

# The UC\* Game

## \*Uncommon Connections

What it's good for: Brainstorming a great response to a UC prompt or, really, any extracurricular essay prompt  
(Adapted from an exercise in the book *College Essay Essentials* © 2016)

The game is called “What do you see?” The aim is to make connections that other players don't see and the goal is to help each other brainstorm topics and connections that stand out. Play as a class, in pairs, or by yourself. Here's how it works:

### ROUND 1 (NO POINTS): PREPARING

**Player 1 (youngest player) names an extracurricular activity aloud**—ideally something that Player 1 is considering using as a writing topic. It could be something typical, such as piano, volleyball, a mission trip, or something more unusual, such as attending a weeklong silent meditation retreat, programming an app, or studying a constructed language. Once Player 1 has chosen a topic, s/he asks all players, “What cliché connections do you see?”

This begins Round 2.

### ROUND 2 (STILL NO POINTS): MAKING CLICHE CONNECTIONS

**All players brainstorm common (or cliché) connections aloud** using the Values List on the next page.

In other words, all players name aloud a few connections that would be cliché for this topic. Stuff people might say:

- “A cliché connection for [football] would be [teamwork, responsibility, hard work, etc.]”
- “A cliché connection for a [mission trip] would be [helping others, hard work, passion, etc.]”

After a minute or two, Player 1 then raises his/her right hand and says aloud:

“I vow not to use these cheesy values in my essay.”

In response, all remaining Players raise their right hand simultaneously and say in unison:

“We'll hold you to it!”

(This takes practice the first time, but by the second time you'll be golden.) Player 1 then says:

“All right, what uncommon connections do you see?”

This begins Round 3.

### ROUND 3 (YES POINTS): MAKING UNCOMMON CONNECTIONS

**Brainstorm uncommon connections** using the same Values List. In other words, all players imagine connections other students are unlikely to make when writing on this topic and say them aloud. Examples:

- “An uncommon connection to [football] might be [privacy, resourcefulness, healthy boundaries, etc.]”
- “An uncommon connection to [a mission trip] might be [serenity, accountability, practicality, etc.]”

**Each time you can a) stump the other player(s) AND b) make a legit connection, you score a point.**

And, obviously, if you're playing by yourself, you'll have to stump an imaginary friend. Have fun with that.

**Take turns.** Once you've brainstormed uncommon values for one player, rotate clockwise so each player goes. Whoever scores the most points wins.

**Play until bored.** Or until topics are fully brainstormed.



# Values List

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> community            | <input type="checkbox"/> growth             | <input type="checkbox"/> fast-paced work       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inspiration          | <input type="checkbox"/> expertise          | <input type="checkbox"/> nutrition             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> money                | <input type="checkbox"/> order              | <input type="checkbox"/> competence            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> intellectual         | <input type="checkbox"/> privacy            | <input type="checkbox"/> practicality          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> status               | <input type="checkbox"/> self expression    | <input type="checkbox"/> creativity            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> financial gain       | <input type="checkbox"/> stability          | <input type="checkbox"/> excitement            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> laughter             | <input type="checkbox"/> art                | <input type="checkbox"/> collaboration         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> serenity             | <input type="checkbox"/> autonomy           | <input type="checkbox"/> social change         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical challenge   | <input type="checkbox"/> risk               | <input type="checkbox"/> beauty                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> responsibility       | <input type="checkbox"/> balance            | <input type="checkbox"/> ecological awareness  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> competition          | <input type="checkbox"/> self-discipline    | <input type="checkbox"/> quality relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> career               | <input type="checkbox"/> courage            | <input type="checkbox"/> travel                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fame                 | <input type="checkbox"/> family             | <input type="checkbox"/> decisiveness          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> working with others  | <input type="checkbox"/> empathy            | <input type="checkbox"/> curiosity             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> freedom              | <input type="checkbox"/> working alone      | <input type="checkbox"/> spirituality          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> security             | <input type="checkbox"/> humility           | <input type="checkbox"/> loyalty               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> strength             | <input type="checkbox"/> efficiency         | <input type="checkbox"/> honesty               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> self-control         | <input type="checkbox"/> intensity          | <input type="checkbox"/> independence          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hunger               | <input type="checkbox"/> health and fitness | <input type="checkbox"/> supervising others    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> personal development | <input type="checkbox"/> meaningful work    | <input type="checkbox"/> recognition           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> trust                | <input type="checkbox"/> my country         | <input type="checkbox"/> accountability        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> faith                | <input type="checkbox"/> music              | <input type="checkbox"/> democracy             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> involvement          | <input type="checkbox"/> truth              | <input type="checkbox"/> close relationships   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> adventure            | <input type="checkbox"/> resourcefulness    | <input type="checkbox"/> religion              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> vulnerability        | <input type="checkbox"/> challenges         | <input type="checkbox"/> respect               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> adaptability         | <input type="checkbox"/> commitment         | <input type="checkbox"/> bravery               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> friendship           | <input type="checkbox"/> leadership         | <input type="checkbox"/> communication         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellence           | <input type="checkbox"/> helping others     | <input type="checkbox"/> change and variety    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> job tranquility      | <input type="checkbox"/> influence          | <input type="checkbox"/> compassion            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> power                | <input type="checkbox"/> wit                | <input type="checkbox"/> nature                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> passion              | <input type="checkbox"/> success            | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cooperation          | <input type="checkbox"/> patience           | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> affection            | <input type="checkbox"/> listening          | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> wisdom               | <input type="checkbox"/> diversity          |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> knowledge            | <input type="checkbox"/> love               |  |



# THE "FEELINGS AND NEEDS" EXERCISE

Adapted from an exercise created by Nonviolent Communication Expert LaShelle Lowe-Chardé (<http://www.wiseheartpdx.org>).

When I saw/heard/experienced... \_\_\_\_\_  
(What event, positive or negative, did you experience?)

I felt... \_\_\_\_\_  
(Choose 2-3 emotions from the list below)

Because I needed... \_\_\_\_\_  
(Choose 2-3 needs from the list below)

## FEELINGS

### Delighted

Joyful  
Happy  
Amused  
Adventurous  
Blissful  
Elated

### Thankful

Appreciative  
Moved  
Touched  
Tender  
Expansive  
Grateful

### Excited

Enthusiastic  
Overjoyed  
Fervent  
Giddy  
Eager  
Ecstatic  
Thrilled

### Satisfied

Fulfilled  
Gratified

### Interested

Curious  
Absorbed

### Healthy

Empowered  
Alive  
Robust

### Relaxed

Relieved  
Rested  
Mellow  
At ease  
Light

### Content

Cheerful  
Glad  
Comfortable  
Pleased

### Friendly

Affectionate  
Loving  
Passionate

### Energetic

Exhilarated  
Exuberant  
Vigorous

### Alert

Focused  
Awake  
Clearheaded

### Peaceful

Tranquil  
Serene  
Calm

### Confident

Secure  
Safe  
Hopeful

### Scared

Apprehensive  
Dread  
Worried  
Panicky  
Frightened  
Vulnerable

### Nervous

Jittery  
Anxious  
Restless  
Vulnerable

### Tense

Cranky  
Stiff  
Stressed  
Overwhelmed  
Agitated  
Aggravated

### Hurt

Pain  
Agony  
Anguish  
Heartbroken  
Lonely

### \*Depressed

Disconnected  
Detached  
Despondent  
Dejected  
Bored

### Tired

Burnt Out  
Exhausted  
Lethargic

### \*Angry

\*Furious  
\*Rage  
\*Irate  
\*Resentful  
Irritated

### Frustrated

Disappointed  
Discouraged  
Disheartened  
Impatient

### Shocked

Disturbed  
Stunned  
Alarmed  
Appalled  
Concerned  
Horrified

### Sad

Grief  
Despair  
Gloomy  
Sullen  
Downhearted  
Hopeless

### Torn

Ambivalent  
Confused  
Puzzled

### Jealous

Envious  
\*Bitter

### Embarrassed

\*Ashamed  
Contrite  
\*Guilty

## NEEDS

### Intimacy

Empathy  
Connection  
Affection  
Warmth  
Love  
Understanding  
Acceptance  
Caring  
Bonding  
Compassion  
Communion  
Divine Union  
Sexuality

### Autonomy

Choice  
Freedom  
Spontaneity  
Independence  
Respect  
Honor

### Security

Predictability  
Consistency  
Stability  
Trust  
Reassurance

### Partnership

Mutuality  
Friendship  
Companionship  
Support  
Collaboration  
Belonging  
Community  
Consideration  
Seen/heard  
Appreciation

### Purpose

Competence  
Contribution  
Efficiency  
Growth  
Learning  
Challenge  
Discovery

### Order

Structure  
Clarity  
Focus  
Information

### Celebration

Mourning  
Aliveness  
Humor  
Beauty  
Play  
Creativity  
Joy

### Honesty

Integrity  
Authenticity  
Wholeness  
Fairness

### Peace

Groundedness  
Hope



# THE "FEELINGS AND NEEDS" WORKSHEET

(Turn this page horizontal... so, like, sideways.)



# UC PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS

For UC (public) schools. Choose four prompts. 350 words each, strict limit.

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. Describe your favorite academic subject and explain how it has influenced you.
7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?
8. What is the one thing that you think sets you apart from other candidates applying to the Univ. of California?

# COMMON APP PROMPTS

For private schools. Choose one prompt. 650 words, strict limit

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.



# The “How Do I Lead?” Exercise

**How it works:** Name four ways you’re a leader in your school, home or community:

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Some possibilities to consider:

1. **You hold or held a role with an impressive title** (Example: You were President or VP of something).
2. **You started something** (a club, non-profit, etc.). Bonus points if you started/founded something in response to a need you saw--either locally or abroad (see “Prayer Till” Example Essay below).

But there are many other ways to lead! Less obvious examples include:

3. **You were the key decision-maker on a particular project.** You don’t have to be President to lead!
  - a. Ask yourself: What projects have I been involved in that would have had turned out very different without me?
  - b. Maybe, for example: You were the layouts editor for your yearbook. Sure, you weren’t the Editor in Chief, but you did decide what went where and it took a ton of work.
  - c. Or maybe: You helped draft the school's student constitution
4. **You held more responsibility than others on a particular task.**
  - a. Were you in charge of the volunteers for Cesar Chavez Day?
  - b. Are you responsible for counting the money at your job?
5. **[What other leadership qualifications can you think of?] Write your answer here:**



# The “Four Ways I’ve Been Challenged in My Life” Exercise

**How it works:** Name four ways you’ve been challenged and an impact you experienced as a result of each. Example: Both my parents worked full-time, which meant I had to watch my little sister (challenge), making it difficult for me to participate in extracurricular activities (impact).

Challenge	Impact
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Here are some challenges you might consider writing about:

- Single-parent household
- Significant work hours while in high school, particularly if you contributed to family income to help pay bills
- Low income family or large family with many dependents
- You’re the first person in your family to attend college
- Parents’ disability or unemployment (specify what and how long)
- Any physical or learning disabilities (diagnosed by a health professional; specify what and how long)
- Language spoken at home other than English, or any portion of your high school career that was taken outside of the U.S.
- Unable to take specific classes at your school (APs, Honors)
- Health issues you’ve faced that have impacted your academic performance or ability to participate in extracurricular activities (diagnosed by a health professional; specify what and how long)
- Travel challenges (you lived too far away from school to participate in extracurriculars, your parents couldn’t transport you, or didn’t have transportation)

Tip: You may not want to devote an entire essay to a single challenge—try mentioning your challenge(s) in the context of a larger story (see the “Prayer Till” example essay below).



# The “Four Ways I’m a Genius” Exercise

- From Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences. Descriptions from Carla Lane’s “The Distance Learning Technology Resource Guide.”

**STEP ONE:** Rank the following seven intelligences from #1 (your best) to #7 (your worst):

**Visual-Spatial** - think in terms of physical space, as do architects and sailors. Very aware of their environments. They like to draw, do jigsaw puzzles, read maps, daydream. They can be taught through drawings, verbal and physical imagery. Tools include models, graphics, charts, photographs, drawings, 3-D modeling, video, videoconferencing, television, multimedia, texts with pictures/charts/graphs.

**Bodily-Kinesthetic** - use the body effectively, like a dancer or a surgeon. Keen sense of body awareness. They like movement, making things, touching. They communicate well through body language and being taught through physical activity, hands-on learning, acting out, etc. Tools include equipment and real objects.

**Musical** - show sensitivity to rhythm and sound. They love music, but they are also sensitive to sounds in their environments. They may study better with music in the background. They can be taught by turning lessons into lyrics, speaking rhythmically, tapping out time. Tools include musical instruments, music, radio, multimedia.

**Interpersonal** - understanding, interacting with others. These students learn through interaction. They have many friends, empathy for others, street smarts. They can be taught through group activities, seminars, dialogues. Tools include the telephone, audio conferencing, time and attention from the instructor, video conferencing, writing, computer conferencing, E-mail.

**Intrapersonal** - understanding one's own interests, goals. These learners tend to shy away from others. They're in tune with their inner feelings; they have wisdom, intuition and motivation, as well as a strong will, confidence and opinions. They can be taught through independent study and introspection. Tools include books, creative materials, diaries, privacy and time. They are the most independent of the learners.

**Linguistic** - using words effectively. These learners have highly developed auditory skills and often think in words. They like reading, playing word games, making up poetry or stories. Tools include computers, games, multimedia, books, tape recorders, and lecture.

**Logical-Mathematical** - reasoning, calculating. Think conceptually, abstractly and are able to see and explore patterns and relationships. They like to experiment, solve puzzles, ask cosmic questions. They can be taught through logic games, investigations, mysteries. They need to learn and form concepts before they can deal with details.

**STEP TWO:** Name a place in life where you express your top four intelligences. And bonus points if you connect it to a “leadership” example above! (Example: “Interpersonal intelligence = leading our club meetings” or “Logical-Mathematical intelligence = handling money at work.”)

1. 3.

2. 4.





# SANTUR

Written using the **Montage Structure** for the **UC Application**  
and could have worked for Prompts 2, 3, 7, 8 and even 1.

Do re fa mi, re do fa mi, re do sol fa mi re mi re. Have I completely lost it? Should I be locked up in a mental hospital chained to a chair? No. Then what are these utterances coming from my mouth? Music.

I have devoted thousands of hours of my life to playing the santur, a classical Persian instrument that originated in the Middle East. Some people think I'm strange: a Persian redheaded Jewish teenager obsessed with an ancient musical instrument. But they don't see what I see. My santur is King David's lyre: it can soothe, enrapture, mesmerize.

The santur also allows me to connect to my culture and Persian heritage, and to visit Iran of the past, a culture rich in artistic tradition. Sometimes I imagine performing for the king in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the santur sounds echoing through the Seven Hills of Jerusalem.

Today, some Americans view Iran as a land of terrorists, but when I play the innocent of Iran, the educated, the artists, the innovators, come to life. Iran is not a country of savages; it's Kubla Khan's fountain, an abundant source of knowledge and creativity.

Finally, the santur represents one of my remaining links to my grandfather. In the last few years of his life, Baba Joon did not know me as his grandson. Alzheimer's slowly took over his brain, and eventually he could not recognize me. Baba Joon grew up with the music of the santur and my father plays it in his car every day, so when I play, the music connects all three generations.

In December I'll be releasing my first album, a collection of classical Persian pieces. Proceeds from the album will go toward Alzheimer's research, as I hope to play some small part in finding a cure for the disease. My teacher is one of only a handful of santur teachers from Iran, and I sometimes wonder if the santur will soon become extinct, like the seven thousand endangered languages which may soon be gone.

Not if I have anything to say about it.

Length: 350 words



## SANTUR (ALTERNATE VERSION)

The UC directors have emphasized that responses to the 2016-2017 prompts need not be beautiful or creative, and a straightforward version (even using bullet points) will work just as well for the UC application. Below is a second version of the Santur essay (given above) that is written in a more straightforward way.

- I've devoted thousands of hours of my life to playing the santur, a classical Persian instrument that originated in the Middle East.
- The santur also allows me to connect to my culture and Persian heritage.
- Today, some Americans view Iran as a land of terrorists, but when I play I believe I help change their perspective.
- The santur also represents one of my remaining links to my grandfather, who grew up with the music of the santur. My father plays santur music in his car every day, so when I play, the music connects all three generations.
- In December I'll be releasing my first album, a collection of classical Persian pieces. Proceeds from the album will go toward Alzheimer's research.
- I sometimes wonder if the santur will soon become extinct. I hope not.

Length: 133 words



## BREAKING UP WITH MOM (TYPE C)

Written using the **Narrative Structure** for the **Common App**  
by a student who **had not** faced significant challenges but **did know** what she wanted to study

I stare into my cappuccino to try to avoid looking at my teary eyed mom, who had just found a hole in her favorite bright pink floral print scarf.

"I'm your mother, Katyush," she says in her heavy Russian accent.

A tiny bird of a woman with clipped wings.

I remember white walls, bottles upon bottles of acrylic paint, and a mortgage on a two-bedroom apartment in Lomita, California: my mother's dream. Together, we unpacked the painting box and started a mural on my new bedroom wall. "Let it Be", my new wall read, with an array of squares and swirls in every shade of blue imaginable. We proudly took a step back, then unpacked the Jasmine Fancy tea leaves and floral teapot.

Her trembling hands reach for her coffee.

"You're supposed to take care of me. That's what family does. I don't have anyone else."

Her mom in Moscow, her ex-husband remarried, and her oldest son avoiding her at all costs. Unemployed and unwilling.

"I'll get my pills eventually, but family has responsibilities."

Her depression plummeting, her sanity dwindling, her only lifeline dying for freedom from her confines.

I flash back to the terror in her eyes as she noticed a chip on the teapot's spout- a spark of fear that transformed into a thunderstorm. How she crumpled in the old kitchen chair across from me. From that moment on, life became a broken record. I walked her to bed, kissed her goodnight, reminded her that I had school the next day. Asleep by 3 am. Late to class. Come home stressed. Start homework. Take care of mom. Finish homework. 3 am.

My mother was in a state of stagnation, and she had a hold on me like quicksand.

Though living with my dad and stepmom was its own ticking timebomb, for the most part I was left alone long enough to do schoolwork and get to class on time- but every moment away from my mom felt like I was tying a noose around her neck. Nothing I did could bring her the peace she wanted from me.

When I was fifteen years old I broke up with my mother. We could still be friends, I told her, but I needed my space, and she couldn't give me that.

For the first time in my life, I had taken action. I was never again going to passively let life happen to me.

During four long months of separation, I filled the space that my mom previously dominated with learning: everything and anything. I began teaching myself rudimentary French through an online program, learned basic HTML coding and website design, and began editing my drawings on Photoshop so that I could sell them online. When my dad lost his job, I learned to sew my own clothing, and applied my new knowledge to costume design within the Drama department.

On stage, I learned to stand up and say things that mattered. Backstage, I worked with teams of dedicated students who wanted each other to succeed. In our improv group, I gained the confidence to act on my instincts. In the classroom, my Drama teacher emulated the person I wanted to be. She gave me hugs on days that wouldn't end, insisted that taking care of myself was not the same thing as being selfish, and most importantly, taught me how to ask for help.

A year later, it all culminated in One Bad Apple--a full length musical that I produced with my best friend. Managing the budget, scheduling rehearsals, and working with a cast and crew of students was easily the most difficult thing I have ever done- but it was my choice. The challenge, and the reward, belonged to me.

On my sixteenth birthday, I picked up the phone and dialed my mom. I waited through three agonizingly long pauses between rings.

"Katyush?"

"Hi mom, it's me."

Length: 649 words

\*Excerpted from College Essay Essentials: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing a Successful College Admissions Essay



## BREAKING UP WITH MOM (UC VERSION)

Written using **Narrative Structure** and adapted for the **UC Application** and would have worked for UC 2016 Prompts 5, 8, and perhaps others.

When I was fifteen years old I broke up with my mother. We could still be friends, I told her, but I needed my space, and she couldn't give me that.

She and I both knew that I was the only person that she had in America. Her family was in Russia, she only spoke to her estranged ex-husband in court, her oldest son avoided her at all costs. And yet, at fifteen years old, I wasn't equipped to effectively calm her down from her nightly anxiety attacks. At forty-three, she wasn't willing to believe that I did love her, but that I couldn't be responsible for stabilizing her life.

Moving in with my dad full time felt like I was abandoning her after tying a noose around her neck. But as my Drama teacher (and guardian angel) pointed out, my mother wasn't going to get better if I kept enabling her, and that I wasn't going to be able to grow if I was constrained by her dependence on me.

For the first time, I had taken action. I was never again going to passively let life happen to me.

During four long months of separation, I filled the space that my mom previously dominated with learning: everything and anything. I taught myself French through online programs, built websites, and began editing my drawings on Photoshop to sell them online. When my dad lost his third job in five years, I learned to sew my own clothes and applied my new knowledge to costume design in the Drama Department.

On stage, I learned to empathize. Backstage, I worked with teams of dedicated and mutually supportive students. In our improv group, I gained the confidence to act on my instincts. With the help of my Drama teacher, I learned to humble myself enough to ask for help.

On my sixteenth birthday, I picked up the phone and dialed my mom. I waited through three agonizingly long pauses between rings.

"Katyush?"

"Hi mom, it's me."

Length: 350 words

