility for the Local Context consideration, or class rank (if reported).

4 **Senior-year course rigor:** The strength of your schedule in 12th grade leading up to your enrollment in college.

5 **Marked academic improvement:** Positive trends; showing improved grades over time.

6 **Special talents and awards:** Any achievements in academics, arts, or leadership.

7 **Special school projects:** Unique academic projects or initiatives.

8 **Life experiences/special circumstances:** Your personal life context, including economic hardship or first-generation college attendee status.

9 **School and residence location:** The geographic context of your education.

10 **Family responsibilities:** Caring for siblings and/or working to support the family budget are real and meaningful experiences for many teens.

11 **Community/school service:** Volunteerism and consistent involvement.

12 **Work experience:** Jobs or internships demonstrating responsibility.

13 **Other achievements:** Research, competitions, or unique contributions that don't fit elsewhere in the application.

These components all contribute to your overall student profile in the eyes of the admissions officers who review your file

Test-blind policy: no weight given for SAT/ACT

Recently, all UC campuses re-committed to test-blind admissions. This means that UC campuses no longer consider SAT or ACT scores for any admissions decisions, scholarships, or course placements. Instead, the focus for UC campuses is on your academic record, written responses, activities, and accomplishments. Students should focus on developing a robust academic profile that demonstrates intellectual curiosity through their courses and contexts rather than through test practice.

Role of academic rigor, extracurricular context, and personal circumstances

Academic rigor is still an important tenet of UC admissions. Strong academic rigor indicates that you don't simply want high grades, but aim to accomplish as many challenging courses as possible. How many of the advanced courses your school offers have you taken?

Extracurricular involvement is evaluated based on the context of your circumstances as well. UC reviewers look for commitment to a few meaningful activities that show growth, deep involvement, and leadership, rather than a lengthy list of superfluous activities with little impact.

Personal situations impact participation, and your circumstances allow evaluators to understand your accomplishments. UCs look at family responsibilities, job obligations, first-generation status, socioeconomic barriers, and any other serious circumstances that may have impacted your academic performance.

Building a smart UC school list

Creating your University of California school list is not merely about listing your preferred campuses; there's a strategy involved. It can be a very deliberate process that (if done right) may improve your chances of admission while still being consistent with your budget, goals, and desired college experience.

Reach, match, and safety strategy

When developing your UC list, we suggest categorizing the campuses based on your academic competitiveness:

Reach: campuses in which your academic profile falls below the middle 50% of accepted students.

Match: schools where your academic profile closely resembles accepted student averages.

Safety: campuses where your academic standing is above the median applicant.

In-state or out-of-state

Because the UC system maintains a public charter with the state of California, your residency status can have a notable effect on your admissions outcomes. Primarily, California residents enjoy less expensive in-state tuition. On the other hand, data trends suggest that out-of-state students may have better admission outcomes at certain UCs (more on this later). There are several

reasons for these trends; among them, some UCs have expressed an interest in out-of-state applicants for the revenue from out-of-state tuition.

What should you do with this information? When you go to build your list, remember that demonstrating how you could contribute to their school environment may enhance your chances as an out-of-state applicant.
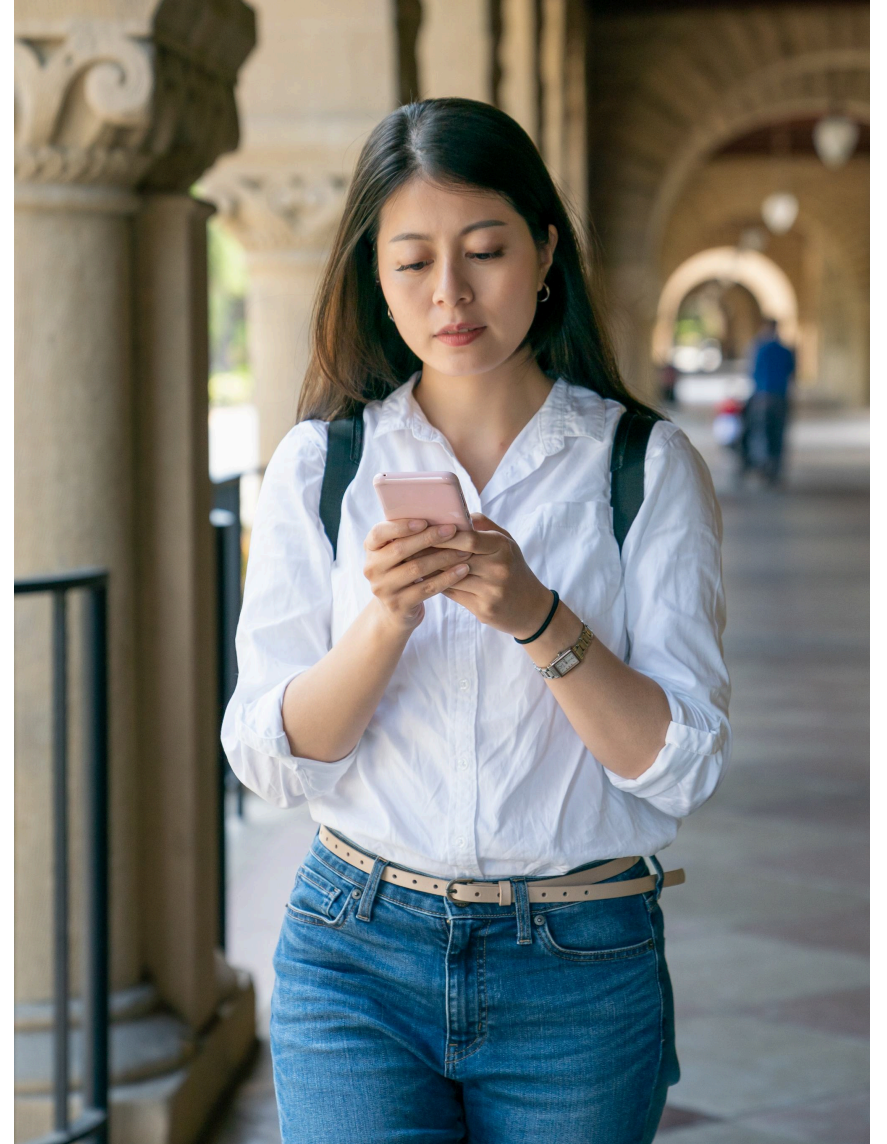
Logistics: ready to create your UC list?

As we mentioned before, the application process for the University of California system is unique in that you can apply to multiple campuses incredibly easily with a single application. For each UC campus you add on, however, applicants must pay an application fee of $80 (U.S. citizens) or $95 (international students) with a cumulative total. This means that the longer the list of campuses you apply to, the greater the overall cost.

For example:

- As a U.S. applicant, applying to 3 campuses would cost you $240 (3 × $80).

- As an international applicant, applying to 5 campuses would cost you $475 (5 × $95).

You can see that you can very quickly add up. If the cost is a barrier, there are fee waivers available for qualifying students, which could help cover several campus applications and save students hundreds of dollars.

Developing the right UC school list can make the difference between an application season where you are scrambling to submit applications and one where you submit with confidence. Empowerly has expert counselors who specialize in UC admissions strategy, using data-driven insights and personal support to help improve your chances. Schedule a free consultation today and begin creating your UC list with an expert guide.

Mapping the journey: key dates & deadlines

Once you've made your list, it's time to begin. With earlier-than-usual deadlines, completing a UC application depends on staying organized and on schedule. Here you've got a straightforward timeline to keep you on track.

Junior spring (March - June):

- ☐ Continue to showcase strong academic progress in A-G classes, specifically in AP/IB/Honors courses.

- ☐ Start researching different UC campuses, program offerings, and competitive majors.

- ☐ Create or update your initial activities and awards list with strong descriptions of your leadership, impact, and community participation in high school.

- ☐ If relevant, map out AP exams (for credit and placement). These are not required for admission, but recommended to demonstrate subject mastery for students who are targeting competitive majors like Math or Engineering.

Summer before senior year (June - August):

- ☐ Begin drafting your UC Personal Insight Questions (PIQs). Plan time to write multiple drafts; your essay topic and prompt may even change several times during the revision process.

- ☐ Research the specific opportunities at each UC campus to tailor your PIQs and activities to your top-choice campuses.

- ☐ Continue to deepen your meaningful activities and opportunities (internships and research) to develop a coherent narrative for your application.

Senior fall (September - November):

- ☐ UC Application opens on August 1. Start early and enter your academic history, activities, and PIQs early to alleviate stress as the deadline approaches.

- ☐ Finalize all PIQs by October to ensure they reflect your narrative and authentic voice.

- ☐ Complete and submit your UC Application anytime between October 1 and November 30 (UCs do not provide extensions or accommodate late admissions)

- ☐ Request fee waivers if eligible (max 4 campuses eligible for fee waiver).

Navigating the UC application process

Applying to the University of California depends on one universal application. Therefore, knowing each section of the UC application in advance will not only save you time, but it will also help you leverage your accomplishments and unique story in the best way.

🏠 About you & residency

This is where you provide citizenship status, legal residence, and demographic information, which will help the UC system validate your in-state tuition eligibility and some scholarships.

- Residency will matter, as Californian residents generally pay substantially lower tuition, and some UCs cater to in-state or out-of-state students (depending on where you apply).

- Be honest and complete with each question. If you are a dependent, then residency is usually the same as that of a parent or guardian.

🎓 Campuses & majors

The UC system allows you to apply to all campuses with one application. However, when applying, you will want to choose your campuses and majors for each of your selections with care:

- You will need to research each campus and look into its academic strengths, campus culture, and program opportunities to make a final decision.

- When picking your first-choice major, be deliberate and include an alternate major where applicable. This is especially useful if you are applying to popular, in-demand programs.

📖 Academic history

This section will require you to provide the high schools you attended, the courses you completed, and the grades you received.

- UC values completion of A-G courses, so they want to ensure that you are ready to take on university-level work.

- Report all courses accurately, including dual enrollment courses and/or any college courses that you handled as part of the coursework for any school you attended.

- UC uses a weighted GPA (honors, AP, IB, and UC-approved college courses). If you're unsure of what your UC GPA would be, use our quick and easy calculator: https://app.empowerly.com/uc-calculator
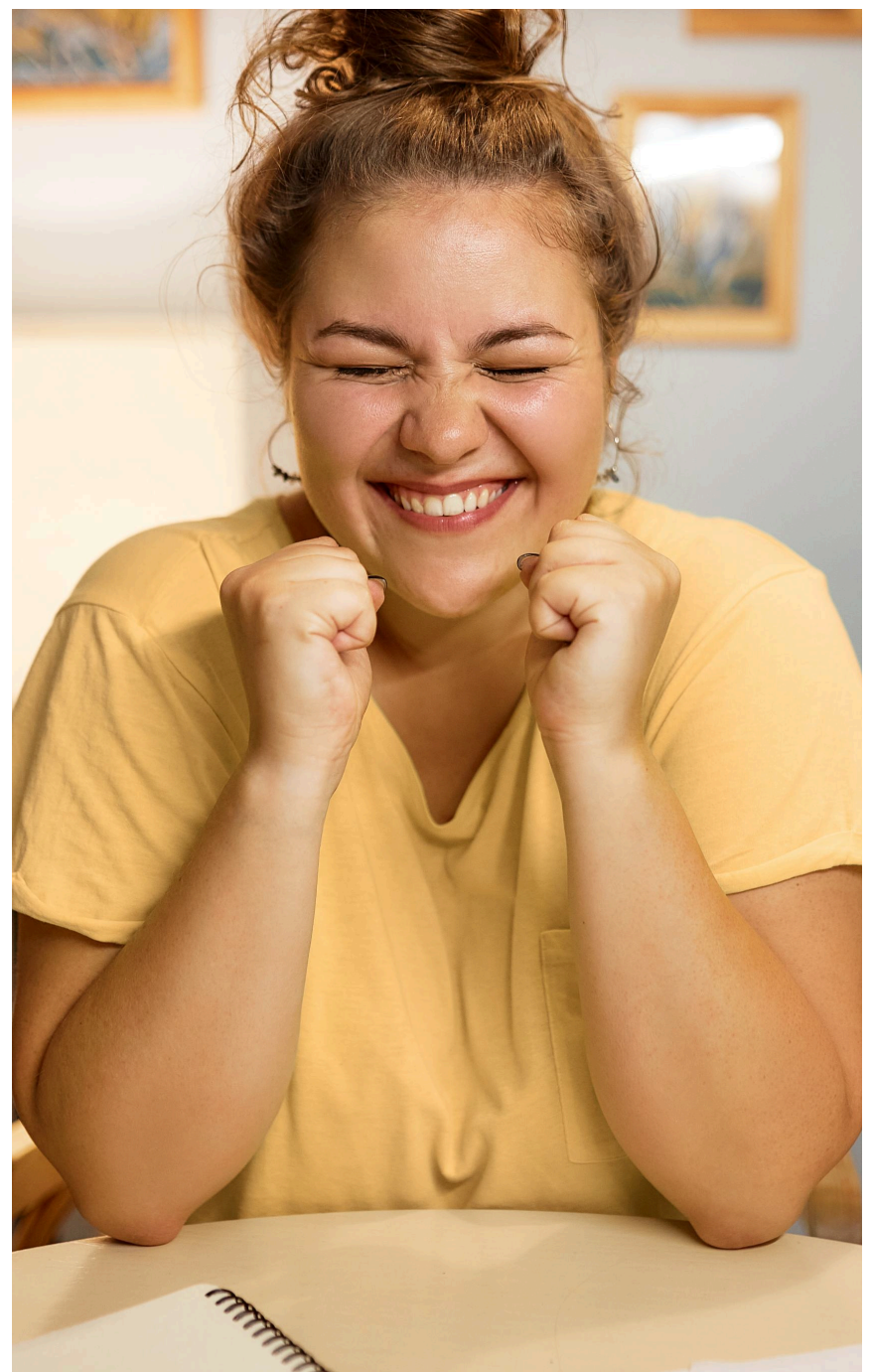
A clear and accurate academic history ensures that your application looks as strong as possible by ensuring that proper academic rigor is highlighted.

✏️ Test scores & exams

The University of California system is officially test-blind, meaning admissions decisions will not look at a student's SAT and ACT scores. However, there is still a location to input your scores for some other standardized exams:

- You can report AP, IB, and other exams because they can be used for course placement and, in some cases, college credit when you enroll.

- These scores have no impact on admission, but strong scores can demonstrate some level of expertise in certain subject areas.

$ Scholarships & programs

Within the application, you can state your interest in several hundred UC scholarships and indicate if you are participating in special programs, including Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), or Foster Youth interventions or supports. If you participated in any special programs in high school, report them. Taking just a little more time to state your interest in scholarships could provide you with valuable financial aid opportunities.

✉   Fee waiver & submission

The UC system provides fee waivers for up to four campuses for eligible applicants with proven financial hardship, helping high school seniors submit their applications.

◎   Activities & awards section tips

The Activities & Awards section of the UC application is a vital part of your application to help admissions readers see your commitments beyond academics. In this part, you have room for up to 20 entries across six categories (academic, extracurricular, volunteer/community service, work experience, awards/honors, and other coursework).

Here are some tips on how to use this section wisely:

2. When and how long have you committed to it (the fastest way is through years and hours per week)

3. What impact you made on others in your communities during the activity

Example entry:

- Tutoring Club President (9-12 grades): I led weekly tutoring sessions in Math and Science for 25 peers by coordinating volunteers, developing tutoring materials/resources that aided them, and improving the average grade of participants by 20%.

Plan entries based on importance

When adding your activities, choose the most specific, relevant, and significant first. Keep in mind that the admissions readers will be looking at many applications, so make sure there is no ambiguity about your priorities.

Overall, as you develop the Activities & Awards section, you will want to emphasize activities that highlight commitment, leadership, and initiative over time.

Provide context and clarity

Each entry you develop should include the following information:

1. What the activity was, and the role you played
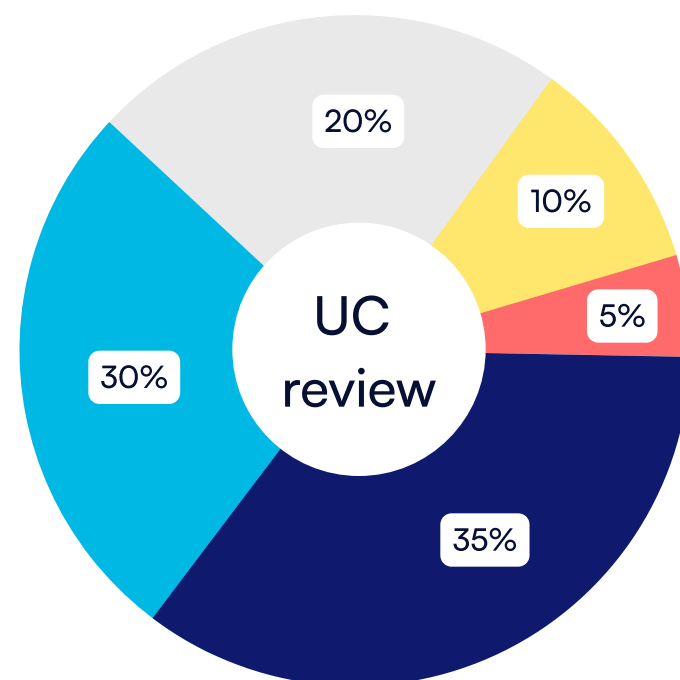
Prioritize impact over quantity

Although you can list a maximum of 20 activities, it is better to provide meaningful depth than a long list of lesser involvement. Admissions officers are looking for long-term interest, development, and manifestations of your values in your actions. Think about cutting items that offer no value or distract from your theme.

Stay focused on your application story

If possible, stay consistent with the themes that you used in the PIQs and your future major. For example, if you selected biology as your major, listing your science clubs, lab internships, and volunteer work related to STEM can pull the application together and carry that theme.

Utilize straightforward, active language

Each entry should have short, unambiguous verbs introducing the actions you undertook, like "founded," "led," "organized," "mentored," "initiated," "researched," and "developed." This style of writing mirrors the UC system's preference for clarity and directness.

UC review

20%

10%

5%

30%

35%

- ● GPA & academic rigor
- ● Personal insight questions
- ● Activities & leadership
- ● Special Circumstances
- ● Other Factors

Final reminders prior to submission

- Double-check everything, including the details, to ensure they are accurate.

- Use the allocated word count wisely, and avoid unnecessary filler.

- Ask a counselor or mentor to look over the entries and confirm everything is clear and understandable.

1. Create UC Application Account: Set up your account and begin your application journey

📅 August - October   ⏱ 15 minutes

2. About You & Residency: Provide citizenship status, legal residence, and demographic information for tuition eligibility

📅 Early in process   ⏱ 20 minutes

3. Campuses & Majors: Select up to 9 UC campuses and choose your intended majors for each campus

📅 Research phase   ⏱ 45 minutes

4. Academic History: Report all high school courses, grades, and college coursework with accurate UC GPA calculation

📅 Mid-process   ⏱ 60 minutes

5. Test Scores & Exams: Submit AP, IB, and other standardized test scores for course placement and college credit

📅 After receiving scores   ⏱ 15 minutes

6. Activities & Awards: List up to 20 extracurricular activities, work experience, volunteer service, and honors

📅 September - October   ⏱ 90 minutes

7. Personal Insight Questions (PIQs): Answer 4 out of 8 essay questions (350 words each) to showcase your unique story

📅 September - November   ⏱ Several weeks

8. Scholarships & Programs: Apply for UC scholarships and indicate participation in special programs like EOP

📅 Before submission   ⏱ 30 minutes

9. Review & Submit: Final review of all sections, payment of application fees, and submission by November 30

📅 November 30 deadline   ⏱ 45 minutes

🏆 Writing winning PIQs

The PIQs are an essential piece of your application that allows you to provide a snapshot of your voice, experiences, and developmental journey.

For starters, here's what you should know:

- You will choose 4 from 8 prompts, with each statement limited to 350 words.

- The topics range from leadership and creativity to overcoming obstacles and serving the community.

- PIQs are a significant piece of your application (~30% of your overall evaluation), so be cautious and plan to write as authentically and coherently as you can.

- Write in the first-person voice, share personal experiences, and illuminate what you learned or how you grew.

Why do these PIQs hold so much weight? Strong responses help the admissions team understand your character, resilience, and how you'll fit within their UC community.

Review the prompts

Ready to get writing? Let's start by carefully reading all eight UC PIQ prompts. As you read, reflect on your past experiences in life, from personal challenges to significant accomplishments that could relate to each of the eight prompts. If anything specific pops into your mind, start a list of these core memories that shaped you — those memorable moments when you demonstrated initiative, overcame adversity or obstacles, or simply embraced a deeper academic interest. Why start with the prompts first? It will kick off your brainstorming in the right direction. While generating ideas, you want to start to identify which of the prompts will help you to best communicate how you embody the UC system's intrepid spirit in your own way.

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 a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?

details you might write branching out on the sides. This visual technique will give you a better overview of the depth (and core message) of each topic, before you commit to writing the full essay.

Make an outline

Got your four best ideas in mind? Next, for each of your selected prompts, outline the following sections. The language doesn't have to be perfect right now; the first drafts are just aboutputting it down on paper and making it exist.

1. Opening (1-2 sentences): An introduction that hooks the reader and explains the context.

2. Experience (3-4 sentences): What you did, the challenges faced, and what role you played.

3. Reflection (3-4 sentences): What you learned, your personal growth, and how this has affected your views.

4. Connection/Significance to UC (1-2 sentences): How will this experience prepare me for college, and how does it relate to my goals?

Hitting the major points on your outline structure will keep your PIQs focused, clear, and concise while still clearly communicating your intent.

Select with intention

Once you've reviewed all your options, it's time to narrow them down. You don't have to submit an essay for all eight, so choose four topics that, together, create the most well-rounded portrait of your strengths and contributions.

But how do you choose? There may be one or more that speak to you immediately; if so, follow that instinct. If not, it may take a second look to decide. Ideally, you don't want to get stuck by focusing on just one type of strength (curiosity, resilience, altruistic service) over and over again. Instead, you want to have a variety of demonstrated talents depicted across your essay responses.

Try making a mind-map for each of your best ideas, with the central story in the middle and all the different angles and

Polishing your essays

Use first person, and write with simple and direct language. Try to make sure that every single sentence adds purpose to your overall narrative, and avoid filler words. Admissions officers read thousands of applications, so you want your PIQs to not only make sense but also reflect your intellectual potential.

Show the impact and the specificity

Replace vague statements with measurable or descriptive information. For example, when you state "I helped in a community garden," specify and say, "I spearheaded a team of 12 peers to cultivate and manage a community garden that produced more than 500 pounds of fresh produce to feed the local food banks." See the difference?

Reflection is essential to go from good to great! Think about:

- What has this experience taught you about yourself or your community?

- How has this experience shaped your ambitions or interests in your studies?

- How has this experience shaped your ambitions or interests in your studies?

- What are some of the bigger challenges you've faced in this experience, and how did you overcome them?

After your first draft, get feedback from mentors, teachers, and college counselors. When seeking advice, ask for specific guidance on clarity, narrative sense, and if it adheres to the prompt.

Common pitfalls on PIQs and how to avoid them

Strong candidates can diminish their UC applications by committing errors in the PIQ format. Learning about these pitfalls will help you improve your essays' clarity and impact.

Being too vague: Generalized statements like "I love helping others" without specific examples will not capture attention. Specific details will show action, challenges, and impact.

Restating the activities log: Your PIQs should not restate your résumé. Instead, you should explore 1 or 2 actions or experiences to show personal growth and insight.

No reflection: Students state what they did, but rarely state why it mattered. Make sure to include a reflection.

PIQ planning funnel

Brainstorm Experiences

Leadership | Academic Curiosity | Service | Challenges

Align with Prompts

Select 4 that showcase breadth and depth

Draft & Refine with Reflection

Clarity | Authenticity | Impact

Managing the UC application with your overall college plan

Many students apply to UCs while simultaneously working on the Common App and Early Decision or other Early Action applications. Keep in mind that UCs do not offer ED or EA, which means there is only one decision pool and deadline for all of your UC schools.

Consider aligning your application approach with the format in mind. While Common App essays typically focus on a singular personal narrative, UC PIQs offer an opportunity for multiple versions of your strengths in four essays to demonstrate your abilities in a broader view. Be consistent in your descriptions of activities and awards across both systems, but adapt to the style of the system and word count restrictions.

Acceptance rate trends (2020-2024)

The UC overall acceptance rates have gotten steadily lower, and admission seems to be getting more competitive each year. Out-of-state students have an advantage at some UCs. However, highly selective campuses keep their standards high and apply the same standards to their applicant pools.

	In-state acceptance rate (Empowerly)	Out-of-state acceptance rate (Empowerly)	Average acceptance rate
UC Irvine	35%	68%	29%
UCLA	30%	24%	9%
UC Davis	38%	74%	42%
UC Berkeley	39%	29%	11%
UC Merced	99%		89%
UC Riverside	95%		70%
UC San Diego	34%	61%	29%
UC Santa Barbara	56%	63%	33%
UC Santa Cruz	87%		61%

Again and again, two schools remain the top competitors in the system.

- **Berkeley** continues to emphasize academic rigor, leadership, and intellectual curiosity, but still places importance on extracurriculars and community involvement. The national acceptance rate is 11%, while the Empowerly Acceptance rate is about 35%.

- **UCLA** continues to emphasize breadth of involvement and greater community contributions as well as academic rigor. Nationally, the acceptance rate is 9%, while Empowerly is about 28%.

Stay organized around key UC deadlines:

Miss a date? In general, the UC system is strict with deadlines. Remember to set reminders, mark your calendar, and collect any documents or supporting materials in advance, especially when it comes to financial aid forms.

- Submitting early will lead to better financial aid awards.
- A Statement of Intent to Register (SIR) is a formal declaration that you will attend a specific University of California campus if admitted. It's how you accept an offer of admission and officially commit to that UC.
- Filing your SIR on time guarantees you a spot, which is critical for popular campuses: May 1 is the deadline.
- You'll need to submit other student forms soon for housing and other student services.
- Applying early will help you avoid the stress of doing everything last-minute!

With a clearly defined timeline, adherence to essay strategy, and knowledge of UC admissions trends, you can create a competitive UC application process while simultaneously juggling your Common App and ED/EA efforts. If you would like to build your chances with a data-backed, personalized strategy, then the UC specialists at Empowerly will be able to assist you at every point.

Final touches before you submit

Typos, grammar mistakes, and formatting inconsistencies can distract the reader and detract from the professionalism of your application. Take time to proofread carefully. Reading aloud and/or printing a hard copy may help you spot tiny mistakes you may miss otherwise.

Ask for help, but maintain your voice

It is a good idea to get feedback from a trusted counselor, teacher, or mentor who knows the UC process. In addition to reading for first impressions, you can ask them to check for clarity, flow, and grammar. As you incorporate suggestions, however, remember that this application reflects your story, so you need to make sure your voice and perspective come through. Use only the feedback that strengthens your authenticity and makes the telling natural.

Use "Additional Comments" sparingly

The "Additional Comments" field is NOT an additional PIQ nor an opportunity for a lengthy essay. Most students won't need to write anything at all. If you do, it should be used very sparingly to provide appropriate context for an anomaly or clarification of your application. Some examples of using the additional comment section can be:

- Explaining a break in your academic history.
- Clarifying what a grading system was, or anything different about your classes that isn't on a transcript.
- Explaining significant personal or family obligations that impacted your education.

Suggestions and how Empowerly can support you

The University of California admissions process is challenging and one-of-a-kind. Successful applicants do more than just check the boxes; they have a solid sense of how to convey their academic and personal narratives.
At Empowerly, we've observed the types of students who succeed at UC campuses. So, what do these applicants do differently? Regardless of whether you're applying to one or all nine campuses, here are a few last tips to help you confidently hit "submit."

Top UC applicants...

1 **...focus on fit, not just prestige.** Top UC candidates spend time researching each campus, aligning their PIQs and activities with that campus's mission, and demonstrating a genuine interest in the major they've selected.

2 **...are authentic.** Strong applicants do not try to impress with buzzwords; instead, they genuinely reflect on personal growth, impact, and learning. They also incorporate specific examples into their narratives, making them more engaging and accessible.

3 **...submit a cohesive application.** The academic CV, activities, awards, and PIQs all support one another, rather than contradicting. For example, if a student highlights community involvement in the PIQ, their activities and essays will all demonstrate that commitment by "walking the walk."

4 **...proofread and revise early.** UC applications are not forgiving of errors. The best candidates put the same care into their essays and careful formatting in the application as they would put into a final paper or project.

5 **...understand UC's holistic review.** While grades matter, context matters as well. High-impact extracurriculars, personal resiliency, and thoughtful insights can have an equally large influence on the overall application.

Checklist before submission

Before November 30, double-check the following:

☐   You have met the A—G course requirements

☐   Your activities and awards are in order of importance

☐   All PIQs demonstrate a distinct strength or quality

☐   You have carefully reviewed your academic history for accuracy

☐   You have thoughtfully used the Additional Comments (if any)

☐   All spelling, punctuation, grammar, and formatting are corrected

☐   You have saved and backed up all of your work

☐   You have confirmed submission to all of your chosen UC campuses

How Empowerly assists UC applicants

Empowerly students receive far more than just encouragement; we offer a data-driven admissions strategy, personalized essay feedback, and guidance from experts who have previously worked as college admissions officers in California schools. Our team has helped students successfully gain admission to every UC campus, including Berkeley and LA.

Regardless of whether you are a California resident looking to apply to a top STEM program or you are an out-of-state applicant that is applying across the system, our team can:

- Evaluate your candidacy using the Empowerly Score®

- Build out a balanced UC school list that aligns with your academic profile, career interests, and goals

- Strategize your PIQ responses to showcase your strongest stories

- Edit your application materials to ensure clarity, authenticity, and grammar

- Maximize your chances of success with areas for holistic review for each UC campus

Next steps to get started with Empowerly

1 | Take the Empowerly UC readiness quiz

Get a personalized readout on your current academic standing and what to work on before you submit.

2 | Download the University Visit Checklist

Planning to tour the campus? Use this list of questions to prepare and compare UC campuses.

3 | Schedule your free UC strategy consultation

Connect with our counselors who are experts in this process so that you don't have to guess about how to navigate the UC application process.