



Welcome to the Personal Statement and UCAS Form Day

Please seat yourselves where you would like, and read the four statements (A-D) on pink paper in pairs, cross out general, waffly or obvious statements and underline detailed and specific ones.

Good UCAS Video to Get You Started



YOUR UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT

- Tips from admissions tutors (and from successful applicants)**
- and why it's not a case of 'one-size-fits-all'**

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT? - 1

It's especially important for:

- **high-demand courses and high-demand universities**
- **Professional*** courses where, in effect, you're applying for the profession **as well as the course** (like Medicine, Dentistry, Vet Science, Nursing, Midwifery, Optometry, Physiotherapy, OT, Social Work, Primary Teaching)
- ***some even SCORE it against their selection criteria**

It's often a **deciding factor** at 'Confirmation' in August **if you don't quite get the grades**

But some courses want you to **"introduce yourself"** rather than feel the need to **"sell yourself"**

And some may not read it all (but you probably won't know who they are)

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT? -2

Some admissions tutors say: **don't get too stressed about it**

- **“We rarely reject a student because of a personal statement”**
(Physics at Bath)
- **“Don't see it as a scary obstacle where you have to sell yourself, or worry that it must conform in some way; see it as an opportunity to show your enthusiasm for the subject”** *(Geography at Southampton)*

But then, **don't be complacent about it either ...**

- **“With keen competition for places, we are now seeing more attention being paid to personal statements and what motivates the candidate”** *(Physics at Surrey)*

Most of all, it's important for the applicant, because it focuses your mind on why you want to study this course and why you're suited to it

CREATING THE WRONG IMPRESSION...

- **DON'T** exaggerate, waffle or repeat yourself
- **DON'T** plagiarise
- **DON'T** use quotations for effect
 - “I’m fed up of Muhammad Ali quotes” – Sport at Bournemouth*
 - “We ignore quotes, so those lines are wasted” – Portsmouth*
- **DON'T** make spelling/grammar/punctuation errors
 - “One mistake can lead to rejection” – Law at Aston*
 - “I have a Saturday job at Raymond Blanc’s Brassiere”*
- **DON'T** use vocabulary that’s pretentious, stilted or archaic...
 - “It was in Year 10 that my love for German came fourth”*
- **DON'T** shower them with praise
 - “It would be such an honour to attend your esteemed university”*

CREATING THE RIGHT IMPRESSION



- Focus on **why** you want to do the course
- **Reflect** on the skills, interests, experiences, ideas, qualities or aspirations you will bring to it (both academic and personal)
- Convey your **enthusiasm** for learning and a **passion** for the course...
- ...but preferably without using the word “passion”
- ‘Pitch’ it right, but also write **naturally** as if you’re **speaking** to them
- Search **course websites** for tips and advice (e.g. *Bristol* has an ‘admissions statement’ for every degree discipline)

“BE YOURSELF and make sure your ENTHUSIASM FOR THE COURSE shines through” - Nottingham

“WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOICE” - Southampton

ADVICE FROM UNIVERSITIES 1

- There's no such thing as a **model statement**
- Most of all, we want people who are **enthusiastic** about the course
- Don't patronise us, **engage** us
- Be **specific** from line one
- Tell us what you **think** not just what you do
- If an **adult** has helped you write it, we can tell

ADVICE FROM UNIVERSITIES 2

- The personal statement is your one chance to **speak** to the admissions tutor
- But don't be too **quirky**
- Avoid **clichés** (*"from a young age"/"since I was a child"/ "the world we live in"...*)
- Be **selective** - less is more
- If you've had relevant experience, we want you to **reflect** on what you **learned** from it
- If you're taking the **EPQ**, write about it, as this is the kind of study you'll be doing at uni

ADVICE FROM UNIVERSITIES 3

- Show that you're **interested** as well as interesting
- If you're applying for a **joint or combined** course, we want to know about **BOTH** subjects
- If you're applying for **deferred entry**, what are your gap year plans (in brief)?
- But beware, what you say in your statement may come up in an **interview** or **applicants' open day**
- And tell us something that makes you **stand out....**

ADVICE FROM UNIS ON STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

- “We’re busy, grab our attention, what makes you **different?**”
but...
- “We like you to be different, but **not TOO different**”
- “**Off-the-wall** won’t work”
- “Don’t be **outrageous** - you’ll stand out, but not in a good way”
- “**Weird** is not a selling point”

So, a better way to stand out is to....

- Convey **genuine enthusiasm and motivation** ...
- ... starting with a **strong opening sentence** ...
- ... that engages because it’s **interesting & personal**, not gimmicky

*“This isn’t **The Apprentice**”*

OPENINGS AND ENDINGS: *Engaging or not ... ?*

Openings:

- I was born to dance
- I have always been interested in history
- So why am I applying for this degree?
- Coco Chanel said “Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only”
- My love for English began when my mum gave me a Beatrix Potter book when I was six (*English at UCL*)
- On my first day at Burger King a customer got very angry with me because the drinks machine didn't work (*Police Studies*)

Endings:

- My passion for Business and my strong work ethic make me a perfect candidate for this course
- I genuinely believe I am a highly-motivated person

...SHOW, DON'T TELL!

So, instead of unsubstantiated claims (like *"I genuinely believe I am a highly-motivated person"*) ...

... demonstrate it with evidence, such as:

- **How** has playing basketball improved your teamwork skills?
- **How** did you get the elderly man with dementia in the nursing home where you volunteer to tell you about his past life?
- **How** did your field trip or your cycling holiday change your opinions about sustainability?
- **How** has your job on the fish counter at Asda made you a better communicator?

BALANCING ACADEMIC & EXTRA-CURRICULAR CONTENT

Courses in **'academic'** subjects want more emphasis on your academic and super-curricular interests (75%ish)

Examples: History, Physics, Philosophy, Maths, Languages

'Professional' courses will want much more emphasis on your "experience"

Examples: Medicine, Nursing, Veterinary Science, Midwifery, Physiotherapy

Courses in other **'vocational'** subjects may not need as much "experience" as you expect – it depends on what is motivating YOU to study the subject

Examples: Law, Politics, Engineering, Architecture

EXTRA-CURRICULAR CONTENT AND THE “SO WHAT? FACTOR”

1. If you play **badminton** or do the **Duke of Edinburgh Award**, how important is it to write about it in your statement?
2. Answer: **Apply the SO WHAT? Factor**
So what? Compared with all the other things you could use your 47 lines for, will it give them some important evidence that will make them more likely to want you on their course?

OXBRIDGE

These two quotes are not necessarily representative, but they hint at how Oxbridge admissions tutors might like you to engage with them in your statement:

“The worst personal statements are polished but boring”

(Oxford admissions tutor)

“We would love to know what you want to question about your chosen subject or what concerns you about it”

(Cambridge admissions tutor)

THERE'S LOTS OF FREE HELP OUT THERE!

Such as:

- www.ucas.com/personalstatement
- www.university.which.co.uk/getadvice
- www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/apply/the-personal-statement.aspx
- An increasing range of advice on **unis' own websites**
- Or go to **uni open days** and **ASK ...**
... because the best place to get it is from the horse's mouth!

Which? University



DIFFERENT SUBJECTS 1:

A SAMPLE OF TIPS PICKED UP FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS

- Get your **motivation** across; why do you want to study the subject and what will you bring? Any insight gained through experience is great, but this can be in a diverse range of settings (*Law*)
- Talk about your wider reading or theatre-going; avoid deep philosophical statements, overlong sentences, baroque syntax, incorrect punctuation ... or “*I was encapsulated by To Kill a Mockingbird*” (*English*)
- Engage us by discussing what you think about some of your recent work (*History*)
- If I hear about Freakonomics one more time, I’ll scream (*Economics at a high-ranking uni*)
- We like to hear about what you’ve learned for yourself beyond the classroom, rather than standard texts like Freud, Milgram or Zimbardo (*Psychology*)
- We don’t want to know that you played with lego as a child or that the first word you ever uttered was hydraulics (*Engineering at a high-ranking uni*)
- Motivation is 90% of the battle, so anything that demonstrates your enthusiasm for the subject is great; we’re also interested in your outside interests - we like people who have a life (*Maths*)
- 80% of the statement should be about your motivation for teaching, reflecting on your experience, your observations and on what’s current or topical (*Primary Teaching*)
- Avoid bland clichés like “*I have a passion for helping people*” or “*I am a people person*” - people skills aren’t enough (*Social Work*)
- All sport and no science will not impress (*Sport Science*)

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS 2:

QUICK TIPS ON NHS-FUNDED COURSES

Selection for NHS-funded courses now focuses around **NHS core values**, so urge your students to research this and attend open days

- If you mention Call the Midwife or One Born Every Minute ... **you won't even get an interview** (*Midwifery*)
- Lots of applicants say they were inspired by **Florence Nightingale**...but she's been dead for 100 years (*Nursing*)
- Show you're aware of what the profession involves - it's not all **flashing blue lights** (*Paramedic Science*)
- You must be **100% committed to Physiotherapy**, not "I want to be in a caring profession" (*Physiotherapy*)

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS 3:

MEDICINE (& DENTISTRY)

- Give us a rationale for why you want to study Medicine
- Whatever environment you've had experience in, what have you observed about the qualities exhibited by professional staff there?
- It's not the techniques you saw, but what you saw about the realities of medicine
- Evidence relevant qualities you have demonstrated (like how you took the lead in your D of E expedition)
- Don't give us any flannel and don't use humour inappropriately
- Don't over-elaborate about Grade 8 flute – what we want is more subtle than that
- Don't give a list of every procedure you saw - we would much rather hear what you learned from observing one filling (*Dentistry*)
- Keep your conclusion punchy, maybe 3 lines, and use it to add something
- The interview will test whether what you wrote in your statement can be justified
- We tell you what we want on our webpage, but most applicants don't look

Course Choice

- Please move to your subject tables and brainstorm reasons why you might want to do to this subject area. Please write them on the large A3 sheets with subject names on them.

I love my subject

- Work in pairs. One of you has to claim to love your subject while the other one puts hard questions to them to test whether or not this is true.

The Opening Paragraph

- You have fifteen minutes, in silence, to write a paragraph explaining why you want to do your course.

I have chosen this course because

My interest in stems from ...

Taking part in ... led me to investigate ...

I am fascinated about ... because ...

Peer Assessment

- Exchange your work with your neighbour. Rewrite it so that it says more in half the words. Hand it back to your neighbour.

I have chosen this course because I love reading. I love English because we get to read a wide range of books, novels and poetry. My favourite thing in English is poetry.

I have chosen this course because I love reading. ~~I love English because we get to read a wide range of books, novels and~~ **my personal favourite**, poetry. ~~My favourite thing in English is poetry.~~

Immediate Feedback

- Too many of you have first sentences which are too general, or tell me facts about the course you want to choose. If I have been teaching my subject for twenty-five years, I don't need to be told what it involves. **I want to learn about you. I want to see that you are interested in my subject, have researched it and can think about it.**

Action plan

- Write your name and your tutor's name at the top of a piece of paper, and write down five things you plan to do in the next five months to make your Personal Statement more detailed.

What skills do you have?

- Re-arrange yourselves around your tables in order of birthdays
- List all the skills and experience you bring to support your application

Taking part in ... has taught me

Studying ... has taught me ...

The experience of ... proved

I enjoyed the challenge of because

I aim to in order to ...

The areas of particular interest for me are

Defend your skills

- Prove to your neighbour that your skills really support your application

Taking part in the Extended Project Qualification has taught me to be independent and study on my own. My Extended Project Qualification was on fisheries in Vanuatu and the impact of Ecolabelling.

~~Taking part in the Writing my Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) on fisheries in Vanuatu and the impact of Ecolabelling has taught me to be independent and study on my own. My Extended Project Qualification was on fisheries in Vanuatu and the impact of Ecolabelling.~~

Outline your skills

- You have ten minutes to write a paragraph outlining your skills, showing how they support your skills

Gaining new skills in ... will help me with ... because

Following this

Aside from

As part of

Prior to

I believe that

SKILLS

Time management

Independent reading

Research

Organisation

Note-taking

Team work

Critical analysis

Library skills

Lab skills

Debating skills

Peer Assessment

- Re-write your neighbour's paragraph using only 70% of the words but saying more

Aside from studying for my A Levels, I have learnt to be independent by reading a range of articles and books on the topic of Anthropology. This has taught me to organise my time, read independently and research things to read on my own.

Through researching and reading anthropology-related texts such as Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* I have developed invaluable library and research skills. ~~I have learnt to be independent by reading a range of articles and books on the topic of Anthropology. This has taught me to organise my time, read independently and research things to read on my~~

Hobbies and Activities

- Sit next to someone you don't know well.
- Write down two things about yourself which are true and one which is false
- Explain them to your neighbour – see if you can detect which of them is not true.

Hobbies Paragraph

- You have ten minutes to write a paragraph describing your hobbies and other interests. Use them to prove that you have stamina, good time management and contribute to the community.

Peer Assessment

- Exchange your work with your neighbour.
Choose one of their sentences and re-write it.

Final First Draft and Action Plan

- Spend fifteen minutes writing out the final first draft of your statement.

Homework

- Type up your first draft this evening, and hand a paper copy to me and to your tutor on Monday.

Clear up

- Please take one or two chairs and stack neatly at the side.
- Please fold up one table and stack neatly at the side.



Personal Statement Peer Assessment: Be the Admissions Tutor

1. Are they suited to the course?
2. Are they hardworking?
3. Can they work under pressure?
4. Will they be able to adjust to the university environment?
5. Do they have good communication skills?
6. Are they genuinely interested in the course and shown you have researched it?

Have they shown:

✓ **Enthusiasm**

E.g?

✓ **Genuine interest in subject**

E.g.

✓ **Research**

E.g.

✓ **Wider reading**

E.g.

✓ **Reflection and analysis**

E.g.

Have they addressed these questions?

- Why does the course **interest** me/Why study it in more **depth**?
- What specific **topics** do I enjoy and why?
- Do I understand what the course/profession **involves**?
- Have I done **extra** reading and research?
- What are my **career** plans?
- Have I attended any courses/**field trips**?

One thing that's really strong:

One thing to improve:

Think for yourself, act for others

Final First Draft and Action Plan

- Spend fifteen minutes writing out the final first draft of your statement.
- Underneath, write five bullet points detailing the things you plan to read or do over the summer for inclusion in your statement this autumn.

