

UC Personal Insight Questions: Complete Revision Guide

Which four to submit, how they work together, and what to change next

Admissions Narrative | Sample Student | Sample report

Fall 2027 first-year applicant. Reviewed: PIQ 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 (one version of each) and your Common App personal essay.

THIS IS A SAMPLE REPORT

The student, school, town, family, teachers and every essay line in this report are fictional. They were invented for this sample so you can see how much detail a real report holds.

A real report uses your child's own drafts and facts. It covers each essay at this depth: a recommendation on which four to submit, a diagnosis, a section-by-section revision plan, word math, and the questions only your child can answer.

IMPORTANT: YOUR FINAL WORDS MUST BE YOUR OWN

Every sentence you submit must be your own. These suggestions are a way to rethink and strengthen your drafts, not language to copy. Never use a detail that did not actually happen.

UC says feedback is fine and the answers must be your own words and ideas. Anywhere this report shows sample wording, it is labeled "Model, not a copy" and uses blanks for your true facts.

YOU CAN WORK THROUGH THIS REPORT ON YOUR OWN

It is a self-guided plan, not homework that needs another meeting. Read Section 1, then jump to Section 10 for your order of attack.

1. Your Four-PIQ Recommendation

Submit PIQs 1, 4, 5 and 8. Hold PIQ 6 in reserve.

You have strong raw material in all five drafts. Each one gets better with a focused round of revision. PIQ 1 has the most room to grow: it is 54 words over the 350-word limit, it opens on a general statement, and its best moment (the Saturday you were sick) sits at word 179.

Candidate (words)	Standalone strength	Unique contribution	Overlap risk	Decision	Reason in one sentence
PIQ 1: Creek Crew leadership (404)	Clear arc: a club that failed without you, then did not	Leadership as a system you built; the only draft where others depend on your decisions	Creek test kits appear again in PIQ 6; "outlasts you" moral	KEEP IF REVISED	It shows you building something that runs without you. One verified town result will make it land.
PIQ 4: Teaching yourself calculus (322)	Clear barrier, clear action, honest voice	How you act when your school lacks a resource; the adult you sought out	Saturday hardware shifts also in PIQ 8; 6:00 a.m. routine echoes PIQ 5	KEEP IF REVISED	Barrier plus initiative answers the prompt directly. One Friday session scene will complete it.
PIQ 5: Evacuation and recovery (389)	Vivid opening; a hard number (71%)	What a disruption cost you academically and how you rebuilt	"Resilience" moral; morning routine echoes PIQ 4	KEEP IF REVISED	It is the only draft with a real dip and a real recovery. Trim the night of the evacuation and expand the rebuild.
PIQ 6: Chemistry (372)	Sincere curiosity; one excellent titration scene	Subject interest in chemistry	High with PIQ 1 (same test kits, same patience-and-curiosity ending)	RESERVE	The titration scene is the best thing in the draft and it arrives at word 202. Rebuild around it and it competes.
PIQ 8: The hardware store (325)	Warm, specific, and unlike anything else in the set	Your Saturdays, your town, and the repair cards	Store job also in PIQ 4; environmental science goal repeats PIQ 6	KEEP IF REVISED	It is the only place a UC reader meets your town and your daily work. The repair cards deserve more room.

Set A (recommended)

PIQ 1 Creek Crew (leadership) + PIQ 4 teaching yourself calculus (educational barrier) + PIQ 5 the evacuation semester (challenge, with academic effect) + PIQ 8 the hardware store (beyond what you have shared).

Why Set A wins. Each response gives a reader a different fact about you: what you build so it keeps going without you (1), what you do when your school cannot give you something you need (4), how you rebuild when life knocks your grades down (5), and who you are at the counter of a store in a town of 1,900 (8). Remove any one and a whole side of you disappears. PIQ 6 is a good essay. It waits in reserve because PIQ 1 already puts you at the creek with a test kit, and PIQ 4 and PIQ 5 already carry the curiosity and discipline that PIQ 6 would repeat.

Alternative Set B: swap PIQ 1 for PIQ 6

Choose B only if both are true: (1) you cannot document any result for the Creek Crew beyond its size, so PIQ 1 stays a claim, and (2) you can name at least three specific things you did in chemistry beyond the one titration lab, such as a question you chased, a conversation with a chemist, or a comparison you ran on your

own. In that case the creek work can appear once, in PIQ 6, and the leadership story moves to Activities & Awards.

Possible Set C: the repair cards as their own response

The repair cards in PIQ 8 are the most original thing you do. If you have sustained evidence for them (how you decided what goes on a card, how you draw them, how many you have made and who uses them), a new PIQ 2 on the cards could replace PIQ 8, and the store itself would move to Activities & Awards. If you go that way, do not use the cards in two places. I have not seen that material, so Set C is a question for you to answer, not a recommendation.

Official rules versus my judgment. UC requires four of eight prompts, 350 words maximum each, and gives all eight equal consideration. No combination carries an official advantage. Choosing these four is my independent advising judgment, not a UC rule, a scoring formula or a prediction.

What I had and did not have. I had your five drafts and your Common App essay. I did not have your Activities & Awards, transcript, school course list, intended campuses or majors, or Additional Comments. Every judgment about overlap with those sections is provisional. My word counts are working estimates; the UC text box is the final authority.

2. The Biggest Thing I Noticed

What is already strong

- **You admit things plainly.** “I was exhausted and frustrated that nobody else seemed to care as much as I did.” A plain admission like this is more believable than a polished lesson.
- **You put numbers where they count.** “I got a 71% on my Chemistry test, the first C I have ever had.” A reader does not need to be told this hurt.
- **You write about things only you have.** A creek behind an elementary school, a hardware counter in a town of 1,900, a video call with a community college instructor every other Friday. None of this could belong to another applicant.
- **You name real changes in what you did.** You split the club into pairs in PIQ 1, emailed a stranger in PIQ 4, rebuilt your nightly routine in PIQ 5, and started writing repair cards in PIQ 8.

Try this: read the last paragraph of each draft out loud, back to back. You may hear what I heard.

The opportunity: you have more to show than your drafts say yet

All five drafts end the same way. The last paragraph tells the reader what the experience means: “Through this experience I learned that real leadership means building something that outlasts you.” “I am grateful for this experience because it taught me that barriers are only obstacles if you let them be.” “Looking back, this experience taught me that resilience is not about never falling, it is about getting back up.” Those closing paragraphs run 26 to 62 words each. Across the five drafts, “realize” forms appear 6 times, “learned” or “taught me” 6 times, and “proud,” “grateful” or “passionate” 6 times.

Here is the opportunity. The facts that prove these lessons are already in your drafts, and they get a sentence or two while the lessons get a full paragraph. The Saturday you were sick. The overshot titration. Professor Hale asking what you thought the next step was. The \$4 coupling. A reader who finishes these drafts knows what you concluded. With more room for the facts, a reader will conclude it for themselves, and believe it more.

The good news: this is not a polishing problem. Your sentences are clear and your voice is honest. The biggest gain comes from choosing the right four (PIQ 6 in reserve), cutting the closing lessons, and giving each remaining draft a few more of your real facts.

3. What a UC Reader Learns From These Four

PIQ	Memorable evidence	Distinct quality	Overlap with the rest of the application	Next fact to add
1	pH strips and a turbidity tube bought with your own money; the Saturday you missed in February; five test sites	You build a system that survives your absence	Creek also in PIQ 6. Creek Crew is probably in Activities & Awards (provisional).	A verified result from the town council or the county
4	The 6:00 a.m. library; a \$350 course; Friday video calls with Professor Hale; an exam taken 25 miles away	Resourcefulness when the school has a real gap	Saturday hardware shifts also in PIQ 8. Early mornings echo PIQ 5. AP Calculus may be listed elsewhere (provisional).	One problem you solved differently after her question
5	A loudspeaker truck, a quilt, eleven days in a motel, a 71%	Academic recovery after a disruption	Morning routine echoes PIQ 4. "Resilience" moral echoes PIQ 4 and PIQ 1.	The recovery steps by class, with the retake score
8	A cracked pipe fitting, a \$4 coupling, a wooden box of repair cards	Daily service in a small town	Store job also in PIQ 4. Environmental science goal repeats PIQ 6.	One card, and one number showing the cards get used

Target snapshots (a description of where each response can land, not language to copy):

- **PIQ 1:** the student who found out the club could not run without them, and rebuilt it so it could.
- **PIQ 4:** the student who found the calculus teacher the school did not have.
- **PIQ 5:** the student who rebuilt a study routine in a semester of smoke and make-up work, and got Chemistry back to an A-.
- **PIQ 8:** the student who noticed customers afraid to ask, and wrote the instructions they were missing. (This one lands once you add proof from your own experience.)

4. The Real Diagnosis: Where Your Drafts Can Grow

I ran ten audits across the set. These are the findings that will help you most.

Audit	What I noticed	What it means for you
Reader takeaway	PIQs 1, 4 and 5 each tell me you work hard and do not quit. The facts differ, but the conclusion is the same three times.	Each answer shines when it shows a different side of you through different facts.
Agency	Strong in PIQ 4 (you signed up, paid, studied, emailed a stranger) and in PIQ 1 after February. Room to grow in PIQ 5: "I went to my teachers and asked for help." Which teachers? What did each say? In PIQ 6, "I joined the Creek Crew, where I use test kits to measure pH and nitrates." reads as membership, not a task you did.	A reader can credit what you did once they can see it.
Story and image overlap	The creek and the test kits appear in PIQ 1 and PIQ 6. The hardware store pays for the course in PIQ 4 and is the setting of PIQ 8. A 6:00 a.m. library routine in PIQ 4 and an hour-earlier alarm in PIQ 5 are the same habit. Mr. Okafor is the adult who says yes in PIQ 1 and PIQ 5.	Each repeated image is room that new facts could use. Give each fact one home.

Audit	What I noticed	What it means for you
Directness	PIQ 1 reaches its first scene at about word 98 of 404. PIQ 5 reaches school at word 160 of 389. PIQ 6 reaches the titration at word 202 of 372.	My coaching rule of thumb (not a UC rule): make the subject and your role clear in the first 40 to 70 words.
Concrete evidence	"the data was collected anyway" (how many tests, how many people?). "She never gave me the answer." (what was the problem?). "I have written 22 so far" (which one gets used most?).	These are spots where adding a fact, not changing a sentence, helps most.
Architecture and habits	Every draft ends on a lesson paragraph. Three drafts open on a general statement (PIQ 1: "Leadership is not about being in charge"; PIQ 6: "Chemistry is the subject that makes the invisible visible."). The scene openers in PIQ 4 and PIQ 5 are stronger.	Open on a scene. Keep one reflection per answer, only where it explains a real change.
Credibility	"since a state survey in 2011" [verify: source]. "led the council to ask the county to inspect a culvert upstream" [verify: who asked, when, what the county found]. PIQ 4: course price, number of AP classes, score. PIQ 5: nine closure days, eleven motel days, the 71% and the A-.	Exact numbers and sources build trust. A result you imply but cannot document costs you more than a result you leave out.
Third-party privacy	PIQ 8 names a real neighbor: "a retired mail carrier named Mr. Brandt". PIQ 4 names the instructor and describes a counselor's advice.	Describe people by role instead of name. The story works the same and nobody is identifiable.
Prompt fit	PIQ 1 fits leadership. PIQ 4 fits barrier. PIQ 5 answers both halves, the challenge and its academic effect. PIQ 6 answers "how you pursued it" with a list of five activities in one paragraph. PIQ 8 needs to show something a reader would not learn elsewhere.	Check each response against its prompt, then against the other three.
Fairness and context	Your topics are all welcome. A rural school without calculus, a family store and an evacuation are all fine. UC says it weighs achievement against the opportunities available to you. Your parents' budget (PIQ 4) is your family's choice to share; UC does not require it.	The goal is to show what you actually did with what you had.

5. Before You Revise: Interview Yourself

UC's advice is to use specific, concrete examples in your own voice. You already have good ones, and this exercise helps you find more.

The five-minute voice memo

For each PIQ you are rewriting, tell the story out loud to a friend for about five minutes. Do not try to sound impressive. Record it, transcribe it, and highlight every fact, decision and plain explanation that is not in your current draft. Your spoken version often holds your best material.

Two-draft exercise: let the facts lead

On your next exploratory draft, avoid these phrases: "I learned," "I realized," "this taught me," "I am grateful for this experience," "I became passionate about." This is a brainstorming rule, not a UC rule. Your final draft may include one short reflection if it explains a real change. The aim is to build the evidence first, so any lesson you state is earned.

Universal question bank

1. What happened, in order, in plain language, to someone who was not there?

2. What problem were you trying to solve, or what goal were you pursuing?
3. What was your decision, as different from everyone else's contribution?
4. What did you do that nobody assigned or required?
5. What was your first attempt, and what changed after it failed or fell short?
6. What detail would prove this happened without a link or a recommendation letter?
7. Who was affected, and what would they say changed?
8. What can you count truthfully: time, frequency, scale, result?
9. What irritated, surprised, embarrassed or amused you?
10. What did you leave out because it seemed ordinary or "not college-essay worthy"?
11. What would a friend or sibling say is particularly you?
12. What changed in your behavior afterward, and what is still unresolved?
13. What in this answer is not already clear from your Activities & Awards?

Each PIQ plan in Section 7 adds questions written for your exact story. Start with the ones marked essential.

6. Lines Worth Protecting

Where	Your words	Why it works
PIQ 1	"I realized that I had built a club that could not function without me."	A plain admission of a real failure. This is the hinge of the whole essay.
PIQ 1	"I wrote a one-page guide with photos so a new member could run a test in ten minutes."	A real fix with a number attached. A reader sees what you made.
PIQ 4	"My high school has 700 students and four AP classes. Calculus is not one of them."	Two facts, no adjectives. The barrier is clear in 15 words.
PIQ 4	"She never gave me the answer. She asked me what I thought the next step was, and that changed how I studied."	Shows how the help worked. The next draft can show one problem it changed.
PIQ 5	"I grabbed my laptop, my chemistry notebook, and my grandmother's quilt."	A list of three real objects tells a reader what mattered in ten minutes.
PIQ 6	"I repeated the trial, this time adding the base so slowly that my lab partner joked I was watching paint dry."	A decision, a person, and a bit of humor in one sentence.
PIQ 8	"So I walked him back to the aisle, held the fitting next to a four dollar coupling, and showed him how the threads lined up."	You can see your hands doing it. This is how service looks on the page.
PIQ 8	"My uncle says the box gets emptied faster than we can refill it."	A fact about reach, from another person. The next draft can back it with a count.

The shared lesson

Every protected line names an action or an exact ordinary detail. None announces a feeling or a moral, and that is why they work. Write more sentences like these, and do not swap them for more elevated language.

7. Your Four PIQ Revision Plans

Work in this order, starting where the most is at stake. Each plan opens with the one change that will help most. Everything else is a bonus.

Order	PIQ	Level of work	Why this order
1	PIQ 1	Biggest opportunity	Largest trim, and one verified result will change how the whole essay reads
2	PIQ 5	Reshape	Trim the night of the evacuation and give the rebuild its space
3	PIQ 8	Add proof	The repair cards are the strongest fact in the draft and get the least room
4	PIQ 4	Light revision	A strong base; one scene and a new ending finish it

PIQ 1: Leadership

Priority 1 of 4 | Biggest opportunity: lead with the scene, verify the result | 404 words now, 350 maximum

The one change that will help most

Show the club running without you, with real numbers. Your draft says “the data was collected anyway” and ends on a council request for a culvert inspection. Say how many tests, who ran them, and what the county actually did. Leadership shows up as a result, not a claim.

1. Disposition and role

KEEP IF REVISED. Role: leadership as a system you built. It is the only draft where other people depend on your decisions, and the only one that shows you changing your own approach after a failure.

2. What works

- “I realized that I had built a club that could not function without me.” This is the hinge of the essay and the most honest sentence in the set.
- “I wrote a one-page guide with photos so a new member could run a test in ten minutes.” A concrete tool with a number on it.
- “I was worried about the creek, because it runs behind the elementary school and my little cousins play there.” A real reason, in plain words. Keep it.

3. Prompt fit

Answered: you led a group and changed how you led it. The prompt asks for a positive influence on others, and your draft shows members taking on sites and tests that you used to carry yourself.

Room to grow: the reader does not yet see what members did that they would not have done before. The first scene arrives at word 98, after a thesis sentence and a paragraph of setup, and the Saturday you missed arrives at word 179.

Check the strongest claim before you rely on it. “Last fall, our turbidity readings after the first storm led the council to ask the county to inspect a culvert upstream.” says your data caused an action. If the minutes or an email show that, keep it with the date. If you only know the council asked, say that.

4. What will help most

The February Saturday is the best moment in the draft, and it currently gets 46 words after 178 words of setup. Open on that Saturday: you wake up sick, you text no one, and nobody tests the creek. Then back up in two sentences to why you started the club.

The last paragraph is 42 words of lesson. Your own sentence “I am proud of that, but I am even prouder that the club can run without me.” already says it with a fact behind it. End there or on the culvert, and let the lesson go.

5. Recommended architecture

1. The Saturday in February, in plain facts (3 sentences, done by word 50).
2. Why you started the Creek Crew and what you did alone for months (3 sentences).
3. What you changed, in order: pairs and sites, the one-page guide, letting members choose.
4. What happened without you: April, the counts, one result the town saw.
5. End on a fact, stated exactly as it happened.

6. Trims to make room

“Leadership is not about being in charge, it is about making other people feel like they belong. When I started the Creek Crew at my school, I did not realize how true that was.” (34 words) A thesis opening. The scene is stronger, and “belong” is not what the essay shows.

“That was a failure of leadership, and I had to change my approach.” (13 words) Labels what the next paragraph shows. Cut it and start the fixes.

“He said yes, and I was thrilled.” (7 words) A stock feeling. Keep the fact that he said yes if space allows.

“Through this experience I learned that real leadership means building something that outlasts you. I realized that the best leaders do not do everything themselves, they empower others to take ownership. I will carry this lesson with me to college and beyond.” (42 words) The same lesson stated three ways. Your protected line above does this job better.

7. Evidence to add

[verify: your title and the month you started]; the number of tests run so far; what “collected anyway” looked like in April (who ran which site); the council meeting date and what was presented; the county’s response, with a source such as minutes or an email; the source of the 2011 state survey; how Creek Crew is listed in Activities & Awards.

8. Model, not a copy

Pattern only: “On [date], I [what you were doing] and [what did not happen]. I [first change]. By [month], [measurable result].” Fill in only what is true, and write your own sentences. The move is: state the failure, then the change, then the count.

9. Word math

Now 404; limit 350. The cuts above save about 96 words. Addition budget: 20 to 40 words of new facts. Expect to land near 328 to 348 before proofreading, and recount in the UC text box.

10. Questions only you can answer

1. **Essential:** What exactly happened on the Saturday you missed? Who knew, and what did you do when you found out?
2. **Essential:** What did the council or county do after your readings? Who told you, and when?
3. How many tests has the Creek Crew run, and how many ran without you present?

4. Why did you let members choose their own sites, and what changed after that?
5. Who helped with the one-page guide? Which part was yours?
6. How did you recruit the first fourteen members?
7. Who pays for supplies now?
8. What would Mr. Okafor or a co-member say you do differently from the first year?

11. Revision checklist

1. Find the council minutes or the county email so the culvert sentence matches the record.
2. Voice memo: "Walk me through the February Saturday, minute by minute."
3. Redraft using the five-part sequence with the banned phrases off.
4. Cut the thesis opening and the lesson ending. Start and end on facts.
5. Recount to under 350 in the UC text box.

12. Target takeaway

After this PIQ, the reader should know you are someone who builds a team that keeps working when you are not in the room. (Target snapshot, not language to copy.)

PIQ 5: Challenge and Academic Effect

Priority 2 of 4 | Reshape: trim the evacuation, expand the rebuild | 389 words now, 350 maximum

The one change that will help most

Give the recovery its space. The prompt asks how the challenge affected your academics, and your draft gives a strong number ("a 71% on my Chemistry test") and then covers your whole rebuild in one paragraph that starts at word 255. The rebuild is what the reader most wants to see.

1. Disposition and role

KEEP IF REVISED. Role: a disruption's academic cost and the system you built to recover from it. It is the only draft with a hard number for a bad result, and the only one that could explain a dip on your transcript.

2. What works

- "I got a 71% on my Chemistry test, the first C I have ever had." This shows the academic effect better than any sentence about stress.
- "I grabbed my laptop, my chemistry notebook, and my grandmother's quilt." Three objects and a reader knows what you valued.
- "Mr. Okafor let me retake the test after school." A real action by a real person with a real outcome. Say what the retake score was.

3. Prompt fit

Answered: the challenge, the academic effect (71%, then an A-), and steps you took.

Room to grow: "I went to my teachers and asked for help." covers every teacher in one sentence. Name the classes, what was due, and what each teacher did. Your steps begin at word 291, after about 290 words of scene and feeling.

Many students in your area went through an evacuation. What makes this response yours is the 71%, the nightly lists and the retake. Spend your words there.

Honest academic effect: if your Chemistry grade is the only one that moved, say so. Do not imply a broader drop that your transcript does not show.

4. What will help most

Today about 159 words go to the evacuation and the motel before school enters the story. The loudspeaker and the quilt are vivid; the television glow, the stomach drop and the line “I felt like I was drowning.” state feelings your facts already show. Trade some of those words for the steps you took.

The 6:00 a.m. library routine in PIQ 4 and the hour-earlier alarm here are the same habit. Keep the early alarm in only one place, and use the lists, the teacher meetings and the retake as the new facts in PIQ 5.

5. Recommended architecture

1. One image from the evacuation: the loudspeaker truck or the quilt (done by word 60).
2. The school problem: nine closure days, three classes, what was due.
3. The 71%: what the number meant and what you did that week.
4. The rebuild in order: which teachers, the retake, the nightly list.
5. End on the Chemistry grade and one habit you still keep.

6. Trims to make room

“The glow of the television never really turned off.” (9 words) Atmosphere that delays the school story.

“I did not know whether our house was still standing, and every news update made my stomach drop.” (18 words) A feeling stated twice. The next paragraph carries the stakes.

“Some nights I stared at the ceiling, running through everything I had missed, and then fell asleep in my clothes.” (20 words) Mood language. The 71% says it more clearly.

“I felt like I was drowning.” (6 words) A common phrase. The 71% already says it.

“Looking back, this experience taught me that resilience is not about never falling, it is about getting back up. I realized that hard times can reveal your strength.” (28 words) The same lesson as PIQ 1 and PIQ 4. End on a fact.

“I am now more grateful for my home and more confident in my ability to overcome anything that comes my way.” (21 words) Gratitude and confidence, both announced. Trim this first if you are still over.

7. Evidence to add

[verify: the dates of the evacuation and the closure]; the three classes affected and what was due in each; the retake score; what your nightly list looked like; which teachers helped and how; whether other grades dipped, held or rose, with numbers only if you are sure; where your Chemistry grade stands now; whether a counselor was involved.

8. Model, not a copy

Pattern only: “In [month], my score on [assignment] fell to [___] because [specific cause]. That week I [first step]. By [month], [measurable result].” Fill in only what is true, and write your own sentences. The move is: state the drop, then the step, then the result.

9. Word math

Now 389; limit 350. The cuts above save about 102 words. Addition budget: 40 to 60 words of new facts. Expect to land near 327 to 347 before proofreading, and recount in the UC text box.

10. Questions only you can answer

1. **Essential:** Which classes fell behind, and what was due in each?

2. **Essential:** What did you score on the retake, and what did Mr. Okafor say when you asked?
3. Which other teachers helped, and what did each one allow or suggest?
4. What did the nightly list look like? Do you still use it?
5. Did any grade other than Chemistry change? Give numbers only if you are sure.
6. Did anything change at home after you returned that affected your schedule? Say only what is true and what you want to share.
7. What do you do differently now when a deadline is at risk?
8. Is the motel detail doing work for the essay, or is it there for atmosphere?

11. Revision checklist

1. Pull your fall transcript and write down the real numbers.
2. Voice memo: "Tell me the week school reopened, day by day."
3. Redraft using the five-part sequence with the banned phrases off.
4. Cut the closing lesson and end on the grade and one current habit.
5. Check your Common App essay on the same event. Write fresh sentences here and keep every fact identical.

12. Target takeaway

After this PIQ, the reader should know you are someone who, when a crisis pushes your grades down, builds a system and gets them back. (Target snapshot, not language to copy.)

PIQ 8: Beyond What You Have Already Shared

Priority 3 of 4 | Add proof | 325 words now, 350 maximum

The one change that will help most

Make the repair cards the anchor. They are the one thing you did that nobody asked for, and they arrive at word 189 in a paragraph of 81 words. Show one card: what was on it, who took it, what happened next.

1. Disposition and role

KEEP IF REVISED. Role: home and daily work. It is the only place a UC reader meets your Saturdays, the store, and your town, and the only draft about helping someone who is not a classmate.

2. What works

- "a hardware store is also a help desk" A fresh way to see a familiar place, in your voice.
- "So I walked him back to the aisle, held the fitting next to a four dollar coupling, and showed him how the threads lined up." Your hands, the customer, the price. Keep all of it.
- "My uncle says the box gets emptied faster than we can refill it." A signal that the cards work. A count would make it proof.

3. Prompt fit

PIQ 8 asks what else makes you a strong candidate beyond what the application already shows. Answered: new context (the store, the town) and one real initiative (the cards).

Room to grow: the neighbor scene runs 125 words and the cards 81. The ending reaches for "a larger stage" with no link to the store. Your environmental science goal also appears in PIQ 6, so say it once here with a fact behind it.

Watch the overlap: the hardware job likely appears in Activities & Awards, and PIQ 4 uses your Saturday shifts to pay for the course. Use the shifts as a clause in one place.

4. What will help most

Flip the weight. Shorten the neighbor scene to its three most useful facts, then give the cards a full paragraph: the first one you wrote, what it showed, what you changed after watching someone use it.

Use a role instead of a name. “a retired mail carrier named Mr. Brandt” becomes “a retired mail carrier,” and the story loses nothing.

5. Recommended architecture

1. One fact about the store and how long you have worked there (about 30 words).
2. The neighbor and the cracked fitting, unnamed, in 70 to 80 words.
3. The cards: what is on one, how many you have written, who takes them, what the box tells you.
4. One sentence linking the store to environmental science, only if a real customer question connects them.
5. End at the box or a customer, not a goal.

6. Trims to make room

“Some left without buying anything.” (5 words) A detail that does not lead anywhere yet.

“Growing up here has taught me that knowledge is only useful when people can reach it.” (16 words) A lesson. The cards show it.

“I come from a family that fixes things, and I come from a town that does not always have an expert nearby.” (22 words) Two claims about identity with no fact attached. Keep one short fact about your family’s store instead.

“I am proud of where I come from, and I hope that I can bring what I have learned at the counter to a larger stage.” (26 words) A general hope. End on the box or a customer.

“Mr. Brandt” (2 words) Replace with a role to protect the neighbor’s privacy.

7. Evidence to add

[verify: how many hours a week you work and since what age]; one card described exactly (title, parts list, drawing); how many cards exist and how you know they get used; whether anyone beyond the store uses them; one real customer question that connects to water, drainage or the environment, only if it happened.

8. Model, not a copy

Pattern only: “A customer asked about [problem]. I wrote a card: [what was on it]. Since [month], [count or response].” Fill in only what is true, and write your own sentences. The move is: the need, the thing you made, the sign it works.

9. Word math

Now 325; limit 350. The cuts above save about 69 words. Addition budget: 70 to 90 words of new facts. Expect to land near 326 to 346 before proofreading, and recount in the UC text box.

10. Questions only you can answer

1. **Essential:** What is on your most-used card, and how do you know it is the most used?
2. **Essential:** How do you know the box “gets emptied faster than we can refill it”? Is that your uncle’s estimate or a count?
3. How many hours a week do you work, and is it listed the same way in Activities & Awards?

4. What did the pipe fitting visit change about how you answer questions?
5. What do customers say when they take a card? Has anyone come back?
6. Have you shown the cards to anyone beyond the store, such as the library or the school?
7. Which part of the Saturday shifts story belongs in PIQ 4, and which belongs here?
8. What customer question has connected the store to environmental science? Use it only if real.

11. Revision checklist

1. List the store job and your weekly hours exactly as they appear in Activities & Awards.
2. Photograph or recopy one card so you can describe it precisely.
3. Voice memo of the pipe fitting visit. Count your words.
4. Remove the neighbor's name and the "larger stage" ending.
5. Recount.

12. Target takeaway

After this PIQ, the reader should know you are someone who sees a person stuck at a counter and writes the instructions that were missing. (Target snapshot, not language to copy.)

PIQ 4: Educational Opportunity or Barrier

Priority 4 of 4 | Light revision | 322 words now, 350 maximum

The one change that will help most

Show what Professor Hale's question changed. "She asked me what I thought the next step was, and that changed how I studied." is the best sentence in the draft, and it stops there. Show one problem you solved differently afterward.

1. Disposition and role

KEEP IF REVISED. Role: educational barrier and initiative. It shows what you do when your school cannot give you something, and it is the draft with the cleanest beginning.

2. What works

- "My high school has 700 students and four AP classes. Calculus is not one of them." The barrier in two plain sentences.
- "When I got stuck on related rates, there was nobody to ask." Specific, and a little lonely.
- "I was sure she would ignore me." A small honest moment that makes her reply matter.

3. Prompt fit

Answered: a barrier, what you did about it, and a result (the exam score).

UC reads achievement in light of the opportunities available to you. The draft names what your school lacks and what you did. A short line on cost and access is enough; the course price and your family's budget are your choice to share.

Room to grow: "she said I would be fine, since our highest math class is Precalculus" reflects on a named role in a way the reader may find unfair. Keep it only if it is accurate and necessary, and word it neutrally.

4. What will help most

Professor Hale appears at word 168 of 322. The reader needs one scene from those Fridays: a problem, what you tried, the question she asked, your answer.

The closing paragraph makes three claims: barriers are obstacles only if you let them be, resourcefulness is a skill, and you can succeed anywhere. End on a fact instead, such as the exam result and one way you use calculus now.

5. Recommended architecture

1. Keep the opening two sentences.
2. Why calculus matters for your major, and how you paid for the course, in two sentences.
3. The stuck moment: related rates and what you tried first.
4. One Friday session as a scene.
5. The exam, where you took it, the score, and one fact about what you do with calculus now.

6. Trims to make room

"I am grateful for this experience because it taught me that barriers are only obstacles if you let them be. I realized that resourcefulness is a skill, and I will keep using it in college whenever I face a challenge that seems bigger than me. Not having a calculus class made me work harder, and I know that I can succeed anywhere." (62 words) Three lessons stacked. The exam result and a current use of calculus will carry the point.

"I did not want to arrive on campus already behind." (10 words) A fear stated as a reason. Cut it, and the sentence before it still works.

7. Evidence to add

[verify: the course provider, course name and price; the number of AP classes at your school; the exam site and the score]; one problem from a Friday session; how many Fridays you met; whether any classmate asked about the course; one place you have used calculus since, such as your creek data or physics, only if true.

8. Model, not a copy

Pattern only: "I could not solve [problem]. On [Friday], [instructor] asked me [question]. I [what you did]. [Result.]" Fill in only what is true, and write your own sentences. The move is: the stuck point, her question, your answer.

9. Word math

Now 322; limit 350. The cuts above save about 72 words. Addition budget: 80 to 95 words of new facts. Expect to land near 330 to 345 before proofreading, and recount in the UC text box.

10. Questions only you can answer

1. **Essential:** What was the first problem Professor Hale asked you to explain, and how did you answer?
2. **Essential:** Is the counselor's comment accurate and fair? Do you want it in?
3. How did you find the course, and was there a cheaper option?
4. How many Fridays did you meet, and did you ever stop?
5. Was there a morning you nearly quit? What did you do that day?
6. Did any classmates ask about the course?
7. What math have you used since, in physics, chemistry or your creek data?
8. What did the 4 mean to you, honestly?

11. Revision checklist

1. Confirm the score, course name and cost.
2. Voice memo of one Friday session, start to finish.
3. Cut the closing paragraph and end on a fact.
4. Make sure the Saturday shifts appear in only one of PIQ 4 and PIQ 8 as more than a clause.
5. Recount.

12. Target takeaway

After this PIQ, the reader should know you are someone who finds the teacher your school lacks and asks the question out loud. (Target snapshot, not language to copy.)

8. Why PIQ 6 Is Your Reserve, Not a Rejection

PIQ 6: Chemistry and the titration lab (RESERVE)

Genuine strengths

This is a good essay with real curiosity and one excellent scene. “My first trial overshot the endpoint, so the solution turned dark pink and my number was off by almost ten percent.” A reader trusts a writer who admits a ten percent error. The question “Why does the water in Tamarack Creek look clear but smell faintly of fertilizer?” is a good one.

Why it waits in reserve

After PIQ 1, it covers similar ground. Both put you at the creek with a test kit, and both close on patience and curiosity. PIQ 1 shows you doing the work with other people; PIQ 6 only mentions it, so PIQ 1 takes the slot.

The prompt asks how you have furthered your interest inside and outside the classroom. The draft answers with “Outside of class, I have pursued chemistry in many ways.” followed by five activities in a row. The scene that proves your interest starts at word 202 of 372. The opening, “Chemistry is the subject that makes the invisible visible.”, is a general statement, and the draft is 22 words over the limit, which is an easy trim.

When it could return

If you can list at least three specific things you did to pursue chemistry beyond class and beyond the Creek Crew (a question you chased and what you found, the library book and what it changed, a conversation with a chemist about college labs), PIQ 6 could replace PIQ 1 as Set B. That would also mean your creek work is documented in Activities & Awards instead.

One concrete improvement

Follow your own overshoot. Why was the number off by almost ten percent? What did you look up, or whom did you ask? What do you do with a pipette differently now? That thread would give the essay an action and a result, and it would move your best scene to the opening.

What to save

The question about the clear water that smells like fertilizer belongs in only one of PIQ 1 and PIQ 6. If you tested for it (nitrates, for example), the result is a strong fact for PIQ 1 or for this essay. Use it only if you actually ran the test.

Topics you have not drafted

The repair cards as PIQ 2 (creative side). Needs the design decisions behind the cards, how many exist, and who uses them. If you go this way, move the cards out of PIQ 8 so the same evidence is not used twice. See Set C in Section 1.

Town council presentations as PIQ 7 (community). Needs dates, what you presented, and what the council did. Worth drafting only if the culvert result is documented.

There is no need to invent anything. If these experiences are real and you want to use them, this is what a swap would need.

9. One Last Audit Across the Four

The four-slot impact map

Selected PIQ	What the reader learns	What new evidence establishes it	Keep it fresh: avoid repeating elsewhere
PIQ 1	You build a team that keeps working without you	The missed Saturday, pairs and sites, the one-page guide, a documented town result	The 6:00 a.m. grind (PIQ 4 and 5). The “outlasts you” moral.
PIQ 4	You find the teacher and the resource your school lacks	Cost, the Friday sessions, the exam site, the score, one solved problem	The Saturday shifts (PIQ 8). The “obstacles” moral.
PIQ 5	You rebuild a system when a crisis drops your grades	The 71%, nine closure days, the retake, the nightly lists, the A-	The early alarm (PIQ 4). Mr. Okafor appears in PIQ 1 as well: one fact each.
PIQ 8	You notice a stuck person at a counter and write what they need	The pipe fitting visit, the repair cards, a count from the box	The store as background only. Environmental science goal said once.

What a reader knows after all four, if the revisions land. You founded a creek-testing club, found out it could not run without you, and rebuilt it so it could. You taught yourself calculus when your school did not offer it, with help you went and found. A fire sent your family to a motel and your Chemistry grade to a 71%, and you can say exactly how you got it back. You work Saturdays in your family’s store and write the instructions your customers need. Four different facts, one believable person.

Small habits to tidy across all four

- **Moral last lines.** Keep one short reflection per answer, only where it explains real change.
- **Thesis openers.** PIQ 1 and PIQ 6 open on a general statement. PIQ 4 and PIQ 5 open on a scene. Make all four scenes.
- **“Realize” and “learned.”** 6 uses of “realiz-” and 6 of “learned” or “taught me” across the five drafts. Keep the ones that attach to a fact.
- **Stock feelings.** “Thrilled,” “amazed,” “drowning,” “grateful.” Replace each with what you did or saw.

Whole-application consistency (provisional until I see the rest)

- **Activities & Awards.** List the Creek Crew with your real title, start date and member count. List the store job with honest weekly hours. Keep every number identical to your PIQs, then let the PIQs deepen the entries instead of repeating them.
- **Transcript.** Check every grade, class and date in PIQ 5 against the record. If a term shows a dip, explain it factually. If your grades held, show the effort and the changed routine instead.

- **Additional Comments.** UC describes it as a place for unusual circumstances or unclear points, not an essay. Use it only if your transcript shows a visible change in the fall term that PIQ 5 cannot explain in 350 words. If so, give one or two factual sentences about the closure. Do not move PIQ 5 there.
- **Common App versus UC.** They are separate applications. A UC reader will not see your Common App essay. Do not paste from it. Keep facts consistent (dates, the 71%, the A-).
- **Housekeeping on the Common App file.** The version I read gives the motel stay as ten days in one paragraph and eleven in another, and spells wildfire two ways. Pick the correct number and the spelling, and fix them in your final copy.

10. Your Revision Order and Final Checklist

Timing

The UC filing period for fall 2027 closes November 30, 2026. Do not wait for the last week.

1. **Confirm the four.** Submit 1, 4, 5 and 8 unless Set B or Set C clearly applies after Step 2.
2. **Answer the essential fact questions.** Start with the ones marked essential in Section 7: the Saturday you missed and the culvert result, your fall grades and the retake, the repair-card count, and Professor Hale's first question.
3. **Start with PIQ 1.** It has the most to gain from a new opening and one verified result.
4. **Move to PIQ 5.** Trim the evacuation and expand the rebuild.
5. **Add proof to PIQ 8, then sharpen PIQ 4.** One card, one count, one Friday scene.
6. **Cross-check against Activities & Awards.** Dates, hours, titles and numbers must match everywhere.
7. **Read all four aloud, back to back.** Fix repeated phrases and endings.
8. **Ask a trusted reader** (a teacher, a friend, a sibling) to say four different things they learned about you. If they cannot, find the two that blur and add a fact to one.
9. **Recount in the UC text box.** The limit is 350 words per response. Paste as plain text and check for odd characters and broken line breaks.
10. **Verify originality.** Every detail must have happened, and every sentence must be yours. When you finish an independent pass, you may send me your revised drafts.

You have real material and an honest voice. Take it one PIQ at a time.

11. Sources and Professional Disclaimer

Official UC pages this report relies on (confirm dates on the live site before you file):

- UC first-year Personal Insight Questions: admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-first-year/personal-insight-questions.html (four of eight prompts, 350 words each, equal consideration, your own work, concrete examples).
- UC first-year dates and deadlines: admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-first-year/dates-and-deadlines.html (fall 2027 filing period October 1 to November 30, 2026).
- How UC reviews applications: admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-first-year/how-applications-are-reviewed.html (achievement weighed against available opportunities).

Limits of this review. Campus-specific guidance was not reviewed because your campuses were not provided. My strategic recommendations are independent advising judgment and are not UC policy.

This report provides educational and strategic guidance based on the information supplied by the student and family and on publicly available information. It does not guarantee admission, scholarship selection, financial aid, placement, credit, or any other outcome. Admissions and scholarship decisions are made independently by colleges and sponsoring organizations and may be affected by institutional priorities, applicant-pool strength, policy changes, residency, finances, deadlines, application quality, and many other factors outside the advisor's control. The family is responsible for verifying all current requirements, dates, policies, eligibility rules, award terms, and financial commitments directly with each institution or scholarship provider before submitting an application or making an enrollment decision.