



Inside the UC App: Collegewise Tips and Tricks for a Stellar Application

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A Message to Students, Parents, and Counselors

For Students and Parents:

Here at Collegewise, we love guides. While we've got a guide for just about everything – including how to make a perfect pot of coffee (yup, it's amazing)-shockingly, until now we've never produced a University of California (UC) Admissions Guide.

This guide contains more than thirty pages of advice to help students craft their very best UC applications based on aspects of the UC application that we've identified as unique or worth focusing on.

We've arranged the guide so that you can either read the entire thing or go directly to those sections where you have questions or need a little help. Just like with the Common App (and if you haven't downloaded the amazing [Collegewise Guide to the Common App](#), you are missing out on a true piece of guidance magnificence), we think you'll be delighted by what a difference even some small— but smart—tweaks can make to your application.

If, at the end of reading this, you feel like you want some more assistance, our Collegewise counselors can help you:

- Tackle your UC personal insight questions
- Review everything before you officially hit “submit” and send your application spiralling off into cyberspace
- Answer any last minute questions about either UC admissions in particular, or your college journey in general

To find out more about these services, just ping our Outreach Director, Patti Winkel, at pattiw@collegewise.com and she'll point you in a sensible direction.

For Counselors and Teachers:

While this guide is copyright protected, we encourage you to share it with anyone who is well-served by its existence, including your colleagues and students. Some counselors print a copy for their office, others forward the download link directly to their students, and some add the link to their school's newsletters or websites. All that we ask is that our Collegewise name stay on it, and that you neither change the guide nor charge for its use.

We also have other useful pieces for you:

[Sign up for Collegewise's free email newsletter](#) for counselors, students, and parents. We don't send out sales pitches—just great college planning advice. And if you change your mind about subscribing, one click is all it takes to opt out.

Check out [our founder's blog](#). Hundreds of counselors around the world read (and share) it, and it's a streak Cal Ripken would admire in that Kevin's blogged his wisdom daily for eight straight years.

You can even invite us to help you. We're really good presenters both live and online and there are very few college-related topics we cannot handle. And yes, we also conduct remarkably good professional development sessions.

If you'd like to set something up where Collegewise can help, please email me at paulk@collegewise.com.

Thanks for reading this.

Paul Kanarek
Managing Partner
Collegewise

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How to Use this Guide

This guide is meant to provide insight into how to complete a UC application that will be effective and stand out once it reaches the desks (or computers) of the UC admissions officers.

We wrote this guide to pick up where the UC Application's instructions leave off. For example, the UC application outlines how to add your activities to the appropriate section, but we explain how to present them in a clear and compelling way. The UC app shows you where to input your first and second choice major selections for each of the UCs, but we tell you how to decide which majors to choose.

We *didn't* write this guide to tell you how to select which UCs you're applying to, how to correctly report your grades in the Academics section, or which dorm cafeteria is the least likely to give you the heebie-jeebies (though we're partial to UCLA's Café 1919). We think the UC application instructions and resources are very thorough, and we didn't want you to spend time reading about anything that's already available online.

This is our subtle way of saying, "Please don't ignore the UC application directions." As you work through the sections on the UC app, look for the Instructions and Help box to the right—they answer, clearly and well, a lot of obvious and not-so-obvious questions.

We've arranged this guide in a sequence that we think makes the most sense. You can read it in its entirety or you can feel free to skip right to the sections where you need the most help.

Everything we're sharing here is born from the advice we've given to over 10,000 Collegewise students since our founding in 1999. It's worked very well for them, and we think it will for you, too. If you have questions or feel like you should do something differently, always check with either your high school counselor or with the various UC admissions offices.

Before You Start Your Application (a.k.a. Boring but Necessary Information)

Here are a few steps we suggest you follow before you begin your UC application:

1. Bookmark <https://admissions.universityofcalifornia.edu/applicant/login.htm> (You'll be using this link a lot as you complete your UC application.)
2. Bookmark the UC's [guide for freshmen](#) or their [guide for transfers](#). Each of these documents offers a wealth of basic information on how to fill out the UC app.
3. Check out the University of California's [tips on how to write effective responses to the personal insight questions](#).
4. Double-check that your computer and software meet all system requirements outlined on [this page](#) under the Technical Issues section.
5. Make sure spell-check is enabled in your browser. (If you're not sure how to do this, you can search your browser's "help" section, or ask about it in Google.)
6. Add yourself to the University of California Facebook page and Twitter feed. They offer timely and useful advice throughout the process:
[Facebook](#)
[Twitter](#)
7. Increasingly, many schools are providing advice on how to approach their applications through social media. (And they'll likely announce on their pages when they'll be releasing admissions decisions!) Here are the specific links for each campus:

UCLA - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

UC Riverside - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

UC Irvine - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

UC Berkeley - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

UC Merced - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

UC Davis - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

UC Santa Barbara - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

UC San Diego - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)


UC Santa Cruz - [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)

4 Easy Steps to Create an Account (a.k.a. More Dull but Necessary Info)

1. When you are ready to begin, go to:

<https://admissions.universityofcalifornia.edu/applicant/login.htm>.


2. After clicking on “Create New Account”, you will be taken to a page that asks you to set up a login and a password.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** When you choose your email address, avoid three common mistakes.

- **Use YOUR primary email address, not a parent’s.** While it’s tempting to have Mom or Dad check in on your apps, it’s up to you to make sure you’re keeping up with your college emails.
- **Use an appropriate email address.** Make sure that your primary email address is neither silly (e.g. beachgirl24@aol.com) nor offensive (we’ll pass on giving examples here). Our best advice? Use an email account that’s a version of your name—`firstname_lastname@gmail.com`, `lastname_firstname@gmail.com`, or even `firstname_middleinitial_lastname@gmail.com`.
- **Use an email address that you check frequently.** All UC correspondence will go to the account that you choose, so make sure it’s one that you check often. Make it easier on yourself to check for college emails by adding this email account to the mail app on your phone.

3. Now you get to acknowledge the UC value set (this is kind of like their terms and conditions—you agree that you’ll abide by their values of inclusion and diversity).

4. Confirm your full legal name as it appears on official documents (such as your passport or birth certificate), along with your place of birth.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** Double-check this information because it will be used to match you to your exam score reports and any other official documents that are requested of you.

Sections of the UC App

Start your Application

The subsections here include Term & Level, Address & Phone, Residency, and Citizenship.

Term. The first subsection will ask you to select the term for which you are applying. Make sure you select the quarter/semester that you plan to begin your college studies. For most of you reading this guide, you'll select Fall of 2018.

Collegewise Pro Tip: If you're seriously considering attending a UC, make sure you understand the differences between the quarter and semester systems. We've compiled a cheat sheet here:

Quarter System:

- Followed by all UCs except Berkeley & Merced
- 10 weeks of classes
- Not typically followed by high schools
- Pros: fast-paced, classes start in late September (seriously!), students typically take fewer classes at once
- Cons: fast-paced, less time to study for finals and midterms

Semester System:

- Followed by UC Berkeley & UC Merced
- 15 weeks of classes
- System typically adopted by high schools
- Pros: similar pace to high school, more time to let important concepts sink in before finals and midterms
- Cons: students typically take more classes at once, slow pace can feel less exciting

Academic Level. Next, you will have to select your beginning academic level.

You're a freshman if:

- You are entering college straight out of high school

OR

- You have chosen to take college courses while you are still in high school, but you haven't taken any time off between high school and college (e.g. to take college classes).

You're a transfer student if:

- You have completed high school

AND

- You have already begun taking college courses at an institution of higher education (i.e. community college or another four-year university) and wish to complete your undergraduate education at a UC.

Address & Phone. The UCs may want to contact you, so it is important to provide a correct address and phone number.

Address. Make sure the address you provide is the place where you want your correspondence to go (obviously).

Collegewise Pro Tip: If, for whatever reason, your address changes after you submit your application, don't worry! You can always update it in your UC portal after you've clicked submit.

Phone number. Your listed phone number should be for a phone that is easily accessible, like your personal cell phone or a parent's cell if you do not have your own.

Collegewise Pro Tip: Make sure your voicemail is less insane than your usual one (yes, we all have to be appropriate during admissions season) and that your voicemail box has space available. Oh, and just so you know, people may leave voicemails for you, so you need to check. Yes, it's all so very last century.

Residency. The Residency section will ask you if you've attended high school in California, how long you've lived in California, and when and where you were born.

Citizenship. Lastly, the application will ask for your country of citizenship and, if applicable, your social security number (SSN).

You are allowed to leave the SSN field blank if you do not have one. Note: if you select a country of citizenship other than the United States of America, you will have to select the appropriate citizenship/visa status.

***Collegewise Pro Tip: What if you are a DACA student or an undocumented student?**

The UC System is supportive of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival) students—so much so that the UC System is suing the Trump Administration claiming that rescinding DACA unconstitutionally violated the rights of the university and its students.

The UC suggests the following approach for undocumented students:

When you are asked to make your country of citizenship selection, you have the option to choose “No Selection.” This option is considered a valid response and we recommend this choice for undocumented applicants, including those with DACA status. By choosing “No Selection,” you’ll avoid being asked other questions about permanent residency and visa status that are not applicable to you.

The link to the official UC Undocumented Student Resource page can be found below:

<http://undoc.universityofcalifornia.edu/applying-to-uc.html>

You can be a DACA student *and* be considered a California resident. You’ll just have to meet the requirements outlined by the UC. Generally, if you’ve lived in California for all of high school, you will qualify as a California resident. After you’re admitted and have selected a UC campus to attend, you will need to submit an AB 540 exemption to secure in-state tuition. The AB 540 form will ask for some basic information about where you’ve lived, along with supporting documents (like your high school transcript) as proof that you’ve been living in California.

More information about qualifying as a DACA student and as a California resident can be found here: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/paying-for-uc/tuition-and-cost/ab540/index.html>

UC Berkeley also has an outstanding website for DACA recipients, their families, and anyone supporting these students: <https://undocu.berkeley.edu/legal-support-overview/what-is-daca/>

And finally, a word of caution. The current political climate has these things changing quickly. Like everything else within this guide, we’d suggest talking about your specific situation with your school counselor or the person helping you with your application, especially if you think any of this isn’t the right answer for you.

Beyond this, NACAC (the National Association for College Admission Counseling) often updates their DACA resource page that can be found here:

<https://www.nacacnet.org/knowledge-center/undocumented-students/>

There are a host of additional resources recommended by NACAC if you want to learn even more:

[National Immigration Law Center](#), defending and advancing the rights of low-income immigrants

[Department of Homeland Security](#), Consideration of DACA

[Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#), What Do I Need to Know about the End of DACA?

[Department of Homeland Security](#), Frequently Asked Questions about DACA Rescission

[Protecting Our Students](#): Educational Rights of Immigrant Children Now that DACA is Rescinded

[Education Counsel, Memo](#): Undocumented Students' Rights of Equal Access to K-12 Schools

Campuses & Majors

There are nine UC undergraduate campuses, and this part of the application is where you select the campuses where you would like to apply.

Campuses. Before you select every campus, remember that this is not exactly a cheap proposition, as the application fee is \$70 (or \$80 for international applicants) per UC campus. Applying to every UC will run you a whopping total of \$630, which might be better used to purchase next year's textbooks (or even to decorate your dream dorm room). Fee waiver information can be found on page 30 of this guide.

Beyond the expense, there's a major flaw in the "just check every box" plan: few students would be happy and successful at every UC. Make sure that the UCs you're applying to offer your major (and other subjects that interest you, just in case you change your mind) and fit your other important criteria (location, size, semester/quarter system, internship opportunities, etc.).


Majors. Depending on your campus selections, the ensuing pages will list your chosen campus' (or campuses') academic schools/colleges/divisions and the majors within. Select the major that most interests you.

Alternate majors. Generally, the UCs recommend that you choose both a major and an alternate major if the option is available. An alternate major permits some UC campuses to accept you into that second choice rather than your primary one. Normally, the alternate that you pick should be for a less competitive program. Please see the table with campus-specific details on the next page.

Closed majors. Some majors at certain UC campuses may be designated as closed. Why? Usually this is because you are a freshman/sophomore and the program is one that requires the successful completion of prerequisite coursework.


Supplemental applications. If you pick a major that requires a supplemental application—and this will almost always be the case when you want to pursue a

discipline that involves either an audition or a portfolio—a notification will pop up when you click to go to the next page. Acknowledge this message, as it's letting you know that you will need to go to that specific UC campus's website to review the requirements for that supplemental application.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** Carefully review the following table that explains major selection and its implications at each of the UC campuses.

	Does the campus admit by major?	Does the campus consider second majors?
Berkeley	<p>It depends.</p> <p>The Colleges of Chemistry, of Engineering, and of Environmental Design all admit applicants by major.</p> <p>The College of Letters and Science and the College of Natural Resources don't seem to be admitting by major, but both will take major into account and potentially compare students to others within that same major pool.</p>	No.
UCLA	<p>No, for the College of Letters and Science, major is not considered.</p> <p>Yes, for the Schools of Engineering, Arts and Architecture, Music, Nursing, and Theater, Film and Television.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>Except in the case of engineering—if you choose a more selective engineering major for your first choice and a less selective engineering major for your alternate major choice, you'll potentially be considered for the less selective major if you're not admitted to the more selective first choice. (Whew! Try to read that sentence aloud three times fast.)</p>
Santa Barbara	<p>It depends.</p> <p>No, the College of Letters and Science does not consider major.</p> <p>Yes, the College of Engineering is highly selective. Majors in the College of Creative Studies are also selective and require a supplemental application.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Students applying to the College of Engineering and the College of Creative Studies must select an alternate major in the College of Letters and Science in order to be considered for general admission to the campus. If the major is impacted (engineering) or selective (CCS) then the student will be prompted to pick an alternate major in the College of Letters and Science.</p> <p>Collegewise Pro Tip: It is nearly impossible to transfer later into engineering if you're not admitted as a freshman. Students shouldn't look for a loophole or back door into a school. Stay true to your desired major and do not think you can get into your desired major later, as that simply isn't a guarantee. If you're on the fence regarding your major but are 200% sure about UCSB, you can be strategic in major choice, but this is only a good strategy if you are confident that you will be happy in another major.</p>

San Diego	No. Freshman applicants are admitted to the campus regardless of major.	Yes, if you are applying to a “capped” major (https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/advising/majors-minors/capped-majors.html). Then you are required to select an alternate major that is NOT capped, unless you are okay with UCSD admitting you as an undeclared major.
Davis	It depends. Davis tends to look more holistically at the school/college to which you are applying rather than the specific major you pick.	Yes. Davis will consider an alternate major if it is less competitive than the student’s initial choice. Collegewise Pro Tip: Read the pro tip from UCSB above to give you an idea of how you might make some strategic choices in major. This all depends on how much you want a certain major vs. a certain UC campus.
Irvine	No.	Yes. Will consider an alternate major if it is less competitive than the student’s initial choice. Collegewise Pro Tip: Where campuses consider second majors, the advice you’ve read above still holds true.
Santa Cruz	Yes, but only for the College of Engineering.	No (we do so love a simple, declarative answer).
Riverside	Yes. The majors in the Colleges of Engineering and the Natural and Agricultural Sciences are selective. Some majors in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences are also selective.	Yes. Riverside will consider an alternate major if a student chooses a less competitive option. Collegewise Comment: No, we don’t really have another way to rephrase this, so you’re going to have to read everything we’ve said previously regarding alternate majors. We’re just not that creative.
Merced	No.	Yes. A less competitive alternate major may be considered. Collegewise Comment: You’ll go far in life if you’ve made it to reading this far. Bravo, you table reading maestro.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** In general, any major that requires auditions, portfolios, extra application essays or materials, or anything in engineering should prompt a student to choose an alternate major (if possible).


Scholarships

When you apply via the UC Application, you'll be eligible for a range of scholarships based on merit, financial need, or both.

The UCs are a public university system and the majority of this scholarship money is dispersed as financial aid to low-income students, not as merit-based scholarships.

You can access <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/paying-for-uc/> for the most up-to-date information.

The UCs also offer “restricted” scholarships that only apply to some students. To apply for these scholarships, you must start by selecting up to 16 characteristics that apply to you.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** If you have more than the allotted 16 characteristics, select the descriptors that are rarer. For example, in any given year there are tens of thousands of California born students, but there are fewer children of public school teachers applying.

Here are the more popular scholarships:

Middle Class Scholarship (MCS)

What is it? This is exactly as billed: a scholarship for middle class families. The amount awarded will vary depending on family income and assets.

Who qualifies? The way it is translated today is that it applies to students from families with incomes of up to \$104,001 and household assets of no more than \$156,000. The MCS will cover up to 40 percent of system-wide tuition and fees.

How does financial aid from Pell Grants and other UC Grants factor in? This is a terrific scholarship, but you do need to understand that it is calculated after students are awarded grants like Pell, Cal, or other UC Grants. So, you can't combine the MCS with those other grants and scholarships to “go over” the amount that would have initially been awarded using the MCS calculation.

More fine print. Additionally, this award is dependent on both the state budget and the number of eligible students in any given year. In some cases, students with demonstrated financial need will be eligible for Cal Grants or UC Grants that are worth more than the amount available through the MCS. The UC encourages us to

think about this as a “minimum level” of financial aid as many can qualify for more grant funding, depending on their family circumstances.

The Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan

What is it? This scholarship is for families who have an income of less than \$80,000 a year and who qualify for financial aid.

Can I apply for additional financial aid? Blue and Gold students with proven financial need can also qualify for more grant aid to help reduce the cost of attending a UC. What does this mean? Families who qualify for Blue and Gold might also be able to receive gift aid (these are grants and scholarships that don’t need to be paid back, unlike loans that a student/family will have to repay after college).

How do I apply? To be considered for Blue and Gold, a student needs to send in a FAFSA or California Dream Act Application and a Cal Grant GPA Verification. All forms are due by March 2 and students will be considered automatically if they qualify.

The Regents Scholars

How do I apply? This one is a “don’t call us, we’ll call you” situation.

Okay, then how do I qualify? Students cannot apply to be Regents Scholars. Instead, admissions committees refer strong candidates to an internal selection committee that is then responsible for selecting that campus’ Regents Scholars. To qualify for Regents, you need to be a top applicant. Many Regents Scholars are high caliber students who are competitive applicants to highly selective US institutions.

What are the key factors? Grades, test scores, and the level of your high school curriculum are all key factors for these. Your overwhelming charm and glorious personalities are not.

About You

The Basics. This section will ask you for personal, parent, and family information, including your first language, if you were in the military or foster care, and whether you would like to apply to the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

Wait, what's EOP? EOP is a program that provides mentorship, academic programs, financial assistance, counseling/advising, and other campus support services.


Who is EOP for? These services are for first-generation college students and/or students from low-income and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

What information do I have to provide if I'm applying to EOP? If you choose to apply to EOP by clicking the appropriate box on the page, you will be required to provide certain information later in your application:

- Your parents' level of education
- Family size
- Family income


You will report this information in the **Parent Information** and **Family Size & Income** subpages of the **About You** section.

You will also need to provide a short (240 character) response to the prompt "Discuss your reasons for applying to EOP."

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** Some students, especially those who are from less privileged backgrounds, are afraid to answer these questions honestly because they fear that the UC admissions officers will find them to be somehow less desirable. Those students are magnificently wrong, and we promise you that nothing bad happens to you in UC admissions if you come from a background that is less wealthy or where English is not your first language.

Academic History

The UCs do a fantastic, thorough job of explaining how to fill out this section. We'll defer to their excellent instructions, but before you zoom off and start filling out your courses from memory, check out our pro tips below.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** Before you even touch this section, print out an official copy of your transcript! Students can usually find their high school transcripts in their online school portals, but if you don't have one of those (or don't know what the heck we're talking about), ask your high school counselor for a copy of your unofficial transcript.

Why is this important? The UCs rely on your self-reported grades to make admissions decisions. That's why they don't require you to send in a copy of your transcript—they're trusting you to accurately report your coursework, and they'll double-check your final transcript for accuracy only after you've been admitted.

Okay, fine. They're relying on my account of my grades. But why can't I just type out my courses from memory? If they find that you've misrepresented your grades, course titles, or honors designations, it's fair game for them to revoke your acceptance.

Whoa, okay! So I've printed my transcript. Now what? Keep that copy of your transcript handy and make sure you've entered the course titles, grades, and honors designations correctly for all of the classes you've taken in high school. For example, the abbreviations APUSH, AP US, AP US Hist all refer to the same course – Advanced Placement (AP) US History. You see why having your transcript will be helpful as you're reporting grades? The details matter, and you wouldn't want the UCs to see your self-reported transcript and think you were misrepresenting the classes you'd taken, right?

California Students & Academic History

What are "a-g" requirements? "a-g" requirements are simply a list of course requirements that fit into categories labeled by letters (a, b, c, etc.) that correspond with core academic subjects that the UCs expect you to have taken in high school.

What does it mean to fulfill the "a-g" requirements? To fulfill the "a-g" requirements, you have to take (and pass!) the minimum recommended courses [listed on the UC website](#). Here's a (very cursory) breakdown:

- Two years of history/social science
- Four years of English (sorry, my math- and/or science-oriented friends)
- Three years of math
- Two years of science
- Two years of foreign language
- One year of art
- One year of a college preparatory elective

How do I know if my course is UC-approved? Courses from California high schools and online schools that are used to fulfill the "a-g" requirements are approved by the UC. If you are in a California school, you will be able to search for your classes that meet these requirements using the UC application.

I've fulfilled my "a-g" requirements! I can get into UCLA now, right? Hold up. These are the minimum requirements to be eligible for admission to any of the UCs. The more popular UC campuses (like Berkeley and LA) and majors (Engineering, Computer Science) often want more than what is listed above.



Collegewise Pro Tip: Going beyond the “a-g” Minimum

You can use your transcript to tell a story (and increase your chances of admission). Don't believe us? Consider these two stories as told through transcripts:

- A high school senior is applying to UC Berkeley as an engineering major. His transcript shows that he's fulfilled his a-g requirements—but just barely in the science and math categories. He's taken the minimum of two years of science (biology and chemistry) and he finished Algebra II in his junior year, after which he stopped taking math classes. How interested does he seem to be in engineering?
- A different high school senior is applying to UC Berkeley as an engineering major. Her transcript shows that she's fulfilled the a-g requirements—and then some—especially in the science and math categories. She's taken the most advanced science classes her school offers, and she even doubled-up on science in her junior and senior years, choosing to take advanced biology, chemistry, and physics classes at the same time. She's done the same with math, and when she realized that her school didn't offer enough advanced math classes for her, she decided to check out her local community college and take additional math courses over the summer. How interested does she seem to be in engineering?

Your transcript is your chance to highlight your strengths. The “a-g” requirements are an important benchmark, but if you want to be competitive for admission to selective campuses and majors, you'll need to go beyond those requirements and show the admissions officers just how much you love learning about the subjects related to your intended major.

Non-California Students

Do your best with representing your courses as accurately as you can. It is possible that your courses are not going to dovetail perfectly with the UC's “a-g” requirements. That's okay. Just describe all of your courses as accurately and fully as possible.

Activities and Awards

The UC app breaks down this section into six different categories: Coursework Other than A-G, Educational Prep Programs, Community Service, Work Experience, Awards & Honors, and Extracurricular Activities.

Always read the directions preceding each category. You'll find all sorts of pertinent examples of things that fit well in each category on the UC app. In the meantime, we've answered a few of your frequently asked questions.

Activities and Awards FAQ

Can I cut and paste my résumé as part of the Additional Comments section instead of completing this section?

Absolutely not! Admissions officers spend a lot of time constructing the applications so that they can collect all the information they need to know about students. If you send a résumé without being asked, it's like telling them that you didn't like the way they put the application together. This will create more work for them and will probably annoy them, and that is never a good idea.

How should I list my activities? In chronological order? In alphabetical order?

In each category, you will have the opportunity to enter up to five activities. List these in order of importance to you. The preceding was a **Collegewise Pro Tip**, so we'll write it again: list your activities in the order of their importance to you. The first one listed is the one that will resonate most with your admissions reader.

Beyond importance, consider listing those activities towards the top that you have been involved in the longest/most consistently or where you held a leadership position. (Usually this matches up with importance for a student.) It is far more important that you be authentic here rather than worry about being impressive.

Can I abbreviate? There's so little space!

We get it. Space can be limited in this section, so it's fine to abbreviate as long as the abbreviation is universally understood. It would be hard to find an admissions officer who doesn't know the meaning of "MVP," but if you're not sure, then spell out the acronym. In addition, you'll find you can save space by using numbers and abbreviations in the right place. "Senior Class Vice President" can also be "Class VP: 12," and "First Place in Conference Championship as a Sophomore and Junior" can be "1st in Conf. Championship: 10, 11." But be cautious. If you find yourself so desperate to squeeze in more information that your section is looking more like someone with a concussion trying to do Morse code, you may want to consider using the Additional Comments section to give yourself some breathing room.

I don't have enough activities to fill every space! What do I do?

You don't have to have an activity in every single category in order to be admitted. We promise. You will have some categories that are blank, and that is okay! Also, don't feel the need to fill in all five spaces in each category. Only have one? Great! Put that one down proudly and don't try and make other things fit there that just don't. And, whatever you do, don't try to make things sound important that just weren't. (More on that below.)

Wait—what should I list in Coursework Other than A-G?

Don't have anything? Don't worry. This is not the place to add a class for the sake of adding something, but instead should be used to list a course that shows your love of learning in a particular area. The UC app gives examples such as a Career and Technical Education (CTE) nursing careers course, a Spanish immersion program, your weekend Chinese school, and a non-transferable community college course. Don't worry if you don't have anything to list in this area. Just leave it blank.

What's an Educational Prep Program?

Did you participate in AVID, tutoring, EAOP, and/or study engineering for a summer and get to experience life as an engineering student? All of these would be great to put in this section.

What should (and shouldn't) I list in the Volunteer and Community Service section?

Did you do a blood drive once in ninth grade for an hour? While that is great (and Red Cross math says that you saved up to three lives with that donation), it is probably not worth noting here. Try to focus on the volunteer experiences that meant the most to you and where you had a legitimate, tangible impact. If community service wasn't your thing, that's okay. Leave this section blank. It's best not to exaggerate (or invent) community service hours that just didn't happen.

What should I list as Work Experience?

List any jobs you got paid to do here. It doesn't have to be a formal job at a restaurant or store. This can be a paid internship, babysitting gig, or the neighbourhood landscaping business you started.

What should I list as Activities and Awards?

National Honors Society (NHS) is an activity that fits a lot better here than it does in the Extracurricular Activities section, especially if you are not super involved in NHS. Other good things to note here include MVP, Student of the Month, Honor Roll, Scholar Athlete, and other recognitions of this ilk.

What should I list as Extracurricular Activities?

This is the catch-basin for anything else that you do outside the classroom that didn't fit in the other sections. This includes sport teams, music, theatre, student council, clubs/organizations, etc. Don't forget that hobbies count, too! Did you teach yourself how to play guitar by watching YouTube videos and spend a couple hours every week playing? Well, that's awesome—put it down.

Test Scores

Again, filling out the Testing section of the UC app is actually quite intuitive. We decided to spend this section answering your frequently asked questions about how the UCs evaluate tests for admissions purposes.

Before we dive into your UC testing FAQs, a quick note: any testing calendar involves a deeply complex set of decisions that depends on a multiplicity of factors including your choice of major, the competitiveness of the school to which you are applying, where you sit in your academic schedule, and when your major activities soak up the most time. The info below does not take all of your personal factors into account.

UC Testing FAQ

When should I test?

Students should plan to take the SAT or ACT *no later than December of senior year*. But, in reality, this is the very latest anyone should test. Students who test earlier will be able to consider which UC campuses might be the best fits for their profile and interests.

If I'm testing in December, how can I make sure that the UCs will receive my scores in time to make a decision?

If you want your December scores sent directly to the UCs, be sure to select at least one of the UC campuses to receive your test results. You need to do this on the actual test day when prompted to do so by the SAT or ACT materials in front of you.

How should I report my scores to the UCs?

There are two steps to make sure that the UCs receive your test scores:

1. In the UC application, you should report your ACT and/or SAT scores in the testing section of the application.
2. Send an official copy of your scores to the UCs from ACT or College Board.

Do I have to send my scores to each of the UCs?

The official score reports you send to one UC campus will be shared with all of the UC campuses to which you applied. You don't have to individually send scores to each campus, which saves you a tidy sum of money.

Do the UCs superscore?

No. They take your highest score from *one* sitting of the ACT or SAT.

Many colleges do manipulate test scores from different sittings of the exam. So, for example, they might take your highest SAT English score from one test and combine it with your highest math score from another. This tactic is called "superscoring."

The UCs do NOT follow this practice, nor do they care how many times you take each test, although other colleges may start to raise their metaphorical eyebrows after you take these exams more than three times.

How do I know that the UCs received my test scores?

If you are unsure whether any campus has received your official scores, it is imperative that you confirm directly with that admissions office that your scores are on file.

What about SAT Subject Tests—should I take those?

Great question! See the magic *Subject Test Recommendations* chart below to determine whether you should consider taking SAT Subject Tests. Remember, these are not mandatory. In addition, you will never be penalized for not taking any. The good news is that strong Subject Test scores could add positively to your application.



Collegewise Pro Tip:

We're not huge fans of standardized tests, but we are committed to giving you the best possible information, so here it is...

The UC admissions process is quite quantitative due to the massive number of applications they receive. In general, if you are good at tests ranging from the SAT/ACT to Subject Tests to AP exams, then feel free to show a lot of good test scores. If you know that you can do substantially better on the SAT or ACT than you have shown to date, then yes, it does make sense to try the test one more time (unless your scores are already in the 99th percentile, in which case it's nuts to keep bashing away at them).

Many students do get accepted to highly selective UCs *without* taking the optional Subject Tests, but they are often getting additional points elsewhere due to home city or first generation/socioeconomic status.

In a nutshell, if a student is going to a highly rated high school that draws students from a wealthier area, then he or she should probably try to take those extra exams to get more points. Again, this is going above and beyond the basics to demonstrate to the UCs that you're serious about your academic subjects.

Subject Test Recommendations

UC Berkeley	College of Chemistry	Math Level 2 and a science test (Biology E/M, Chemistry, or Physics) closely related to the applicant's intended major.
	College of Engineering	Math Level 2 and a science test (Biology E/M, Chemistry, or Physics) closely related to the applicant's intended major.
UC Davis UC Santa Cruz	Not recommended for any area	
UC Irvine	Claire Trevor School of the Arts	Recommends that freshman applicants take any SAT Subject Tests that will demonstrate the student's strengths.
	Henry Samueli School of Engineering (including the joint Computer Science and Engineering major)	Math Level 2 and a science test (Biology E/M, Chemistry, or Physics) closely related to the applicant's intended major.
	Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences	Biology M, Chemistry, and/or Math Level 2
	School of Physical Sciences	Math Level 2
	Program in Public Health Sciences	Biology E, Biology M, and/or Chemistry
	Program in Public Health Policy	Biology E, Biology M, and/or World History
UCLA	Henry Samueli School of Engineering and Applied Science	Math Level 2 and a science test (Biology E/M, Chemistry, or Physics) closely related to the applicant's intended major.
UC Merced	No recommendation at this time	
UC Riverside	College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences	Math 2 and Chemistry or Physics, for all majors
	Bourns College of Engineering	Math 2 and Chemistry or Physics, for all majors
UC San Diego	Jacobs School of Engineering and	Math Level 2 and a science test (Biology E/M, Chemistry, or

	biological or physical sciences majors	Physics) closely related to the applicant's intended major.
UC Santa Barbara	College of Engineering	Math Level 2
	College of Creative Studies	Math Level 2 for math majors Math Level 2 and Physics for physics majors Biology for biology majors Chemistry for biochemistry and chemistry majors Math Level 2 for computing majors

Personal Insight Questions

Think of these as your blended interview, résumé, and best story showcase. Because you almost certainly won't be interviewed or have to submit letters written on your behalf, this is your greatest opportunity for the admissions readers to learn more about you.

How can I make the most of the space allotted?

Because your answers are limited to 350 words, you have to get to the point quickly and stay on topic. In fact, UC admissions readers' most consistent pieces of advice are "give me the facts" and "don't include too much flowery writing." Other colleges encourage depth and personal exploration in their essay topics, but they also give students 500 words or more to do so and often have creative prompts that reflect the type of writing they expect you to submit.

How should I pick the four questions to answer?

The four UC questions you pick should each be designed to give your application readers specific insight into who you are and what matters to you. Your responses should be varied and discuss multiple facets of who you are. If you talk about your love of macramé in three of the four questions, while you are gloriously weird (and we like you), you are also on the wrong track. Successful applicants are adept at using the Personal Insight Questions to add new information or expand on something they had previously briefly mentioned elsewhere in the application.

Who should review my responses before I press submit?

This may seem counterintuitive, but we recommend that you not show your answers to these questions to your parents or to anyone who loves you. It's almost impossible for them to be objective. Instead, share them with a professional (a teacher, a high school counselor, or a trusted college counselor) who doesn't love you, but who has taken the time to know you or your story. Ask him/her to do two things: (a) Check your spelling, grammar and punctuation, and (b) Help you determine whether your response sounds like you and reflects your best self.

How can I determine if my style/voice is appropriate for a UC Personal Insight response?

Don't be too stiff. You are not writing a thesis for English class. Pretend you're speaking to a favorite teacher—this will ensure that you're not too formal (after all, we don't know any students who use words like "heretofore" in everyday conversation). If you write like you're talking to a teacher who you like, you won't be too informal, either. We've yet to hear a student use "on fleek" in a conversation with a faculty member (and we'd like to keep it that way). Keep your voice. Authenticity is probably the most important single attribute in an interesting UC response.


The UC's guide to answering the questions can be found below. They offer some great prompts to help you flesh out your ideas and brainstorm potential answers.

<http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/files/uc-personal-questions-guide-freshman.pdf>

Additional Comments

This page comes right after the UC Personal Insight questions. It offers a text box (with a maximum of 550 words) that allows applicants to explain unique circumstances. These circumstances can include personal situations that have affected the student's performance in school or anything the student feels the admissions readers need to know. Here are some examples of information you can include:

- If you took enough AP tests that you ran out of room on the application, that's something important that an admissions officer would want to know. List the additional scores and future test dates here.
- Include significant health circumstances, especially if they caused you to miss multiple weeks of school. Make sure to be specific about the dates you missed.
- If you attend a school with a specialized curriculum, like a performing arts school or a school with specialized religious instruction that takes up a significant portion of your class day, that's appropriate to list here. Your counselor will likely also cover this in the school profile, but it's never a bad idea to make things as clear as possible for an admissions reader.
- If you have important activities or awards that you couldn't accurately summarize or just didn't fit on the application, list them here. We're not talking about "9th Grade Homecoming Float Committee." But if you've played on two different club soccer teams and on a state-wide select team (in addition to your high school team), and if you've received multiple accolades in each, it's quite possible that you just couldn't fit all of that in the previous sections. It would be helpful to bring it up here.
- Maybe you did a research project with a college professor and you'd like to write a short summary of the project and your involvement in it. Keep it short and clear, but it deserves inclusion here.

 ***Collegewise Pro Tip:** If you choose to use this space, then the information should be new. Do not use this area to repeat something that has appeared elsewhere in your application or was part of an answer to one of your Personal Insight questions. Instead, make the rest of your application as clear, organized, and complete as possible. Most students who do those things won't have anything compelling left to share—that's the sign of a thoughtful and complete application. Don't assume that blank space is bad or that more information is always good. In fact, two-thirds of our students at Collegewise don't write anything in the Additional Information section. That's how strongly we believe in this advice.

Letters of Recommendation (UC Berkeley)

Most UCs simply don't require or request letters of recommendation, but some majors (or individual campus colleges) may require one or more letters of recommendation as part of a supplemental application review.


To be clear, these letters are only needed if a campus sends you a request. If that happens, it will come via email (along with the necessary instructions), so be sure to check your inbox regularly. Only send letters of recommendation if they are requested.

UC Berkeley is the UC school most likely to ask you for these additional letter(s). Here is what they write on their webpage:

"We will request letters of some students after we initially review their applications, if we feel additional information would be helpful in our selection process. Only a fraction of applicants will be selected to submit letters, and they can choose to submit letters or not to do so. Not doing so will not harm them in any way." (Read more at: <http://admissions.berkeley.edu/freshmanpolicy>.)

Submit

The submission page provides you with an application summary and shows the completion status of all of the sections of your application. Once you start the submission process, you will be asked for demographic information and your state of legal residence. You will then be able to review your entire application to ensure everything is correct.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** Remember that per California law, the UC admissions officers are not permitted to use ethnic data as part of their decision making process, so sharing your demographic data is only for data aggregation purposes.

Take as long as you need to review your entire application before you submit it, as after you click your approval, you will not be able to make changes online. And if you do mess this up, trust us when we say that it's a huge hassle to have to contact every campus to which you applied and correct any errors.

Once you are confident that your application is complete, you will be asked to digitally sign an affidavit to confirm that, indeed, all of the information you provided is truthful.

The payment page is the last subsection before final submission. It currently costs \$70 for US applicants and \$80 for international students to apply to each UC campus. Using a credit card is recommended, but they also allow applicants to pay by mail.

For payment by mail, write a check payable to Regents of the University of California and send it to:

UC Application Center
P.O. Box 1432
Bakersfield, CA 93302

Fee Waivers

If paying might be a hardship for your family, the University of California will waive application fees for students who are US citizens, permanent residents, or eligible for AB 540 benefits for up to four campuses. You can apply for a fee waiver in the **Review & Submit** subsection entitled "Fee Payment." If you apply to more than four campuses, you'll need to pay \$70 for each additional campus.

After You Submit

After you submit your application, we recommend printing out a copy so that you have a record of the application along with your application ID. If you don't have a printer, or better yet, are ecologically inclined, save the document electronically so that you have access to this information. (Google "Print to PDF" to find out how to do this on your computer.)


Sending test scores has already been covered in "UC Testing Requirements" on page 22, but if you're a freshmen or sophomore applicant, you must order scores to be sent directly from the testing agency to the UC.

How to Update your UC Application After You Submit It

Just so we're clear here, the UC states: "Minor changes to your activities, awards, volunteer work or employment are unlikely to have an impact on your admission decision." So resist the urge to try to change things that aren't going to be perceived as a big deal. Winning a national award might be worth adding, but letting them know you're moving from Treasurer to Vice President of the Red Cross Club isn't worth an amendment.

If there is anything that should always be updated, it is your address. If you move, be sure to keep your address up-to-date on your UC application account. The same holds true if you change your email.

You can update this information in the online application portal or by contacting the UC Application Center at (800) 207-1710 or at ucinfo@applyucsupport.net.

 **Collegewise Pro Tip:** If you get bigger and better test scores (SAT, ACT, TOEFL, etc.), you should update those.

Changes to your Academic Record

This one is a big deal. If after submitting your application you:

- Change schools
- Add or drop a course
- Fail to get a C or better in a course

Then you must notify the UC Application Center by email or postal mail. Your correspondence must include your name, UC Application ID number, and your

signature (if you mail a letter). Again, if this should occur, keep a copy of this correspondence for your records.

Below are the contact details if you need to contact the UCs regarding this type of issue.

Email:
docs@applyUCsupport.net

Post:
UC Application Center
P.O. Box 1432
Bakersfield, CA 93302

Adding Campuses

If, after you have submitted your initial application, you want to add another UC campus, you might be able to do so if it's before the November 30 deadline and if the campus is still open. Log in to your UC application to see which campuses are still accepting applications. You will need to pay the application fee for each new campus you apply to.

Reception invite(s)

A handful of UC campuses invite applicants to receptions in various metropolitan areas in early spring (January – March), before they release their admissions decisions. Attendance is not mandatory, but if you want to attend one of these schools and they throw a reception that you don't go to, that's not only depriving you of the chance to learn more about the place, but also probably sends them the "I'm just not that into you" signal. If you do decide to go, you usually have to RSVP.

About the Authors

Lisa Caruso

Lisa was a student at UC Irvine, where she led campus tours and counselled peers on study skills. After graduating *magna cum laude* (that's Latin for showing off), Lisa continued assisting students at the University of Pennsylvania, where she worked in graduate admissions while earning her master's degree (that's education speak for showing off). Then she worked full-time in admissions and academic advising at both UC Santa Barbara and UCLA before joining the Collegewise team as one of our most UC-experienced counselors. As a native of Los Angeles who was the product of a family with high expectations, Lisa has counselled students in time management, academic planning, and maintaining their overall well-being. When she's not helping students to find balance or guiding them over admission hurdles, Lisa enjoys watching independent and foreign films, attending concerts and plays, and exploring the multicultural culinary scene of LA.

Megan Carlier

Megan earned her degree in literature and writing from CSU San Marcos and her master's in education from the University of South Carolina (the other USC). Megan seems to love doing jobs related to colleges, beginning with her role as an orientation leader at her undergrad institution. She's been a regional admissions counselor in Southern California for three years, and prior to that she worked as a tutor and instructor on college campuses. She's also been involved with the Regional Admissions Counselors of California (RACC) and the Western Association of College Admission Counseling (WACAC) (that's college speak for showing off). We like these types at Collegewise. When she is not working with students, you'll find Megan hiking the local trails, cooking all kinds of things (though not with cheese – she doesn't like the stuff), and binge-watching great shows on Netflix.

Monica Gallego Rude

Monica has spent the entirety of her career working in admissions both in the United States and internationally. She has a bachelor's degree from Washington University in St. Louis and a Post Graduate Diploma from the UCL Institute of Education, where she is also currently pursuing her doctorate, focusing on highly selective undergraduate admissions in the United States. Monica enjoys helping students of all academic interests and backgrounds find and tell their best stories in their personal statements so they can ultimately be admitted to and attend their best-fit universities. Her students have been admitted to a variety of highly selective colleges, including both Ivy League and Russell Group institutions. When not thinking about all things college, Monica can most often be found practicing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, reading her favorite blogs, or planning her next travel adventure.

Want More?

Collegewise is a private college counseling firm that holds two beliefs: (1) The college admissions process should be an exciting, adventurous time for every family, and (2) accurate, helpful college information should be made available to everyone. So, even though we are private counselors who work with families who can afford to hire us, we also enjoy working with anyone who is interested and willing to listen, whether we're writing, speaking, or teaching as much as we can.

If you'd like to learn more about how we can help your family or your students enjoy a successful, more joyful college admissions process, just reach out and ask.