



Writing a Successful Personal Statement

UCAS APPLICATIONS

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500,000 personal statements are submitted to UCAS every year. *Yours needs to stand out!*

How important is the personal statement?

The majority of candidates applying to a course will have similar grades. Your personal statement may be the deciding factor between you and a similar candidate.

What is a personal statement?

The personal statement is used to show personality, skills knowledge, experience and ambitions.

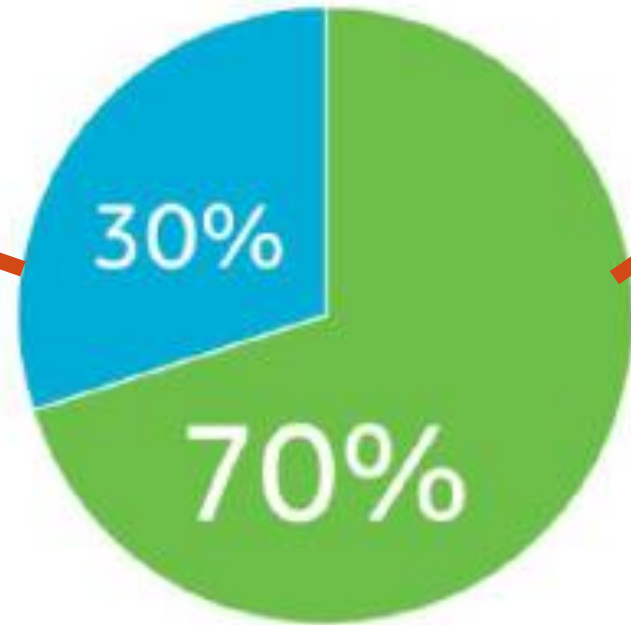
How long should my personal statement be?

4,000 characters or 47 lines (whichever you reach first!)



What should I write about in my personal statement?

- Extra curricular activities
- Part time job
- Work experience that does not relate directly to your chosen course
- Wider skills



- Academic success
- Interest in subject or course
- Specific areas of interest within the subject
- Relevant projects
- Evidence that you have pursued this subject or course over and above what you studied in class
- Course specific work experience
- Additional reading
- Online seminars or courses
- Skills you have acquired as a result of your academic study that are relevant to the course



How should I structure my personal statement?

1

- Introduction and commitment to your chosen course

2

- Academic skills

3

- Beyond the classroom: your interest in the subject

4

- Beyond the classroom: super-curricular activities

5

- Extra-curricular activities

6

- Conclusion



1. Introduction: demonstrate your interest in the subject and make clear why you are determined to study this course.

UCAS revealed the most commonly used opening line: 'From a young age I have (always) been interested in/fascinated by...'



Example (Law)

I first gained an insight into the nuanced and ever-changing nature of law when studying drug abuse laws in Scotland and was particularly struck by the way in which legislation evolves in response to the challenges faced by society.

Avoid: cheesy and clichéd openings; providing a definition of the subject; beginning with a quote or worse, a joke!

2. Academic Skills: Make clear that you have the academic ability to be successful on the course. Give very brief but specific examples that prove you have these skills.

For example (Biomedical Science)

Over the past two years I have developed a blend of scientific knowledge, analytical skills and time management skills, as demonstrated by my success in N5 and Higher Biology and Chemistry. I am also adept at applying and transferring the knowledge I have acquired from one area of study to another. For example, studying molecular structures allowed me a better insight into gene expression. Furthermore, the competent scores I achieved for both my Biology and Chemistry assignments highlights my ability to plan, carry out and evaluate an experiment safely and effectively.

Remember that your grades are on your application – no need to waste valuable characters repeating information!

3. Beyond the Classroom: show that you have pursued an interest in the subject or area of study.

- course specific work shadowing or placements
- online seminars or courses
- additional reading or research
- independent projects
- clubs or groups that are specific to the subject
- speaking to experts

Example (Modern Languages)

*Keen to apply the vocabulary and grammatical structures I had learned, I watched the film *Pan's Labyrinth* with Spanish subtitles and was thrilled when I was able to piece together an understanding of the plot. This spurred me on to challenge myself further by reading online articles on *El Pais*, a habit that is now embedded in my daily routine. By signing up to a language exchange over Zoom, I have been able to converse with a Spanish student who is studying at university in Scotland. Not only has this boosted my confidence in speaking the language, it has also strengthened my determination to study or work in a Spanish speaking country.*

4. Beyond the Classroom: Super curricular: activities you engage in beyond the classroom that increase your skills or understanding of a particular area of study.

Try to think of any projects, challenges, competitions, online courses you have participated in. School trips or work experience that broadened your awareness of a particular aspect of a study could count too!

Example (Civil Engineering)

In S4 I took the lead role in my group for the Young Enterprise challenge. This involved organising and motivating a team of 5 of my peers and maintaining good relations throughout while ensuring that quality and time management was consistent.


As a team we designed our product and negotiated with a local manufacturer who produced it using recycled plastic bottle tops. I gained valuable team work and management skills and we won both regional and national awards including one for 'Innovation'. This also broadened my awareness of the ecological considerations that are now a fundamental aspect of any civil engineering project.



5. Extra Curricular - *how* those hobbies and interests have equipped you with particular skills or experiences that will support you in some way at university.

Example (Primary Teaching)

Outside of the classroom I play an active role in the schools community. As an S6 buddy I have supported a vulnerable S1 pupil make the difficult transition to secondary school. This forced me to re-examine many of the aspects of school life that I take for granted and view them from a different perspective. In addition, I am a member of a local netball team where I now help to coach the Under 12 team. To enable the successful running of the training sessions, I employ different approaches to motivate the children and help them to reach their potential.



Keep linking
the hobby or
experience
to your
course!



Conclusion: Sum up your suitability and interest. Comment on your aspirations in relation to studying this course, learning more about a particular area or career goals.

Successful applicants **do not:**

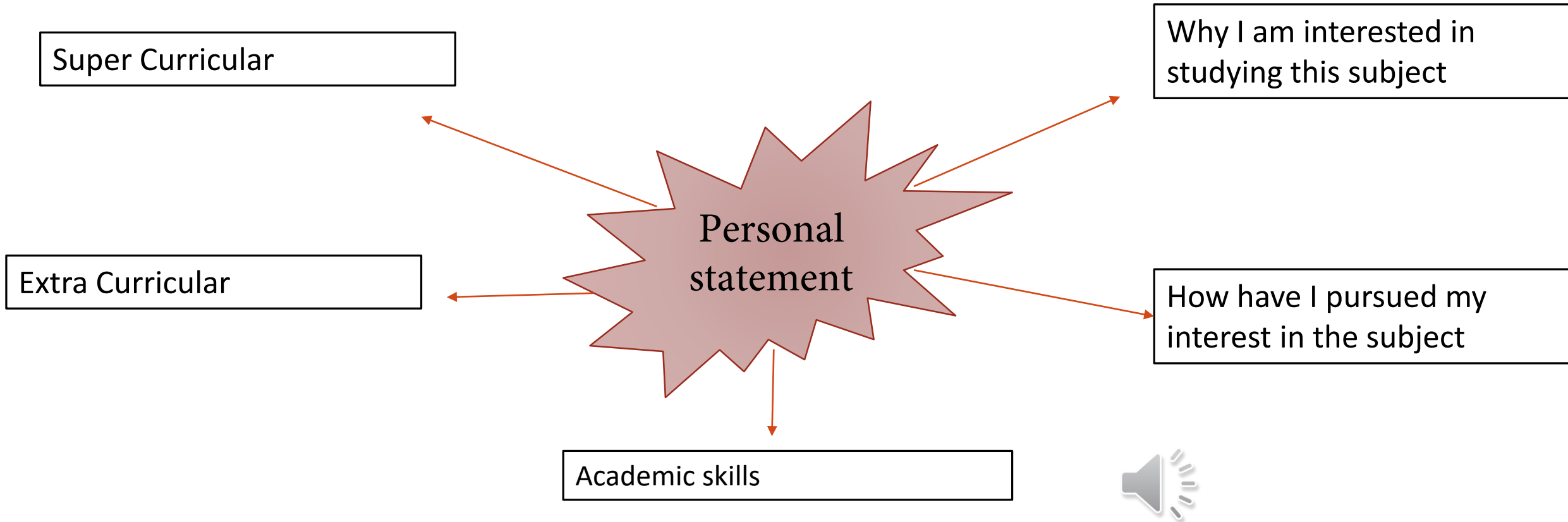
- mention TV programmes or vague, unrealistic career goals
- Explain to an expert which skills you need to be successful in that field
- Make unsubstantiated claims
- Treat it like a letter (you are not directly addressing the reader)

Example (Economics and Statistics)

In recent years my awareness of the economic conditions that gave rise to the 2008 Financial Crisis has grown through my study of statistical models in Maths, as well as my pursuit of further information through reading the Financial Times. I am committed to learning more about the social and political climate of society can impact on the finances of all of its members and, at present, I aspire to a career in actuarial science. As demonstrated, I have the academic ability and the interest to both enjoy and be successful studying a Joint Honours degree in Economics and Statistics.



Before you begin, plan.



Getting started - Overused Opening Lines

- For as long as I can remember I have... Overused opening lines
- I have always been interested in...
- Reflecting on my educational experiences...
- [Insert course here] is a very challenging and demanding [career/profession/course]...
- Throughout my life I have always enjoyed...
- I am applying for this course because...
- I have always wanted to pursue a career in...
- I have always been passionate about...
- From a young age I have (always) been [interested in/fascinated by]...
- Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world...



Your spelling, grammar and punctuation matters!

- Read your personal statement aloud. If it doesn't make sense to you, it won't make sense to anyone else! Make sure that someone else reads it aloud too!
- Write formally; avoid informal language or contractions (e.g. doesn't)
- Avoid cluttering up your sentences with too many adjectives or adverbs.
- It is essential that you punctuate your sentences correctly. Take care to avoid running your sentences together with commas as this can obscure the meaning.
- The apostrophe is only used for two purposes: to join two words together or to indicate possession (i.e. the pupil's personal statement). Apostrophes are not used to make something plural!!
- Vary your sentence openers. Don't begin every sentence with 'I ... I ... I...'



A few more dos and don'ts:

- Avoid repeating yourself as your word count is limited.
- Try to avoid clichés
- Don't include quotations (or jokes!)
- Never provide a definition of the subject or explain what makes a good doctor/teacher/marine biologist.
- Refrain from mentioning any specific universities. Your commitment is to the course or area of study, not the university itself.
- Avoid listing your skills or experiences without passing evaluative comment on them.
- Be truthful as you may be asked to discuss anything you mention in an interview.



Good Luck!



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