



The Little Book of
UCAS
Personal Statements

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Your Personal Statement

Your Personal Statement is your chance to tell universities and colleges why they should want you as a student. A good Personal Statement is important – it should say why you are interested in a course and what you hope to do after your studies. In many cases, applicants are not interviewed, so this may be your only chance to make the case for your admission.

You should consider carefully the information you give in your Personal Statement and the best way to present it effectively while being truthful and accurate.

Remember, each admissions tutor will only see their own course and university on your application, not your other choices. So make sure your Personal Statement does not mention individual course titles or universities, but refers to courses using generic terms i.e. 'My interest in Geology started when...'

Your Statement should be in your own words, and not be rewritten by tutors, parents etc.

If you are applying now, but deferring your year of entry, explain any plans for a gap year and how these might relate to your course choice or future career plans.

How to write a Personal Statement

Think of your personal statement in two sections:

1. **Academic** (approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of the Statement)
2. **Personal** (approximately $\frac{1}{3}$)

Your opening sentence should try to catch the reader's attention and relate to your course choice, but take care not to overdo it.

Section 1: Academic

This is where you explain why you want to study the subject. Admissions tutors want students who want to study their course. They want students who are enthusiastic about the subject area and know what studying the subject involves. Think about:

- Why do you find the subject interesting?
- What started your interest?
- What have you read around your subject?
- What did you learn from it?
- What views do you have on it?
- Name the publication and author, and the impact it had on your subject choice
- What have you done to develop your interest in the subject?
- What wider issues are you aware of around your subject?
- Why do you care about the subject?
- Describe relevant work or life experience, and how this relates to the subject
- Explain specific areas of interest within a subject to demonstrate deeper understanding of that specialism.
- If your chosen HE subject links to a current or recent course of study, describe one or two units which you particularly enjoyed and explain why.

Section 2: Personal

This part of the Statement is where you can show yourself as a rounded person. Try to link your interests and hobbies to personal traits that an admissions tutor will be interested in. Think about them as:

- Achievements and aspirations
- Strengths and qualities

Don't just list all your hobbies and interests, pick out a few you are most proud of or are most relevant to your application. This might include:

- Interests that you feel passionately about
- Interests that are important to you, or to the course
- Interests that allow you to link to a personal trait (are you a team player, a leader, or someone who is caring and compassionate?)
- Unusual interests (but only mention one)

Presentation – How to write your Personal Statement

'The strongest applicants are those who can link their extra-curricular activities to their proposed course of study.' – Undergraduate Admissions, University of Warwick

- **47 lines maximum, 4000 characters maximum** (this includes spaces and blank lines). Try to use all of this space – if you write much less, you are underselling yourself.
- **Get to the point!** It is better to have a slightly shorter, sharper statement than a longer one that you have padded out.
- Write your Personal Statement in **Word** first and then copy and paste into your online UCAS application when it is completed, checked and cannot be further improved. **Do not** type your statement directly into Apply: if you lose your internet connection or are timed out you risk losing your whole Statement. 'Save' regularly if adding to your online application because the UCAS system will time out after **35** minutes of inactivity
- Be prepared to **draft and re-draft**. Most people will write 3 or 4 drafts before they have completed their statement.
- **Proof read** it for spelling and grammatical errors (don't just rely on the spell checker as it won't find a missing or incorrect word), and ask someone to proof-read it to check that it makes sense. Spelling, punctuation and grammar must be **perfect!** Ask your tutors for feedback and ideas to develop it further.
- Your Personal Statement should always be written as prose, with **full sentences** and **paragraphs**. However, it can be helpful to start your first draft as bullet-pointed notes, which can then be worked into sentences and organised into themed paragraphs. Use the **Starting your Personal Statement form** on **page 12** to help you write your first draft.
- Use formal, plain English, with no slang or abbreviations. **Avoid** italics, bold and underlining.
- **Use your normal spoken English.** If English is not your first language, don't ask someone to reword your statement to sound more 'English' as it will lose authenticity. It should reflect how you usually express yourself.

A good Personal Statement will include:

- A 'defining moment' – a specific event or experience which led to the development of a strong interest
- Enthusiasm for the course that you are applying for
- Information on any roles and responsibilities you've had and what you've gained from them
- Examples of work experience or relevant experiences, and details of what you have learnt from these experiences
- Key words and phrases relevant to the subject
- A strong opening and concluding paragraph
- A sense of your personality

What to avoid:

- Not having a clear reason for your course choice
- Use of dull, passive language which does not convey enthusiasm or motivation
- Spelling or grammatical errors
- Lack of detail about work experience
- Not reflecting on what you have gained from your work and life experiences
- Talking about experiences that were a long time ago, they will not be as relevant. (e.g. Your 9 afterschool club activities)
- Weak or inconclusive end sentence
- **Humour, quotes or anything unusual** – it is important to make your Personal Statement individual but if the Admissions Tutor reading your application doesn't share the same sense of humour as you, it might not work!

Plagiarism

Make sure that your personal statement is your own work

UCAS puts all applications through their ***Copycatch similarity detection*** system, which identify Statements that have been copied from another source. Don't be tempted to copy another person's application materials, or download your Personal Statement from a website. There could be serious consequences to using other people's work. If any part of your personal statement appears to have been copied, UCAS will inform all the universities and colleges that you have applied to. They will then take the action they consider to be appropriate. UCAS will also contact you by email.

Plagiarised Personal Statements impact negatively on Bedford College's reputation and will affect the credibility of future UCAS applicants from college

What the Similarity Detection Service does

Each Personal Statement is checked against:

- a library of Personal Statements previously submitted to UCAS
- sample Statements collected from a variety of websites
- other sources including paper publications

Each Personal Statement received at UCAS is added to the library of Statements after it has been processed.

What happens if a personal statement has similarities?

- Any Statements showing a level of similarity of 10% or more are reviewed by members of the UCAS Similarity Detection Service Team.
- Applicants, universities and colleges are notified at the same time by email when an application has similarities confirmed.
- Admissions tutors at individual universities and colleges decide what action, if any, to take regarding reported cases.

What University Admissions Tutors will look for

- This is your one chance to **speak** to the admissions tutor – get their attention!
- They want to read a Statement where the applicant's **own voice** comes over clearly
- Show **why you want to study the subject** and show that you have **some of the skills to be successful**
- Convey your **enthusiasm** about the subject
- Tell them what you **think** not just what you do
- **Demonstrate** that you are **well-motivated**, have an understanding of what's involved and the level of commitment required
- Show that you have the right level of intellectual ability to cope with the academic demands of the course
- **Demonstrate** that you have considered your **career aspirations**, and can link them to the course
- Suggest how you may get involved with university life, and maximize the experience
- **Reflect** on what you have learned from **relevant** experience
- **Don't** include vague, over the top claims like, '*I genuinely believe I am a highly-motivated person*' – **instead**, give **examples** that **prove** it
- **Show, don't tell!** Provide examples and evidence that demonstrate what you think or do such as...**How** has playing basketball improved your teamwork skills? **How** has your job at Tesco improved your communication skills? **How** did you get the man with dementia in the nursing home where you volunteer to tell you about his past life? **How** has doing the Duke of Edinburgh Award made you a better leader?
- If you are applying for a **joint** or **combined** course, they will want to know about **both** subjects
- **Deferred entry?** Advise them what your gap year plans are. How will your plans strengthen your application – both academically and personally?

Extra-curricular activities – apply the ‘**SO WHAT?**’ factor. You play badminton in your spare time, **so what?** Explain **how** playing badminton has contributed to making you a better applicant for a course?

When writing your personal statement, remember this piece of advice from **Nottingham Trent University**:

‘Always remember to answer the question: Why should we give you a place on the course? Rather than just writing about you, every bit of the statement should be answering this question.’

How do Admissions Tutors Use a Personal Statement?

- To check that the course is appropriate for you
- To check that you are appropriate for the course
- To check that you fully understand the nature of the course – particularly if you haven’t studied the subject at school or college
- To get a bigger picture of you as a person
- To help select a shortlist for interview (for some courses only)
- To develop questions for use at interview

‘An inspired Personal Statement may swing us to offer a place to someone whose predicted grades are slightly lower than those we ask for.’ (History Admissions Tutor)

Work experience

Work experience should be clearly and reflectively described in a Personal Statement, with clear links made between what has been learned and course/future career choice.

UCAS Track allows students to see feedback from Admissions Tutors about why their application may have been unsuccessful. This information can ensure future applicants are aware of the benefits and impact of community and voluntary engagement. The following feedback from university admissions tutors indicates some reasons for rejection, and these are often linked to lack of relevant work experience:

Midwifery – *‘Your application has been unsuccessful due to you having insufficient work experience.’ ‘We regret that your Personal Statement does not clearly demonstrate your understanding of the role of a professional midwife, what you could bring to the role and how you have researched the profession. We would suggest that you undertake further research into the profession before reapplying.’ ‘Your Personal Statement does not provide either evidence of suitable personal attributes or knowledge/experience in relation to your choice of degree programme.’*

Vet Nursing – *‘no work experience. Insufficient or unsuitable work experience’*

Nursing (Adult) – *‘Personal statement did not show sufficient understanding or relevant knowledge about the nursing course. Application did not clearly demonstrate evidence of a good understanding of the profession in comparison to others’ ‘Your Personal Statement demonstrates little or no interest in this course.’ ‘Your application has been unsuccessful due to your personal statement being weak.’*

Social Work – *‘you do not have the required experience for this course’ ‘Your application does not demonstrate that you have relevant/sufficient experience within the Social Care field.’*

Nursing (Child) – *‘Limited evidence of interest in nursing. Application form does not evidence accurate understanding or motivation for nursing’ ‘We regret that your Personal Statement does not show commitment to the course that you have applied for. We would suggest that you undertake further research into this branch of nursing before reapplying.’*

Primary Teaching – *‘You do not have 2 weeks experience in a State Primary School.’*

Interviews

Most applicants will not expect to be interviewed for their courses, so their Personal Statement will be their only selling tool.

Some applicants will be invited for a tour of the university teaching department with a group of other students where they will meet tutors, and may have an 'informal chat'. Be aware that this may be considered an informal interview and may affect the university's decision. Any time spent with any member of the university staff may be used to form an opinion about you.

Students applying for the following courses can expect an invitation to a formal interview:

- Medicine
- Nursing or other Healthcare Professions
- Social Work
- Art and Design (with your portfolio)
- Performing Arts, Music Performance (audition)
- Teaching
- Law (sometimes)
- Oxford or Cambridge ('Oxbridge')

If you are applying to one of these courses, your Personal Statement will be used to develop some of the questions you will face at interview.

Make sure you have written about experiences in your Statement which you are able to expand upon at interview and that you are knowledgeable about and can convey enthusiasm about.

Re-read your Personal Statement whilst preparing for your interview and think through how you will expand on and develop your themes. Try to anticipate possible questions.

Don't exaggerate in your personal statement, as you will not be able to sustain a discussion at interview (which will be embarrassing).

Don't contradict what you've written in your statement, but be prepared to argue your case if the interviewer offers an opposing view.

The college Careers Advisers can offer a mock interview to help prepare you for the real thing – make an appointment at the Careers & Job Shop or with your PT.

Do's and Don'ts of a Personal Statement

How to make the RIGHT impression

- Focus on **why** you want to do the course/study the subject further
- Show that you have some of the **skills** to be successful by using **examples** and **evidence**
- Include evidence of your **wider reading** around the course/subject
- **Reflect** on the skills, interests, experiences and qualities you will bring to the course and what you have **learned** from these (both academic and personal)
- Convey **enthusiasm** for learning and a passion for your chosen course (**but without using the word 'passion'!**)
- 'Pitch' it right but also write naturally as if you were speaking to them

'Be yourself and make sure your enthusiasm for the course shines through'
(University of Nottingham)

How to make the WRONG impression

- **Don't** exaggerate
- **Don't** use vocabulary you wouldn't use normally/in real life
- **Don't** just write lots without a point
- **Don't** cram too much in
- **Don't** plagiarise
- **Don't** repeat yourself, or repeat what's elsewhere on your form
- **Don't** start with, *'from a young age'* or *'since I was a child'*
- **Don't** start with a quotation
- **Don't** make spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes

References and Acknowledgements:
Dr Laura Pugsley, Haileybury School
University of Northampton, Student Survival Guide
Writing an Effective Personal Statement – A step by step guide, Michael Senior, Paul Mannix
'A new menu at 18+', Alan Bullock

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Draft your Personal Statement

Reasons for going to university and choosing the course – link to your subject interests and career aims.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Current studies – be positive and mention areas of particular interest.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Work experience – don't forget transferable skills! Link to your course

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Hobbies and interests – sound enthusiastic and be specific. Any specific achievements you are proud of?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Summary of you as a person and why you would be an asset to any university