

UCAS and the Personal Statement

Useful hints and tips

Personal Statement General Advice

Your personal statement is the part of your application which allows you to explain about your reasons for applying for a particular course/courses as well as explaining the skills and abilities that make you stand out from the crowd.

The basics

- You cannot exceed 47 lines/4000 characters.
- No spell check so write in word and copy over.
- UCAS use similarity detection software – NO JOKE!
- DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR FIRST DRAFT

What should your Personal Statement be?

Your Personal Statement should:

- Be clear and Concise
- Reflect your commitment and suitability for the course
- Be correctly spelled ☐ Be grammatically accurate
- “Sell” you to the University

What are universities looking for?

Universities are looking for your personal statement to:

- Display maturity—show that you are ready for university
- Display ability—show that you have the academic and personal skills and ability to go to university
- Display commitment—show that you have the dedication, reliability and suitability to go to university
- Display knowledge—show that you have an awareness and familiarity with the subject area and courses that you are applying for.

Things that will help

In reading your personal statement, universities will expect you to:

- Display an insight into what the course or ultimate career goal is actually about.
- Show that research into the course/career has been done.

Hints and Tips

- Don’t be shy and retiring in what you are saying about yourself.
- The best personal statements are the ones that sound genuine.
- Consistency in your course choice makes the Personal Statement easier to write.
- You may need to write a few drafts in order to get it right.
- Get someone to look over it.
- Ask yourself if it makes sense? Does it flow? Can you say “so what?” to anything in it?, have you shown that you are a reflective thinker? (You can detail the experiences you have had and the skills you have gained from them.) Have you worked out what information is the most important and ‘adds value’ to what is being discussed in your statement? Have you shown evidence to demonstrate this?
- Don’t use language that does not sound natural to you. If you wouldn’t say it, think about why you want to write it.

Personal Statement General Advice

What makes an effective personal statement?

An effective personal statement should:

- Discuss your choice of course - What interests you about the course?
- Detail any background interest in the area that you are applying for
- Detail any relevant experience explaining the skills you developed through that experience and link back to your choices. Be honest about skills/experiences you have had, do not exaggerate.
- Career aspirations
- Personal achievements
- Positions of responsibility
- Show that you have the skills suited to university life, self disciplined, self-motivated, hardworking, committed and sociable.
- Show that you are somebody who will benefit from life at university—remember that you are there to study. Show that you realise that you need a balance between work and social life.
- Show yourself to be an interesting personality. Try to be specific rather than general about your interests and experiences.

Check spelling, grammar, capitals and punctuation.

Advice about using 'I'

Do not write	Instead write
I am captain of the Football Team...	Being a captain of the Football Team...
I enjoy playing sport	Having enjoyed playing basketball...
I am studying Highers in...	My Higher subjects are...
I enjoy socialising	Socialising is important to me because...
I have taken part in	Taking part in...
I have gained a number of skills	This skills I have gained from...

Creating your Personal Statement

When writing your Personal Statement it is better if you are able to structure it in to sensible paragraphs which contain information about different skills and abilities that you have gained through a variety of experiences. Remember to show that you are a reflective thinker—relate everything you are talking about such as the skills you have gained from an experience back to the course and your career path.

A suggested layout is given below:

Introduction

- Give your reasons for choosing the course you want to do.
- Be enthusiastic about the course
- Career aspiration – brief mention
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New Paragraph

- Write about work experience and link to your core skills e.g. working with others, numeracy, punctuality etc.
- Include work experience from school or any you have arranged and completed personally as part of S6 wider experience

New Paragraph – link all to core skills and your chosen course where appropriate

- Write about school experiences S1 -5
- S6 Wider school experience.
- Extracurricular activities – sport/music/trips/clubs etc.
- Roles within Tutor class / House group
- Charity work

New Paragraph – link all to core skills and your chosen course where appropriate

- Interest out with school – clubs, membership of scouts/BB's
- Relevant experiences outside school – travel, hobbies, sport, part time work

New Paragraph – Concluding statement

- How are you preparing for life at University – financial, practical issues living away from home e.g. cooking for yourself, cleaning rooms and clothes etc.
- Identify an area you have mentioned and find a way to build on it for a concluding comment about your course or suitability for university.
- Career aspiration – more detail

Creating your Personal Statement

Following on from the advice on the previous page, it is important that you evaluate your skills and experience before putting it into succinct paragraphs. In order to help you with this, complete the self-reflection in the boxes.

Why are you applying for the course?

Why does this subject interest you? Include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course.

Why do you think you're suitable for the course(s)? What skills and experience do you have that will help you to be successful in the course?

Do the courses you are studying or have studied relate to the course in any way? If so, how?

Have you participated in any activities that demonstrate your interest in the course?

List the accredited and non-accredited achievements that you have below.

Creating your own Personal Statement

Do you have any positions of responsibility in or out of school that will make you stand out from the crowd?

List all of your hobbies and interests and explain the skills you have gained from them and how they link to the course.

Include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work that you have undertaken, especially linked to your chosen course. List the skills and qualities you developed from them linked to your course.

What are your future plans linked to your career? What do you want to do with your degree after university?

Improving your Personal Statement

The 'before' version – The following student has written a Personal Statement to support an application to read History. It is an early draft which needs improving.

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to pursue the subject at degree level. At university I look forward to examining a range of historical sources. I am particularly interested in French History, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness. As a school prefect I hold many responsibilities: organising and attending school functions, delivering speeches to the school body, being an active member of the school council, working effectively with other students. Having played in school concerts with the keyboard orchestra when I was in S3, I have recently taken up piano lessons.

I am a keen sports player and I am a member of the school hockey team, netball team, the athletics squad and the volleyball team, earning me the "Sports Personality of the Year" Award. I have taught information technology skills to younger students and helped a particular student to overcome language difficulties. I have organised sports days and Christmas parties for the elderly; and written, directed and performed a series of short plays.

I have always enjoyed reading but more recently my Higher studies have enabled me to explore foreign literature.

Currently, I am involved in the European Youth Parliament Competition in which I will be representing my school at a residential debating conference. The winner will represent the United Kingdom in Cyprus. This venture enhanced my general knowledge (specifically of genetic engineering and drug legislation).

The 'after' version – The following student has improved their Personal Statement from the earlier draft.

I have always been fascinated by the past, beginning with childhood interests in time-travel and mythology. This interest continued with student exchanges to France and Germany which gave me the opportunity to study 18th century French history and dictatorship and to widen my historical scope. A trip to France, where I studied issues relating to the World Wars, confirmed my interest in History and my decision to pursue the subject at degree level. At University I look forward to analysing varied interpretations of history and the original sources upon which they are based.

As a school prefect I have held many responsibilities such as organising school events, delivering speeches, and participating actively on the school council. This experience has taught me to use my own initiative, and developed my skills of public speaking and diplomacy. Having played in concerts with the keyboard orchestra, I have recently taken up piano lessons and gained a wider awareness of music, especially of Debussy and romanticism.

Playing in various school sports teams has earned me several awards including that of "Sports personality of the Year", and taught me the importance of communication, team working and self-reliance. Organising a series of plays and other events for the elderly was a fulfilling challenge. I also found that the experience of assisting younger pupils with IT and language development was extremely rewarding. I have also enjoyed reading, but more recently my Higher studies have enabled me to explore foreign literature. Brecht is particularly absorbing for his insight into the way people attempt to overcome the horrors of war.

Currently, I am helping to produce a film for the European Student Travel Company concerning the career opportunities for young people in Europe. Also, I represented my school at a national selection conference for the European Youth Parliament. This venture not only enhanced my general knowledge, but improved my teamwork, language and debating skills, which will be particularly useful for my course at university.

Buzzwords and Key Phrases

Below are some 'buzzwords' and 'key phrases' that you can select from to enhance your Personal Statement or even just to help you write it. This list is by no means definitive and you should only use them if appropriate. Remember, use language that you are familiar with, it will sound better.

IN ADDITION – 'in addition to my work experience I have also gained valuable skills throughout my voluntary work.'

AS WELL AS – 'As well as my involvement in team games I am also keen on playing individual competitive sport.'

REINFORCE – 'My involvement in the school voluntary programme has reinforced my decision to study a degree in Nursing.'

STRENGTHEN – 'My decision to study a degree in Economics has been strengthened by my enjoyment and success in my Higher course.'

FURTHERMORE – 'Furthermore , I am particularly suited to a degree in Chemistry because of my love of the subject and my keen interest to further my knowledge of the subject.'

BESIDES – 'Besides my involvement with sport I am also involved in amateur dramatics.'

NOT TO MENTION – 'Being involved in the voluntary work programme not to mention my work experience has provided an opportunity to work with a diverse range of people.'

MORE RECENTLY – 'Although I have taken part in classical music concerts, more recently I have decided to learn to play the piano.'

ENABLE ME – 'The opportunity to play in the school football team enabled me to work as part of a team.'

PROVIDED ME – 'The work experience provided me with an opportunity to work with a range of people.'

OPPORTUNITY TO – 'The opportunity to work with people was provided by my work experience.'

Through my experience.....

I believe that as a result of my participation in.....

Communicator/communication skills

Team player

Time management skills

Effective at managing my time through

Developed my interpersonal skills

Leadership abilities

Positive and enthusiastic person

Use my own initiative

Problem solving abilities

Creative person

Responsible person

Encouraged me to develop....

Resources and Help Guides

Medicine: As part of preparing for your Medicine Degree, some courses require you will be expected to be able to type as quickly as you write

- www.goodtyping.com
- www.sense-lang.org
- www.typeonline.co.uk

www.ucas.com – UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) Details of degree courses throughout the UK. Includes course search by subject and/or institution, course profiles, university/college information, student finance. Also includes Apply, the on-line application system used by applicants to UK universities.

www.myworldofwork.co.uk – Skills Development Scotland's website. Provides information on Higher National and Degree courses as well as a Graduate Portal for details of graduate careers.

www.planitplus.net - PlanIT Contains information on all full and part time courses at Scottish colleges including Higher National Certificates/ Diplomas, along with information on degree courses at Scottish universities.

<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk> - Unistats Detailed information on the going rate for entry to courses. Also includes a survey of current students' views of their course, including how it is taught and assessed, level of academic support provided, availability of learning resources including libraries and IT facilities. Data on graduate employment destinations for individual courses.

www.push.co.uk - PUSH Online The ultimate Guide to student life, university and everything! Researched by students and recent graduates. Includes brief university profiles, university links to student unions/newspaper websites, information on how to apply, prices of beer, a jargon buster and lots more.

www.prospects.ac.uk - Prospects - the essential guide to graduate careers, jobs and postgraduate study in the UK. Gives information about employment opportunities in its 'What do Graduates Do' section.

www.saas.gov.uk - Student Awards Agency for Scotland Information on all aspects of student funding including bursaries and student loans. Scottish students studying in Scotland do not pay tuition fees for their courses. Some students may be eligible for a non-repayable Young Student Bursary depending on the level of their family's income. All students can apply for a non-income assessed repayable loan of up to £4500 per annum. Look at this site to find out more about the cost of Higher Education.

www.latitude.org.uk - GAP Year Activities Projects Information on 'Year Out' opportunities. Over 1,500 placements for UK volunteers in 34 countries across the world each year. There are opportunities in schools, conservation, medicine, outdoor activities and caring.

Resources and Help Guides

For more detailed information on courses and entry requirements, look at individual websites for example:

www.gla.ac.uk - Glasgow University

www.aledonian.ac.uk - Glasgow Caledonian University

www.gsa.ac.uk - Glasgow School of Art

www.strath.ac.uk - Strathclyde University

www.uws.ac.uk - University of the West of Scotland

www.stir.ac.uk - Stirling University

www.ed.ac.uk - Edinburgh University

www.hw.ac.uk - Heriot-Watt University

www.napier.ac.uk - Edinburgh Napier University

www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/edinburgh-college-art - Edinburgh College of Art

www.qmu.ac.uk - Queen Margaret University (Edinburgh)

www.abertay.ac.uk - Abertay University Dundee

www.dundee.ac.uk - Dundee University

www.abdn.ac.uk - Aberdeen University

www.rgu.ac.uk - Robert Gordon University (Aberdeen)

www.st-andrews.ac.uk - St Andrews University

www.sruc.ac.uk - Scottish Agricultural College

www.uhi.ac.uk - University of the Highlands and Islands

www.rca.ac.uk - Royal Conservatoire of Scotland