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The 5 UC Application Tips You Need to Get Into University of California



Posted by Christine Sarikas | Aug 25, 2019 11:00:00 AM
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If you're applying to one or more of the UC schools, you want to make sure you get the application right. **This step-by-step guide will walk you through everything you need to know about the UC application,** from the time you decide to apply to a UC school to when you submit the final piece of the application.

Keep reading to learn when the most important UC application deadline is, which documents you need to submit to complete your application, if you need a separate application for each UC school, and how you can make sure every part of your application sets you apart from the crowd.

Important Info About the University of California Application

It's key to know important information about the UC application early on so that you have enough time to gather and submit all the materials you need before the deadlines.

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Where to Find the UC Application: You can find the UC application here. This is the application for all University of California schools, so regardless if you're looking for a UC Berkeley application, UC Davis application, etc., they all use this same application.

How to Submit the Application: When you've completed the application, you can submit it by hitting the "Submit" button at the end of the application. SAT and/or ACT scores must be sent directly to the UC school(s) you're applying to.

When to Submit Your Application: It's extremely important to know when the UC application deadlines are because missing one could mean your application won't be looked at. Below are the key University of California application dates.

Date	Action
August 1	UC application opens
October 1	FAFSA and Cal Grant Verification Form open for applicants
November 1-30	**Period application can be submitted online**
December	Self-report December test scores
January-February	Submit official December test score results
March 1	Admissions decisions begin to be sent out
March 2	Financial aid applications due
May 1	Reply date for all accepted first year students
July 1	Admitted students must have submitted their final high school transcript

Looking at the above chart, **it's clear that the most important date is November 30th.** This is the last day you can submit your UC application. UC states right on the website that they almost never accept late applications, so don't miss this deadline!

However, as long as you have your application submitted by November 30th, **you can still take the ACT/SAT in December.** If you choose to do this, you'll self-report your scores in December and then send your official scores once you get them in January or February. We don't recommend waiting until December to take the ACT or SAT because if you're unhappy with your score you won't have any other chances to retake it, but if you've taken the exam several times and want one more shot, a December test date is an option.

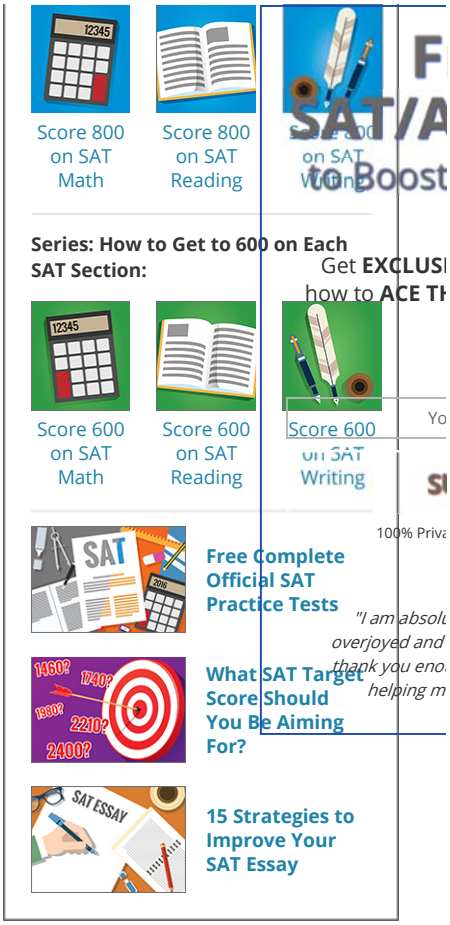
You'll learn if you've been accepted as early as March 1st, and you'll have until May 1st to decide which school to attend.

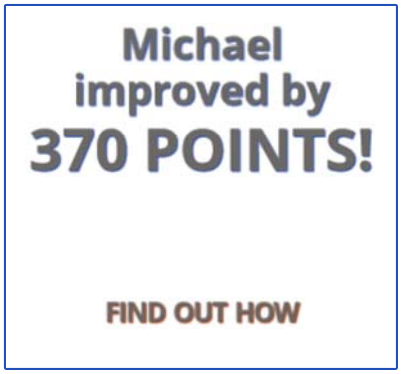


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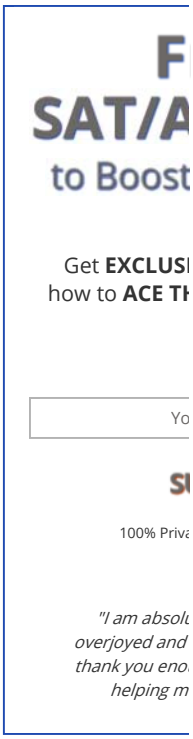
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How to Apply to the UC Schools

There are five main steps to applying to UC schools. The earlier you begin your application (as early as August 1st) the more time you'll have to complete all the steps and the less pressure you'll be under to meet the deadline. **The steps are the same regardless of which UC school(s) you're applying to since all UC schools use the same application** (and you only need to submit one application, even if you apply to multiple UC schools).

Step 1: Create an Account

Your step to applying to UC schools is to create an applicant account. This step will only take about a few minutes since you just need to fill out basic information like your email, name, which semester you want to start school, and if you're applying as a freshman or as a transfer student.

Step 2: Complete the UC Application

After creating your account, you'll be immediately sent to the beginning of the application. The University of California application contains eight sections:

About You

You'll answer background and demographic questions, such as your birth date and contact information, which language(s) you grew up speaking, what your family's income is, if you qualify as a resident of California.

Campuses & Majors

You choose which school(s) you want to apply to. There are nine UC schools, listed below, and you can choose to apply to as many as you want, including all nine. **Be aware though that each UC school you apply to requires its own $70 application fee ($80 for international students).**

Here are the UC schools:

- UC Berkeley
- UC Davis
- UC Irvine
- UC Los Angeles
- UC Merced
- UC Riverside

- UC Santa Barbara
- UC Santa Cruz
- UC San Diego

You'll next select your major. **If you're applying to multiple UC schools, you'll need to do this separately for each school since they all have slightly different majors.** Some schools will also require additional steps in this section. For example, if you're applying to UC San Diego, you'll need to rank the six colleges they have so the admissions committee can place you in the one that's the best fit for you.

Academic History

This is a lengthy section where you'll need to enter in information about the high school(s) you attended, all the classes you took in high school, if they were honors or AP, and the grade you got. **It's basically like entering all the information on your transcript.** (You don't need to submit your official transcript until the summer, after you've been accepted and have decided to attend a UC school.)

Test Scores

Here is where you'll enter information about the standardized test(s) you've taken. NOTE: Even though you're self-reporting your scores in your application, **you still need to submit official exam scores to each UC school you're applying to or your application won't be considered complete.**

UC schools accept both ACT and SAT scores, but for both exams **you also need to take the optional essay section.** Taking either of these exams without the essay won't meet this requirement. You'll enter in your scores for each section of the exam. If you haven't taken a standardized test yet or plan to retake it in December, you'll also indicate that in this section.

Here you'll also report your SAT Subject Test, AP, and IB scores, if you took any of those tests and want UC schools to see your scores. If you're an international student, you can also report your TOEFL or IELTS scores as well as the scores of any international exams you took.

Activities & Awards

In this section you'll discuss all the activities you participated in outside of the classroom. There are six categories:

- Coursework other than A-G (UC's name for core curriculum courses)
- Educational preparation programs
- Awards and honors
- Extracurricular activities
- Volunteer and community service
- Work experience

The application explains which activities fall into which category, and there's no need to feel like you need to have activities to put in all the categories, or even most of them. For each category, you can add up to five separate classes/activities/jobs/awards/etc.

Scholarships & Programs

In this section you'll select your eligibility for different scholarship categories, such as ethnicity, career plans, and work experience. There are ten categories, each with multiple characteristics you can select. You'll only select these characteristics once, regardless of how many UC schools you're applying to. This is also the section where you can apply for the Educational Opportunity Program, which is explained in the application.

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Personal Insight

This is the section where you'll answer the personal statement questions. **There are eight personal statement questions, and you'll need to answer four of them. Each response needs to be 350 words or less.** We recommend that you write your essays in a word document first to make it easier to review them, then paste each essay into the application once you're done editing it.

Below are the eight essay prompts.

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

2. Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.

7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?

If you want tips on writing your personal statements, we have a guide on how to write a perfect UC essay for every prompt.



Step 3: Pay Admission Fees and Submit Your Application

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Once you've finished each section your application, you can submit it, as long as it's between November 1-30. When you submit your application, first you'll enter in some final demographic information as well as your state of legal residence. Then you'll review all the information you entered to make sure it's correct.

Once everything is set, you'll pay the necessary fees. The application fee is $70 ($80 if you're an international student) for each UC school you apply to. Then you'll click submit, and your application will officially be sent to the UC schools you're applying to!

Step 4: Submit Your Standardized Test Scores

You'll self submit your test scores when you fill out your University of California application, but you also need to send official score reports to each of the UC schools you're applying to. **You'll need to take either the ACT with Writing or the SAT with Essay.** You aren't required to take AP exams or SAT Subject Tests, but you can submit those scores as well if you did take those tests.

As we mentioned above, it's possible to take the ACT or SAT as late as December of the year you're applying, but we recommend taking the tests earlier since you'll be busy applying to colleges at that time and, if you're unhappy with your December exam score, there will be no opportunities to make it up.

We have guides specifically on sending ACT scores and SAT scores to colleges if you need more information.

Step 5: (Optional) Complete Additional Materials

Most students applying to UC schools won't need to submit additional materials, but some will. This will depend on both which schools you're applying to and what you plan on majoring in.

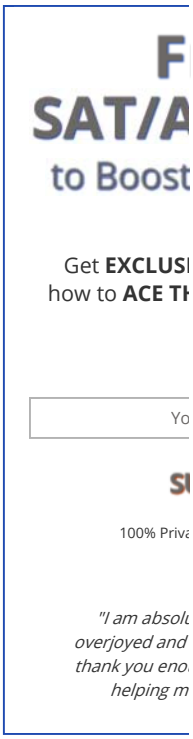
For example, some students planning to major in a fine arts discipline are requested to submit a portfolio. UC San Diego also recommends that biological science, engineering, and physical science majors take two math/science SAT Subject Tests. These additional materials are typically only recommended, not required, but doing these extra steps can help give your application a boost.

If you do need to complete additional materials, you will either get a notification in the application or receive an email outlining what you need to do, but it's also a good idea to research your intended major at each UC school you're applying to in order to make sure you're not missing any important recommendations.

University of California Application Checklist

To recap, below is everything you need to submit when you apply to a UC school. **Your application won't be considered until the schools receive all the pieces below.**

- UC Application
- Application Fee of $70 for each school you apply to
- SAT/ACT scores (must include Writing/Essay section)
- (Optional) Supplemental Materials





5 Things UC Schools Look at in Applications and How to Impress Them

The UC schools are pretty open about what they look for in applicants and what an applicant needs to have to be accepted. They've listed 14 qualities they look for in every application, and **we've organized those qualities into five categories.** Below, we explain what you need to do to excel in each category to create a standout UC application.

#1: Classes You Took

When UC admissions officers look at the classes you took, **they're looking at two things: the actual courses you took and how difficult they were.**

For the first category, UC schools want to make sure you've taken the classes you need to succeed as a college student at one of their schools. **Their minimum requirements are:**

- History: 2 years
- English: 4 years
- Mathematics: 3 years
- Laboratory science: 2 years
- Language other than English: 2 years
- Visual and performing arts: 1 year
- College-preparatory elective: 1 year

(These courses are sometimes referred to as the "A-G subjects").

Note that this is the *minimum* UC schools require; most applicants will have gone well beyond these requirements. Some majors, especially those in math or science fields, require additional classes, so make sure to research the major you plan to take to make sure you're on track.

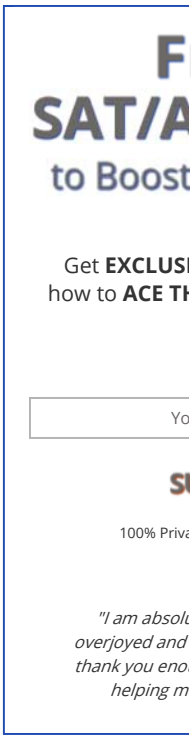
In general, it's best to take more classes in the fields you plan on majoring in. For example, if you want to major in biology, you should take four years of science and four years of math. If you want to be a history major, you should take four years of history. Doing this shows UC schools that you're committed to the subject and can handle higher-level classes on it.

UC also looks at the difficulty of the classes you took. **They're specifically looking for honors, AP, or IB courses** since these are more difficult than regular-level classes. If your school offers these classes, you should take as many as you can without overloading yourself and still maintaining a high GPA. Taking difficult classes shows UC schools that

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you're focused on your studies and can handle the challenge and workload of college classes.

Also, UC specifically mentions the "quality of your senior-year program" as one of the qualifications it looks at, so don't be tempted to slack off senior year with a bunch of easy classes!



#2: Grades

It's not enough just to take the classes UC schools want; you also need to do well in them. Your grades and overall GPA are another critical component of your UC application. **For all UC schools, you need to have at least a 3.0 GPA in your A-G classes if you're a California resident, or a 3.4 GPA if you're a non-resident.** Additionally, you can't have gotten below a "C" in any of those classes.

There is no requirement for classes outside the A-G subjects, but you should still aim to do well in all your classes. UC states that "the strength of your high school record is the most important component in our review" so you want your transcript to be as strong as it can be with a high GPA and record of challenging classes.

Below is a table showing the middle 50% of weighted GPAs of accepted students for each of the UC schools in 2018:

School	Middle 50% Weighted GPA
UC Berkeley	3.92 - 4.45
UC Davis	4.00 - 4.26
UC Irvine	3.97 - 4.25
UCLA	4.31 - 4.66
UC Merced	3.46 - 3.96
UC Riverside	3.66 - 4.09
UC Santa Barbara	4.00 - 4.26
UC Santa Cruz	3.76 - 4.16
UC San Diego	4.02 - 4.28

To give yourself the best chance of getting in, **you'll want to aim for the higher end of the GPA range for whichever school(s) you're applying to.** For example, if you're applying to UC Davis, your goal should be to have a weighted GPA of 4.25. You can definitely still get in with a lower GPA (since that's the 75% marker, ¾ of students are getting in with a GPA lower than that), but if you reach that goal you'll have a great shot at being accepted.

#3: Standardized Test Scores

There is no minimum SAT or ACT score you need to get into UC schools, but again, you'll want to aim high to give yourself the best chance of getting accepted. **Below is the middle 50% range for both the SAT and ACT.** Again, you'll want to aim for the higher end of the range to maximize your chances of getting in.

School	Middle 50% SAT Score	Middle 50% ACT Score
UC Berkeley	1340-1530	29-35
UC Davis	1260-1480	28-34
UC Irvine	1195-1435	27-33
UCLA	1370-1540	31-35
UC Merced	1020-1280	19-27
UC Riverside	1130-1380	22-30
UC Santa Barbara	1270-1500	28-34
UC Santa Cruz	1210-1450	26-32
UC San Diego	1300-1520	28-34

#4: Extracurriculars

Your extracurriculars are another important part of your UC application. **The key to strong extracurriculars is to emphasize your passion and leadership skills.** You can do this by pursuing extracurriculars in a field related to your future major, sticking with them, and achieving leadership roles in them.

Some things UC states that are looking for in extracurriculars include:

- Special talents, awards, or achievements
- Leadership experience
- Significant experiences or achievements that demonstrate the student's promise for contributing to the intellectual vitality of a campus.

They list the following examples of "strong" extracurriculars:

- Special talent in visual and performing arts, communication or sports
- Intensive study and exploration of other cultures
- Significant community service
- Significant participation in student government

Don't feel like you need to have all or even any of these experiences; they're just given so you can get an idea of what UC schools are looking for. **Basically, any extracurricular that you're passionate about, skilled in, and have shown some leadership potential for** is a great extracurricular to include on your UC application.

#5: Personal Statements

Your UC essays should show three main things:

- Who you are
- Why you want to attend a UC school
- What's important to you

Maybe you're a lifelong nature lover who wants to attend UC San Diego to take advantage of all the different ecosystems nearby that biology students can study. Perhaps you've always been obsessed with space and want to attend UC Berkeley and major in aeronautical engineering.

Whatever your story is, this is the place for UC to hear it, and it's the best place in your application to show them who you really are as a person. For a more in-depth look, read our guide on how to write outstanding UC essays.



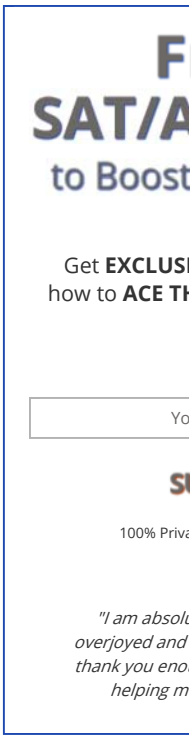
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Automatic Admission for California Residents

If you're a California resident, who meets at least one of the following two requirements, you will have a guaranteed spot at a UC school.

- You rank in the top 9% of California high school students, according to the UC admissions index.
- You rank in the top 9% of your graduating class at a participating high school. This is known as "Eligible in the Local Context" (ELC).

Be aware that this doesn't mean you'll get into every UC school; it just means you'll get into at least one, as long as space is available (which there typically is). If you're a California resident who has met the above requirements and aren't admitted to any of the UC schools you applied to, you'll be offered a spot at another campus as long as space is available.



Summary: UC Schools Application

If you're applying to a UC school, you want to make sure you know every application step you need to complete. **The most important UC application deadline to be aware of is November 30th. This is the last day you can submit your application.**

In addition to completing the application, you also need to submit your standardized test scores, transcript, and any additional materials your specific school and major require. You only need to submit one application regardless of how many UC schools you're applying to, but you'll need to pay a $70 application fee for every school.

Regardless of whether you're working on a UC Davis application, UC San Diego application, UC Berkeley application, etc. **all UC schools look for similar qualities in students.** You'll need to complete the A-G courses, take difficult classes, have good grades, participate in extracurriculars, do well on the ACT or SAT, and have strong personal statements.

Work to make your application as strong as you can across each of these areas to give yourself the best shot of getting into your dream UC school.

What's Next?

Want to learn more about the University of California schools? We have an in-depth guide to the UC schools to make it easy for you to compare the schools and see which is best for you.

Working on your UC essays? Check out our guide on how to answer every UC essay prompt to get great writing ideas.

Want to know how to make your extracurriculars stand out even more? Check out this guide to four amazing extracurricular activities and learn why they're so impressive to colleges.