A summary of personal statement guidelines

Rule #1. “Give them what they want.” Address the prompts & answer the questions. Rule #2. “Give them what you want.” Let them know you. Be honest. Address each prompt in a manner that uniquely allows the reader to know you; each response is an opportunity to reveal you.

The goal is to reveal yourself and show that you are a bright, accomplished, and interesting person who will add to the vitality of the campus. What do you have to offer?

 Each word is precious and must be used to the fullest extent to help reveal you; don’t waste any; no fluff; get to your response immediately-no lead in.

The description of your world must be concise—say a lot in a few words--and must be tied to you; make your world personal and concrete-not abstract.

The most important parts of your statement are how your world has affected you and of primary importance, what you have done in response to your world with its opportunities and challenges; thus focus the vast bulk of your response on these two matters with the “what you have done” getting the most attention. Readers learn about you from what you have done and not from what you say---show and don’t tell. Let the reader infer. Talk is cheap. The reader seeks evidence.

Don’t make statements of fact or be vague. You are the subject; the goal is to learn about you from your experiences, achievements, failures, and accomplishments.

 Freshmen applying to L&S and CNR\* at Berkeley enter un-declared. Stating a major is of no importance. All transfers, along with freshmen in Engineering, College of Chemistry, etc. must state a major and their interests and preparation are crucial parts of their personal statements. Do not describe the major as the readers know what it is. (Consult application materials and instructions of schools of interest)

Comments about your future plans are of little value as many students change their majors and goals as do people in general. Again, what have you done?

Make your ending a conclusion and not a summary. Make it concise.

\*College of Letters and Science and College of Natural Resources

These guidelines apply to both UC prompts and to personal statements in general. They are my personal opinion and should be viewed as such. Always follow schools’ instructions. For copies of my more detailed handouts on personal statements contact me at pvanhcal@att.net Peter S. Van Houten, EdD. 2-14