

How to write your personal statement for university.

Your complete guide to planning, writing, and submitting a personal statement that'll catch the eye of undergraduate admissions tutors and help you find a place on your dream degree.

INTRODUCTION

Writing an eye-catching personal statement could be the very thing that earns you a place studying your dream subject at your favourite university.

It might be the first time you've written anything like this, and there's so much advice out there on personal statement 'dos' and 'don'ts', how can you tell which advice is best? All of our advice comes from university staff who read and assess personal statements every year. These guidelines come stamped with our 'admissions team seal of approval', so you know they're guaranteed to help you find a place on the course of your dreams.

So read on to discover everything you need to know about writing your personal statement for university.

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WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

The personal statement is a vital part of your UCAS application. It's your first opportunity to showcase your ambitions, skills, and experience in your own words to university and college admissions staff.

A personal statement also communicates your passion and flair for your subject.

It's a piece of writing that's personal to you.

While it might seem an impossible task to fit all of this into just a few paragraphs, it can be done, and we'll help you with some easy steps.

THE BASICS

Even if you're applying to five Universities, **you can only write one personal statement.** What you write must reflect your suitability for all courses you're applying to.

Your personal statement should be:

- no more than 4,000 characters (including spaces)
- in size 12 font
- in clear paragraphs
- the truth
- written by you, to University admissions staff
- new information, and shouldn't repeat anything already on your form

"The personal statement is the first thing we actually see that you've written. It's so important to keep your knowledge up to date. Read newspapers, current affairs, and be aware of what's going on in the world now and use it."

Josh Jowitt, in the Law School Admissions Team

WHAT DO ADMISSIONS TUTORS LOOK FOR IN A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Though personal statements written for different courses will need to include slightly different things, there are some universal qualities that all admissions tutors look for.

You'll need to include:

Why are you applying to study this subject?

Think about what interests you about your subject and why you want to spend the next three years studying it. Tie it into your ambitions and future career.

Why do you want to enter higher education?

Many students forget to include why they're interested in going onto further study at all. Is there particular knowledge you need to get into your dream job, or are there personal skills you want to develop as you study?

Are you a part of any other relevant activity?

Include any extra-curricular activities, clubs, or societies you belong to. Don't forget the skills you've gained through programmes like Duke of Edinburgh, ASDAN, the Scout Association, National Citizen Service, and more.

What makes you suitable for the course?

List any relevant experience you have or achievements you've gained while at school or college.

Work experience could come in here, too. Think outside the box and look for transferable skills. After all – if you're planning on studying archaeology you may never have been on a historical dig but you might have been metal detecting or volunteered at a museum

Have you taken part in a higher education taster course?

Don't forget to mention if you've taken part in a higher education placement, summer school, or taster course. Describe how what you learned impacted your decision to go onto higher education.

Attending these courses demonstrates your dedication to preparing for academic life early.

"Write about your extra-curricular activities and give us some insight into what you like to do in your personal time, especially if it's relevant to the subject area."

Richard Glenton, Deputy Manager of the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering)

HOW TO WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

STEP 1: DO YOUR RESEARCH

This is the time to start getting organised.

Think back over the past few years and **list your attributes and reasons for applying** on [this downloadable UCAS worksheet](#) or [use UCAS's online inspiration tool](#). You don't even need to write in full sentences at this point, just get down as many points as possible before you forget them.

If you're struggling for ideas, try thinking outside the box. You'll have developed lots of valuable transferable skills from clubs, societies, hobbies, or part time jobs.

Depending on how early you start planning your personal statement, there might even be time for you to do a mini-placement or volunteer for a couple of days in a related area. Look for gaps in your experience and see if you can identify ways to fill them.

If you're stuck for ideas, ask one of your subject teachers for advice.

"I used a mind-map to get all my ideas out there, even if I didn't end up including them all. There's a great structuring sheet on the UCAS website, which is a great tool to help plan your personal statement."

Emily, Graduate Ambassador (and Geography Graduate)

HOW TO WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

STEP 2: STRUCTURING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

In the same way you might when you write an essay, it's easiest to break down your personal statement into smaller, manageable chunks.

The Opening

Your opening should be memorable, strong, and get to the point quickly. You need to prove that you know what you're applying for, and that you're prepared to get stuck in.

It must communicate your excitement, enthusiasm, and motivation to succeed. Don't just say you find the subject interesting – explain **why** you find it interesting.

Be succinct and draw the reader in, but don't be tempted to use gimmicks or puns. Be honest, and use personal examples to demonstrate your commitment to studying your chosen subject. Write what comes naturally, and if your own personal tone of voice starts to filter through, that's a good thing (as long as you don't stray from the point you're making!)

TOP TIP

Sometimes it's easier to write the introduction last!

"A big 'don't' tends to be to try and be overly witty or humorous, as it doesn't always go down very well!"

Rachel, Graduate Ambassador (and English Literature and Language Graduate)

"Get the first sentence right. When I read a personal statement, the first sentence is really crucial to make that first judgement."

Simon Benson, Undergraduate Admissions Tutor for Marine Technology

The Middle

This is where you flesh out your suitability and experience and is the main body of your personal statement.

As you start to include everything you noted down earlier, keep checking your work to make sure you've included a good balance of:

Academic skills

If you're already studying the subject, include which parts of it have inspired you and why. If you're applying to study a new subject, think about how your current subjects link to your chosen degree and how they nurture your interest.

Interpersonal skills

Pepper the middle with transferable interpersonal skills that an admissions tutor might be looking out for.

Always back each skill up with a practical example of how you've applied it in the real world, whether it's at a part-time job, by taking part in sport, or by winning an award.

Hobbies and interests

Link these to your course if you can, but even if you can't, they'll demonstrate that you're a well-rounded person who actively takes part and isn't afraid to get involved.

Don't forget to include why you enjoy what you do and how it's all helped to make you who you are today.

"Avoid generalised statements. You've a limited amount of space on the application form, so try to stay clear of them. Instead, write things that set you apart from others and show why you want to study the subject."

Adam Behr, Undergraduate Admissions Tutor for Music

HOW TO WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

The Ending

Think of this as the part where you bring together your passion, suitability, and motivations.

Succinctly revisit the key points you want the admissions tutor to remember the most, and summarise how they all contribute to making you a great candidate for the course.

Another approach is to include a few words about how the university experience will help you develop as a person. This could be building your confidence when meeting new people, or living and learning independently from home.

Finally, make your ending forward-looking, dynamic, and optimistic. You don't need to plan out the next twenty years of your life, but try to show how your chosen course ties into your future career plans.

And finally, don't leave on a cliffhanger!

"Show your ambitions. Show what you plan for your career and how ultimately studying this programme will shape your future."

Tom Hill, Programme Director for the Food and Nutrition degree programme

Vocabulary and Grammar

Write your personal statement naturally, letting your passion and positivity shine through. Keep sentences short and simple. The easier it is for admissions tutors to understand what you're trying to say, the better!

Think about any particular words that might show an admissions tutor that you've done your research. Scan through course information on university websites, and write down the words and terms to use when describing your interest in particular subjects.

Always be specific when giving examples of your experience, naming companies you've worked with or volunteered for.

Using active and dynamic words can really help to make your personal statement pop. Show your academic prowess and personal skills with words and phrases like:

Well-organised

Meeting deadlines

Critical thinking

Research

Evaluation

Analysing

Investigative

Experimental

Working independently

Problem-solving

Responsible

Co-operating and team-working

Time management

Independent and pro-active

Efficiency

Trustworthy and reliable

Using initiative

Self-motivated

"Avoid any elaborate or pretentious language. Try to articulate yourself in a clear and concise manner."

Richard Glenton, Deputy Manager of the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering)

EDITING AND PROOF-READING

Your personal statement mustn't exceed 4,000 characters (including spaces).

It's sometimes easier to write more than you need in your first draft, and then edit out unnecessary words. This way, you'll still include all of your examples but in a more concise word-count.

When you think you're done, give these proof-reading techniques a go

- get a parent, sibling, or friend to read your personal statement through for spelling mistakes or typos
- read what you've written out loud, slowly
- print out a copy. Sometimes it's easier to edit on a paper copy than via a screen
- our brain automatically 'corrects' wrong words inside sentences. Try reading your personal statement backwards to notice each word individually
- change the font or size to see your personal statement in a new light
- make sure one read-through is just for punctuation, particularly missing full stops, upper and lower case text, and apostrophes

"For me, I'm looking for interest and drive for the subject. I'm also quite keen to see that it's grammatically correct and doesn't have any spelling errors. You'll be surprised how many of them do, and that can give the wrong impression."

James, Undergraduate Admissions Tutor for Archaeology

AND FINALLY...SUBMIT BEFORE THE DEADLINE

After you've tried some of our proof-reading techniques, do at least one more complete read-through before you submit. Try to do it on a day when you haven't been working on your statement at all.

Give yourself enough time before the deadline to not have to rush. The UCAS deadline for dentistry and medical courses is 15 October, and the deadline for other courses is generally 15 January. Find out if your school sets its own earlier deadline.

"And finally, prove to us that out of all your A-Levels you really do want to do this one subject."

Andrew, Undergraduate Admissions Tutor for Chemistry

And there you have it

Follow our step by step guide to crafting a captivating personal statement and you're already on your way to finding a place on your dream degree.

Here are some further resources to help you as you plan, write, and proof-read your personal statement:

[UCAS personal statement worksheet](#)

[UCAS's online inspiration tool](#)

[UCAS's advice on how to write a personal statement](#)

[Which? University's personal statement examples](#)