Personal Statements

Education Liaison and Outreach
What is a personal statement?
What is a personal statement?

• A personal statement supports your application to study at a university

• It’s your chance to articulate your motivation, inspiration and ambition

• Why you’d like to study a particular course or subject and your understanding of the subject

• What makes you suitable for that course and for university

• What transferable skills and experience you possess, that show your passion for your chosen field
Do’s and Don’ts when writing your personal statement?

- **Do** start early and prepare several drafts
- **Do** be honest
- **Do** make all of your experience relevant to University or your subject

- **Don’t** make your statement too short
- **Don’t** Google for interesting quotes
- **Don’t** simply list information
Who reads the personal statement?

University Admissions

Subject Tutor(s)

Remember, a real-life person will be reading your personal statement.
What should they write about?

Personal Statements

Two-Thirds Academic

One-Third Non-Academic
A suggested structure

1. Concluding statement
2. Your reasons for this course
3. Work or voluntary experience
4. Your school or college experience
5. Sports, clubs, leadership
6. Activities and interests
Sections

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

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.
Readability

1. Ensure you have a clear structure and a good ‘flow’
2. Make the content relevant
3. Be clear and concise
4. Check spelling and grammar
5. Use quotations carefully
6. Make it interesting and engaging
Planning

You will need to demonstrate your 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 your course)
Applying for multiple courses

Remember that you only write one personal statement

*Joint degree*

Explain why you are interested in both subjects

*Contrasting Subjects*

Try and identify the common themes

  e.g. problem solving or creativity
Use examples.

“Be specific from line one.”

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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?”

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Medicine 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
Common mistakes

1. Slang (or informal 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
Bad example of introduction – English Literature

The reason why I want to study for a degree is because of the following reasons:
I want to get a higher degree and better qualification,
I want to gain more experience and knowledge,
I want to improve my skills as an educational challenge
and I want to have a good career later.

Good example of showing an understanding of subject

“I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend a summer school at the London College of Communication, where I learned that Interior Design was not just about the use of wallpaper, colour or furniture; it was also based on creating the interior of a house or a building which is best suited to its purpose, whether domestic or commercial. This opened yet another door to the many possibilities within the Interior Design umbrella.”
Social work application – good example of conclusion

“By embarking on this course I feel that I will be a step closer to my ambition. Being in a career which involves both researching and working directly with people and improving their living standards is something which I have wanted to pursue since a young age. By studying social work/sociology I feel that I will also be able to open more career opportunities for myself as the skills I will learn will be of value on a personal and professional level. For me, university represents a window of opportunity, which will ensure future success in my chosen career path.”

Bad example of expanding skills

“I am a hard worker and very punctual. I am confident, energetic and do my best in all areas of my work. My other interests are keeping fit, playing guitar and reading. I listen to the radio for current affairs.”
University application timeline

**Step 1:** Choosing Courses

**Step 2:** Apply

**Step 3:** Offers

**Step 4:** Decisions

**Step 5:** Results

**Step 6:** Start University

- **October - March:**
  - University decision:
    - Conditional
    - Unconditional
    - Reject
    - UCAS EXTRA if no offers
  - Interview/Test
  - Portfolio/Audition

- **October - April:**
  - Student decision:
    - Firm Accept
    - Insurance Accept
    - Decline

- **April /May/June:**
  - Confirm place
  - UCAS ADJUSTMENT?
  - Clearing

- **July/August:**
  - Websites
  - Prospectuses Open
  - Days

- **October:**
  - UCAS
Questions?