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Empowering Youth Through Education

Sample Personal Statement Questions

Generally, there are three types of questions: The "you," the "why us," and the "creative." Here are tips and actual sample questions for each type. Be aware that many colleges adjust their questions annually.

The “You” Question – Many colleges ask for an essay that boils down to "Tell us about yourself." The school just wants to know you better and see how you'll introduce yourself.

- **Example:** UC Prompt 1: Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.
- **Your approach:** This direct question offers a chance to reveal your personality, insight, and commitment, and something about your background influences, helping them to understand you in a personal way. The danger is that it's open-ended, so you need to focus. Find a few things that will reveal your unique qualities, and avoid the urge to tell everything about you.

The “Why Us” Question – Some schools ask for an essay about your choice of a school or career. They're looking for information about your goals, and about how serious your commitment is to this particular school

- **Example:** Occidental College: There are thousands of colleges and universities in the United States. Why is Occidental College on your list? What distinguishes it from the other schools that you are considering?
- **Your approach:** The focus is provided: Why you chose this school or path. This should be pretty clear to you, since you probably went through some kind of selection process. Make sure you know your subject well. For example, if you say you want to attend Smith College to major in dance, the school will be able to tell how carefully you've chosen (Smith doesn't have a dance major).

The “Creative” Question – Some colleges will ask you an “out of the box” question to get to know you. It's important to determine why a college would ask you this question in order to guide you in the writing process.

- **Example:** Stanford University: Write a letter to your future college roommate.
- **Your approach:** Again, you have something to react to, a way to show yourself and write about your real views. Just don't forget the importance of writing an informed essay. Also, when thinking about how creative to get, use common sense.