Personal Statements

Education Liaison
What is a personal statement?
STRENGTHS

https://youtu.be/Pod4lBAck5E
Who reads the personal statement?

University Admissions

Subject Tutor(s)
What should they write about?

Personal Statements

Two-Thirds
Academic

One-Third
Non-Academic
What should they write about?

Personal Statements

Two-Thirds Academic
- Why this course?
- What have you enjoyed from your studies?
- What skills have you developed?

One-Third Non-Academic
- Relevant responsibilities
- Work or voluntary experience
- Interests and hobbies
A suggested structure

- Your reasons for this course
- Your school or college experience
- Work or voluntary experience
- Sports, clubs, leadership
- Activities and interests
- Concluding statement
Sections to help students write their statements

1. Why?
   • Explain why you want to study X.
   • What is your motivation?
   • What inspired you?
   • How does studying X fit into your future aspirations and career goals?
   • Show awareness of your chosen subject.

2. Experience
   • Describe and link the experience you have (both in and out of school) that relates to your chosen subject and/or career.
   • Reflect on those.
   • Give examples and explain things you found challenging or insightful.
Sections to help students write their statements

3. Academic

- What topics in particular interest you? Why?
- What have you learned from your current studies?
- What skills have your studies help you develop?
- Discuss key events, projects, discoveries, influencers, writers – try to use less obvious examples.

4. Extra-curricular/Travel/Hobbies

- Relate your skills to your subject and/or what you can bring to your course and university.
- Additional positions of responsibility?
- Participated in events? Medals, awards?
- Be specific – give examples and develop your points.
Planning

They will need to demonstrate their interest and commitment by:

- Reading
  - Newspapers
  - Journals/magazines (e.g. scientific)
  - Books
- Attending summer schools
- Taster days
- Public lectures
- TV documentaries
- Work experience
- Voluntary work
- Entering academic competitions
- Sports/Clubs/Hobbies (particularly if relevant to their course)
What Admissions and the tutors are saying about personal statements

We’ve put together a list of quotes from admissions tutors regarding personal statements
Use examples.

"Be specific from line one."

English Admissions Tutor

Reflect on your experiences.

"Whatever environment you’ve been in, what did you spot or learn from what happens there, or what have you observed about how the qualities exhibited by professional staff helped them engage effectively with patients or service-users?"

Medicine Admissions Tutor

But try to be different!

"If I have to read about Freakonomics once more, I’ll scream!"

Economics Admissions Tutor
Think of examples that demonstrate relevant **skills**...

“It doesn't have to be anything fancy!”

Archaeology Admissions Tutor

... like independent working, problem-solving, time management, leadership, organisation, communication.

“If you’re taking the EPQ, do talk about it, as it’s the kind of studying you’ll be doing at uni.”

Modern Languages Admissions Tutor

What are your long-term goals?

“Just saying you want to be a journalist isn’t exactly going to stand you out from the crowd.”

History Admissions Tutor
Examples of personal statements
"Captivated by the all-encompassing importance of the law in society, I am amazed at the way crime is moderated, precedents are set and how they construct the nature of the world around us."

"Shows clear enthusiasm for Law and links this to understanding of its role in society." 
This slightly increases acceptance chances

"This is an empty opening statement with no examples cited to back it up. The weak attempt to define Law wastes space and provides no useful details about the applicant." 
This slightly decreases acceptance chances
“Encountering both clinical and social challenges of the treatment prompted me to research alternatives including autologous pancreatic islet cell transplantation. Although APICT data boasts 69% of patients gain insulin independence, NICE predominantly recommends the “enforcement of life change programmes”, from this I realised the crucial role of primary care services in promoting healthy lifestyles to prevent the onset of disease.”

“Too much medical information. The section is too long and impersonal.” This slightly decreases increases acceptance chances

“Excellent analysis of a complex case. The student actually shows their understanding of communication skills rather than simply stating how important they are. The reflection at the end shows their maturity.” This strongly increases acceptance chances
"I researched psychoanalytic studies and was surprised at Ion Collas’ claim that ‘bovarysme’ is usually beneficial, while in Emma’s case it is morbid."

"More theory than analysis … Lots of opinion and theorising." *This has no effect on acceptance chances*

"“Excellent evidence of intellectual curiosity… Good account of how the applicant responded to being stretched.” *This strongly increases acceptance chances*"
Common mistakes

1. Slang or colloquial language
2. Exaggeration and plagiarism
3. Repeating information from elsewhere on the form
4. Underestimating your transferable skills
5. Not enough understanding of or motivation for the subject
6. Trying to include too much
Strengths

- This statement demonstrates commitment to NHS values with their statements on compassion and putting patients first
- The student talks about their Access to HE Diploma and the modules which are relevant to the course
- Clearly explains how the skills they’ve developed through work experience will help them with their chosen course and career

Weaknesses

- The application ends by urging the reader to take their application into consideration. There is no need to do this.

Use the personal statement example pdf to read through the statements and then look at these slides for the strengths and weaknesses in each
Nursing: A Level Applicant

Strengths

• This statement demonstrates awareness and dedication to NHS values by discussing respect, dignity, improving lives and commitment to quality care

• The student discusses their job as a healthcare assistant and their work promoting “Smoke Free North East.”

Weaknesses

• The applicant does not include their motivation for pursuing a career in nursing. Selectors like to know why an applicant has chosen a particular course

• The student only briefly mentions their A-level studies. Applicants should always talk about their academic qualifications, the subjects they are studying and how these will be beneficial in their chosen course

Use the personal statement example pdf to read through the statements and then look at these slides for the strengths and weaknesses in each
Strengths

• It is good to mention previous experience of visiting universities, such as summer schools, as this demonstrates interest

• The student backs up their interest in sport through lots of extra-curricular involvement

Weaknesses

• Although the student is clearly focused on the subject and has a sporting interest which is very important, they could have expanded more on their interests outside of sports and been clearer about what their career in sport will be

• The final statement is slightly weak and would have been more effective if the student had summed up by re-iterating the reasons why they are looking forward to going to university to study sports science

Use the personal statement example pdf to read through the statements and then look at these slides for the strengths and weaknesses in each
What went wrong?

This personal statement does have some good points, as the student displays their interest in Business Management and touches upon future career plans. However many parts are negative and should have been left out:

• A ‘personality clash’ with a teacher: NEVER mention a dislike of or lack of respect towards one of your teachers or employers.

• The part about not ‘wanting’ to study maths at university is negative and not relevant (also some business management degrees will have mathematical elements)

• The student has made some silly spelling and grammar mistakes.

• It’s good to talk about the benefits of certain hobbies but saying that boxing helps you release your anger makes this student sound a little scary!

• The comments about the lack of a debating club are also negative. Admissions tutors might wonder why the student could not start a debating club at the school by themselves.

• There is too much detail about the part-time job in Sainsbury’s and again it paints a negative picture of the student.

Use the personal statement example pdf to read through the Business Management example and look at the comments.
Do’s and Don’ts when writing their personal statement?

- **Do** start early and prepare several drafts
- **Do** be honest
- **Do** make all of your experience relevant to University or your subject
- **Do** be enthusiastic – if you show you’re interested in the course, it may help you get a place
- **Do** show you know your strengths, and outline your ideas clearly.

- **Don’t** make your statement too short
- **Don’t** Google for interesting quotes
- **Don’t** simply list information
- **Don’t** let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your statement.
If you would like further information or advice on supporting your students to write their personal statements please contact us on EducationLiaison@mdx.ac.uk