

# College Essays and the UC Personal Statement

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Presented by Wildcat Counselors

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# College and University Admissions Essay

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Types and Tips

# How important is the essay?

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- This is your chance to become real to the admissions officers.
- A 2006 report by NCAC found that while grades, admission tests, and class rank remain top factors in college the college admission decision, a majority of colleges and universities consider the essay to be a key factor in determining which academically qualified student they would choose.
- In other word, this is what can tip the scales in your favor.

# What are colleges looking for?

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- Admissions officers look to the essay for evidence that the student can write well and support their ideas with logical arguments.
- They also want to know who you are, something personal

# 3 Types of Essays

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- The “you” question
- The “why us” question
- The “creative” question

# The “you” question

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- This is basically the “Tell us about yourself” question. The school wants to see how you will introduce yourself.
  - Example: “UVM values a diverse student body. What contributions might you make to our campus community outside of academic achievement?” (University of Vermont, 2005)

## The “you” question (cont.)

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- This question gives you a chance to reveal something about yourself other than grades and test scores.
- **DANGER:** Be careful!! This is a very open ended question and can oftentimes lead to essays that are all over the place

# The “you” question (cont.)

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## ■ Tips

- Focus on just a few things and avoid the temptation to tell everything all at once.
- **DO NOT** just re-write your resume in paragraph form!!!
- **Instead:** Develop on small event, person, place, or feeling with a number of narrative specifics.
- This is a “tell us a story” question. You should tell a story that only you can tell.

# The “Why us” question...

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- Some schools will ask for an essay about your choice in school or career. Here, they are looking for information about your goal and how serious your commitment is to the school.
  - Example: “How did you become interested in American University?” (American University, 2007)

# The “Why us” question...

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- This question gives you a focus for your essay. This will hopefully ensure a clear focus for your writing.
- **Danger:** Check your FACTS!!!
  - Any errors will show that you have not really thought about your choice
  - The good part about this is you may realize this school may not be the perfect fit for you.

# The “Why us” question...(cont.)

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## ■ Tips:

- Know your subject well! Research, Research, Research!
- Discuss a specific major or feature that the school offers you are interested in.
- Do not go too far with the flattery. You should make sure you are sincere but not over the top!

# The “Creative” question...

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- The goal of this question is to evaluate your ability to think and write creatively and to assess the breadth of your knowledge and education.
  - Example: “Sharing intellectual interests is an important aspect of university life. Describe an experience or idea that you find intellectually exciting, and explain why.” (Stanford University, 2007)

# The “Creative” question...(cont.)

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## ■ Tips:

- It is SOOOO important to write an informed essay. For example, do not write about a what you would do if you met with a famous person and get titles, dates, facts wrong.
- Use your common sense. Being creative does not mean to be eccentric or self indulgent.
- **Do not** write about high minded topics or exotic locations just for the sake of impressing the admissions officer.

## The “Creative” question...(cont.)

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- This type of question gives you a chance to convey your personality and your views.
- **Danger:** Do not go overboard!!! Many students treat this as an opportunity to be obscure, pretentious, or undisciplined in their writing.

# UC Personal Statement Purpose

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- Part of UC's "Comprehensive Review Process"
- Provides information that supports and augments the review process
- Helps admissions officers know and understand applicants

# Personal Statement Instructions

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- The instructions for the Personal Statement are very specific and need to be ready completely.
- READ READ READ READ READ READ
- You write it!!!! Not your parents!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

# Personal Statement Instructions

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- Two questions
- Students respond to both questions.
  - A maximum of 1,000 words total
  - Students should stay within the word limit as closely as they can. A little over—1,012 words, for example—is fine.
- Students choose length of each response.
  - If they choose to respond to one prompt at greater length, we suggest the shorter answer be no less than 250 words.

# Prompt #1

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- Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

# Prompt #2

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

# Additional Comments Section

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- Use Additional Comments box for clarification, expansion on important details:
  - Additional names
  - Anything not included in either essay or application.
- Describe anything else that you have not had the opportunity to include elsewhere in your application.
  - **500-word limit (Strict Limit)**

# Where Do I Start?

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Personal Statement

# Answer the question.

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- Take time to think about each prompt before you start to write.
- Use MS Word to compose, cut, and paste the essay into the application.
- Brainstorm (let your mind flow and just write down all your ideas)
- Use details and examples to make your point.
- Use your words strategically; is there a reason behind your example?
- Make sure your writing is adding to the context and not just a filler (they can tell).

# Give yourself time to edit.

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- Start writing to answer each prompt then go back and review the word count, content, and overall message. You may not have enough space to tell us everything so make your words count.
- If you write too much the application will display the essay but will cut off when the admissions officers read it. **Don't go over!!**

# Be yourself.

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- Talk about yourself.
- Talk about yourself in a way that the schools can get to know your personality, talents, accomplishments and potential to succeed on the UC campus.
- “I” Statements are welcomed and encouraged.

# Stick to one topic per response.

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- Make a list of your accomplishments, activities, awards, or work that will make your life a lot easier.
- Expand on a topic by using examples and facts for maximum impact to an Admissions Reader.

# Think outside the box.

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- Personal triumphs or challenges – If you decide to talk about a challenge do not forget to explain what you learned from the experience (focus).
- Leadership opportunities – They like leadership at many levels (e.g. family, school, or community).

# Think outside the box.

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- Experiences outside the classroom – Consider experiences that have made an impact on your life (e.g. travels, church/temple, work, youth groups, family, or volunteer work).
- Culture – If your culture has influenced who you are, talk about it.

# Stay focused: Avoid common mistakes

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- Inappropriate use of humor.
- Creative writing (poems, scene setting, or clichés).
- Quotations – They want to know your thoughts and works, not someone else's.
- Generalities – Stick to facts and specifics you want them to know about you.
- Repetition – Do not restate your application
- Philosophy – Do describe your works in facts and examples. Don't ask questions without answers.

# Tips for College Admissions Essays

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Tips apply to all Essays (UC and  
Private)

# Tips for College Essays

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- Write about something you care about.
- Even if the subject does not seem exciting, make sure you are reflected in the essay.
- If you are writing about an influential person, use the essay as an opportunity to see your personality reflected through the prism of that person. Why are you different than you would have been if you hadn't known that person?
- Tell about yourself through a story/anecdote.

# Tips for College Essays

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- Don't write on a topic because it "sounds" impressive.
- Write in a style that reflects who you are. Be yourself!
- Do not write about your summer trip or any event that you know that 5 of your other friends will write about as well.
- Make sure that your essay could only be written by you.

# Tips for College Essays

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- The opening sentence needs to “grab” the reader. An imaginative opening will get their attention.
- Be sure to focus on the “why” of the experience, not the “what”.
- Good writing is lean, progressive, imaginative, grounded in specifics, energized by appropriate verbs, and is respectful of the reader’s intelligence.

# Tips for College Essays

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- Don't write a glorified list or a travelogue or blame others for your situation.
- Focus on a specific idea, not a generality (like taking a picture and focusing on one specific part of the picture)
- Be clear, concise, insightful
- Share your essay with someone, preferably a teacher who can catch the minor syntax things you don't catch because you know what you mean to say.
- Proofread!!!! Proofread!! Proofread!!!

# Tips for College Essays

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- Be yourself (notice a theme) here... write your own essay, use your own voice and have a little fun with it. It is not a book report. Remember, someone is going to be reading yours alongside 80-100 other essays that day and some for the next 12 weeks.

# Tips for College Essays

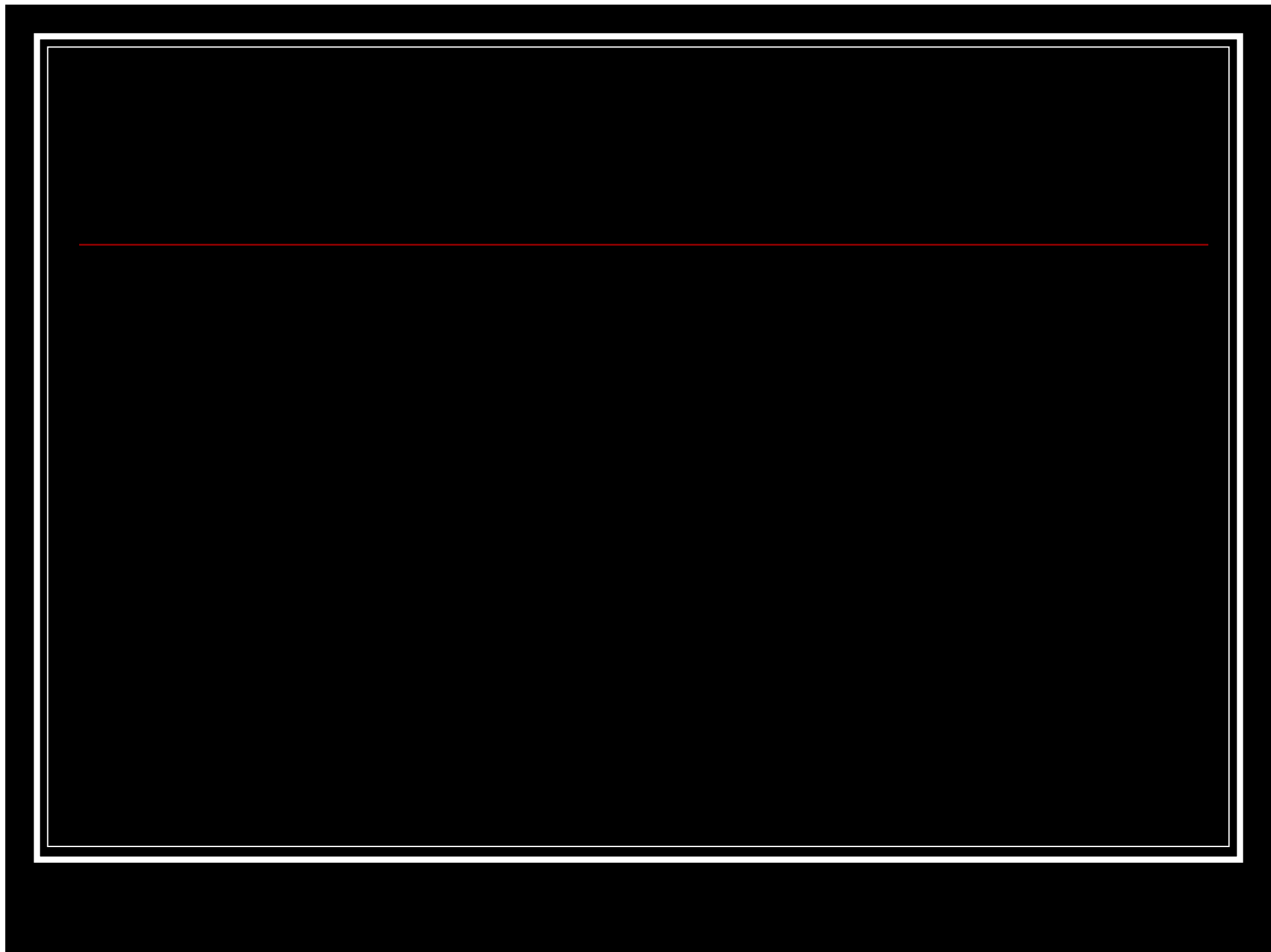
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1. Own It
2. Keep it short
3. Make one point well.
4. Do not use a thesaurus.
5. Like It

**IS THIS YOU????**

# Potential Extras:

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# Steps to Writing an Effective Personal Statement

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**Draft, Get Feedback, Revise**

**Develop Topic and Thesis**

**Read Critically**

**Gather  
Information/Brainstorm**

# Important Strategies

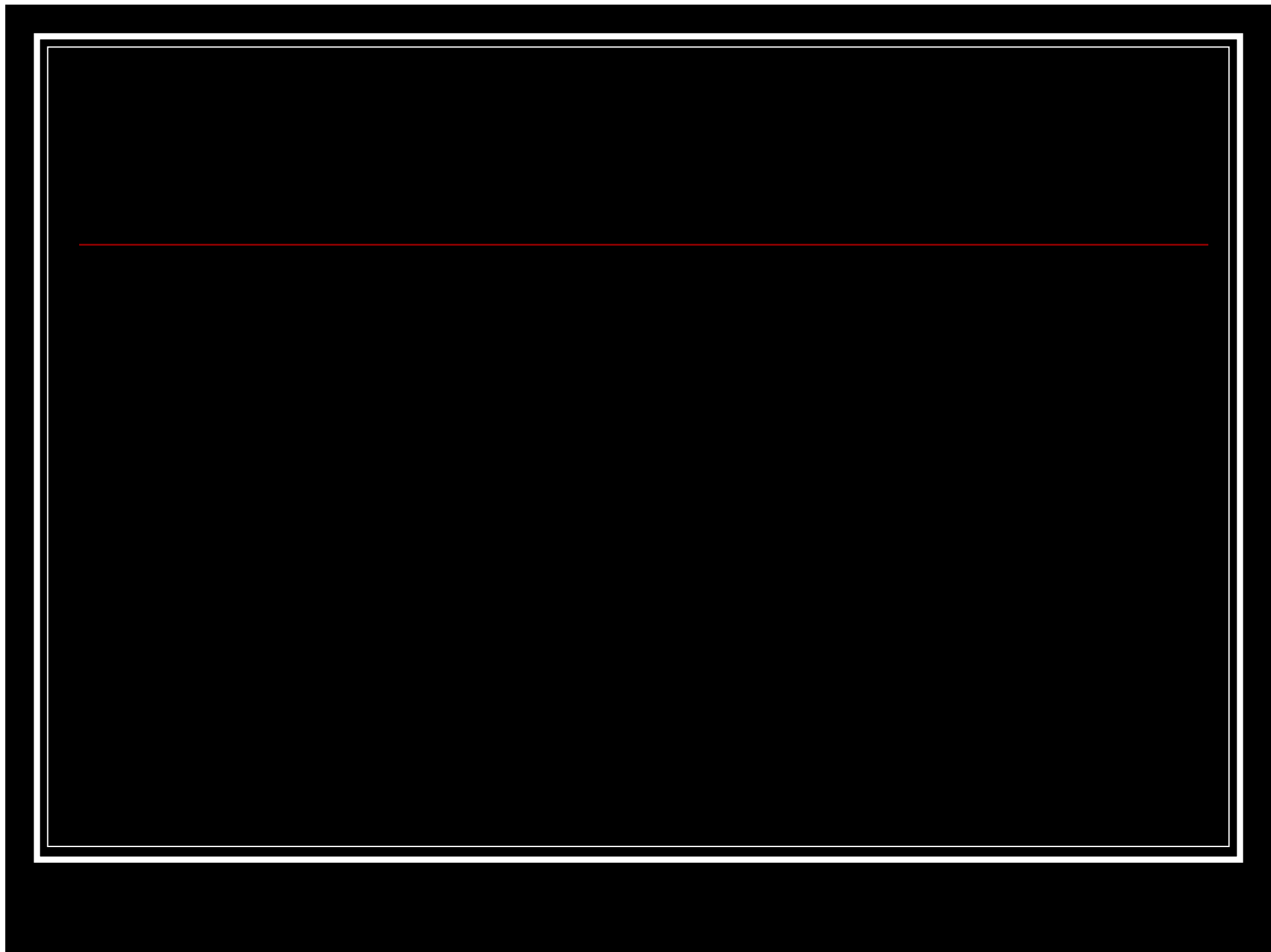
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- Students are encouraged to write about special circumstances that have influenced their educational experience:
  - Small or alternative learning environments
  - Learning and/or physical challenges
- Read critically and write analytically.
  - Think like an admissions reader by capitalizing on the relationship between readers and writers.
- Use a writing process.
- Get good feedback.

# Think Like an Admissions Reader

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- All readers have expectations of writers, revealed in readers' questions, observations and interpretations of the application.
- Writers fulfill readers' expectations by addressing these questions, observations and interpretations in the personal statement.
- Writers can anticipate readers' expectations by **completing and critically reading** their applications prior to writing a personal statement.
  - This will help ensure that you are not RESTATING your application.


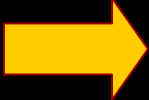



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- It is of the utmost importance that your voice should be reflected
  - Include ethnicity into essay

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- Read the application critically using levels of questions.
  - Draft.
  - Revise for organization, clarity and meaning.
  - Proofread.

# Critical Reading and Analytical Writing

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- Level one: Facts  ■ **Answers to L1 questions provide details in paragraphs.**
- Level two: Interpretation  ■ **Answers to L2 questions are topic sentences of paragraphs.**
- Level three: Meaning and significance  ■ **Answers to L3 questions are thesis statements of essays.**