

Personal Statement Pack

What is a personal statement?

Your personal statement is the most important part of your application to university. Its purpose is to explain **who** you are, **why** you think you are a good applicant for university and **why** you want to study the course you have chosen.

It is about 400 words/47 lines and needs to be submitted along with the rest of your UCAS application.

Why does a personal statement matter?

It allows you to **stand out** from other applicants with the same grades. Competition for university is tough; your grades alone will not get you a place. Think of it like a job application – you need to impress.

DOs for your personal statement

- Structure! Even if you make good points, a rambling and poorly organised personal statement will make reading it hard work.
- Show awareness of your subject; make sure your passion shines through.
- Grab the reader's attention. You can use quotes, a zippy first line, or tell a story.
- Make it relevant and current.
- Give examples to back up your points e.g. don't just say "I'm a good team player". Without any examples/evidence how does someone reading your personal statement know this is true? Instead try something like this: "I have developed excellent time management skills through juggling my studies with my part time job at Smith's Delicatessen and also babysitting my sisters twice a week. Balancing these obligations while still leaving time for hobbies has not been easy, but I draw up weekly plans which enable me to organise myself well."
- Use all the space – just writing a few lines isn't enough.

DON'Ts for your personal statement

- Lie; you will be caught out.
- Use slang or poor English – this is a formal document.
- Use bullet points; write in full paragraphs.
- Get someone else to write it – that includes personal statements found online. Admissions tutors have software which will tell them if something is stolen.
- Try to include too much. It is better to mention a few skills with examples to show how you developed them than to just list loads.
- Repeat information that is elsewhere on your application.
- Mention specific universities – the same personal statement goes to all your choices.

Suggested structure for your personal statement

You can structure your personal statement any way you want; for instance, you might have so much great work experience you want to talk about that you decide not to say very much about your experience at school and college. That is fine. However, you **must** make sure that you explain why you have chosen your course and about the skills you have which you think make you a good candidate for university.

On the next few pages is a suggested structure, including prompt questions. You do not have to answer every prompt question in your paragraph – they are just there to help you.

1) Paragraph covering **your reasons for your choice of course**

- What course would you like to study?
- Why are you interested in studying this course?
- Why do you find this field interesting?
- Is there anything in particular that has inspired you?
- What are your future aims and ambitions – do you have a particular career in mind?

DON'T just say "I want to study this subject because I'm passionate about it and it's interesting"; this doesn't say anything about you

DO give specific reasons for your choice

ALWAYS avoid mentioning specific universities

Useful phrases

"My decision to study... (state subject) at university has been particularly inspired by... (give details) and will allow me to achieve my future goal of... (state goal)."

"Studying... will allow me to develop... as well as giving me the opportunity to... I am particularly excited at the prospect of finding out more about... which I have been interested in since..."

2) Paragraph covering your **work experience or voluntary work**

- What skills have you gained from part-time/work experience?
- What tasks did your job role involve and what did you learn?
- How do you feel your work experience can benefit you?
- Have you been involved in any voluntary work or projects in your local community?
- Have you had any positions of responsibilities?

DON'T underestimate the skills you gain from work and undersell yourself

DO talk about the skills you gained from your work experience. Skills could include: time management, team working, leadership, problem solving, communication, diplomacy, numeracy, analytical, presentation, confidence, increased maturity and awareness

ALWAYS mention any work experience you have in the subject area you're applying for

Useful phrases

“Being involved in a busy/professional/successful... (state type of company e.g. accountancy firm) allowed me the opportunity to... (briefly describe the main tasks that relate to the skills you gained). These duties developed my skills in... (discuss your skills).”

“As well as providing practical experience in a ... (state area of work e.g. computer retail store) the job also allowed me to develop skills in ... (state skills) through... (state tasks). I am particularly proud of my ability to...”

3) Paragraph covering your school/college experience

- What have you learnt from your current studies? How do you feel they will help you progress onto further education?
- Is there a particular project you enjoyed, excelled at or really inspired you?
- What skills do you feel you have developed during the course of your studies?
- Have you balanced your academic life with aspects of your social life?
- How would you describe your college experience?

DON'T list the courses/subjects you're taking – this is stated elsewhere on your application

DO focus on the subjects you've most enjoyed/have more to say about

ALWAYS be positive. Saying negative things about education doesn't look good on an application to university.

Useful phrases

“While at college I have particularly enjoyed... (state subject) because it has allowed me to... (state reason). I was especially proud of my work during the module on... (state module), during which I had to... (state what you did).”

“My school experience will really help me at university because it has given me the ability to... (state skill/ability) which will stand me in good stead when I am required to... (state activity at university).”

4) Paragraph covering your **sporting involvement/involvement in clubs and societies**

- Are you involved in any sports teams? Any clubs or societies?
- Have you recently participated in any events?
- What form of responsibility do you hold within the team/club/society?
- Have you been rewarded with any medals/certificates/awards?
- What types of skills do you feel you have gained?

DON'T say you aren't part of any clubs and societies even if that's the case – it looks negative. You could concentrate on other experiences instead and choose not to include this paragraph

DO make sure anything you mention here is current

ALWAYS mention the skills you've gained – for instance being on a team will probably involve some kind of team work

Useful phrases

“Taking responsibility for ... (state responsibility) has developed my skills in ... (state skills).”

“Attending matches as part of my college's football team has not only enabled me to.... (state what you've done) but also.....(state what else you've done) which I really value because I have gained the ability to.... (state ability)”

5) Paragraph covering your **out of school/college activities and interests**

- What are your hobbies and interests?
- How would you describe yourself as a person? What are your strengths?
- Do you have a valuable or exciting experience you would like to tell the admission staff to know about? For example – have you been travelling? Have you learnt about different cultures and backgrounds?

DON'T just say “I like music and having a laugh with my friends” – this won't impress. This doesn't make you sound interesting or like you'd be a particularly good applicant

DO be honest! A university will be able to spot any lies

ALWAYS include at least a few lines on hobbies – universities do want to know about you

Useful phrases

“I have endeavoured to learn more about ... (state what you have learned e.g. astronomy) despite little information being available at school/college. The reason for my interest in this area is... (give your reason).”

“An experience which I feel has had particular impact upon my outlook was when I... (state experience). This really opened my eyes to... (state what you learned/saw/how this impacted on you).”

6) Paragraph giving a **concluding statement**

- What aspect of university are you looking forward to?
- Are there any clubs/societies you really want to join? Why?
- If you are planning to defer your entry (i.e. take a gap year) say what you plan to do and how you feel it will benefit you.
- What career path would you like to go into and why?
- What can you offer to the university?

DON'T say you're going to take a gap year without having a plan - it doesn't sound impressive if you haven't worked out what you want to do. If you don't have a plan, make one!

DO make sure you sound enthusiastic

ALWAYS include a conclusion – you need to round your personal statement off neatly

Useful phrases

“I hope to continue to ... (state hobby or interest) at university because it provides me with an opportunity to ... (state opportunity e.g. meet people).”

“Before commencing on my course I am planning to take a gap year during which I will... (state your plans). I feel this will enable me to... (state what you'll gain) which will help me at university because... (state why).”