



HOW TO WRITE A GREAT PERSONAL STATEMENT

What is the Personal Statement?

Your chance to showcase your strengths...

The personal statement is a short essay submitted on your UCAS form about your academic and personal experience. It has to be no more than 4,000 characters (including spaces) and 47 lines maximum. This is your chance to “sell yourself” to universities and showcase your skills and strengths. You should aim to make the personal statement as unique as possible so that it stands out from those of other applicants. Remember that the average admissions tutor will have to read hundreds of personal statements, so if yours is interesting and compelling you have a much greater chance of being offered a place.

How to structure your personal statement:

The starting sentence

1. Make your opening sentence is powerful. A good way to do this is to use examples of experiences you have had which illustrate your interest in the subject or course you are applying for. For e.g. if you want to study history you could write something like:

Finding my Great Grandfather's name on a war grave during a recent trip to France has made me truly realise for the first time how historical events affected real people and how we are all connected to what has happened in the past.

You might then go on to illustrate this with other examples of books you have read, lectures you have been to and so on. In the same way if you were applying for Geography you might write:

Speaking to foreign workers during my summer job at a fruit farm, has given me a greater understanding of the cost of human migration and the economic factors which drive people to work away from their families and country of origin.”

These kinds of statements provide the student with an opening to discuss their interest and experience of the subject they wish to study. Some people find it to easier to plan their

Personal Statement first and leave writing the opening sentence to the end when they have a clearer idea of what they wish to say.

2. DO NOT start (as many people do!) by saying something like:

Since I was a child, I have been deeply fascinated by and have wanted to study Sociology

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You should also avoid overused quotes or words like “passionate” or “deeply fascinated”. Remember that the best opening sentences refer to your experiences. It is worth thinking about your memories and trying to apply them to what you wish to study.

Interests, experiences and strengths

1. **Themes and structure:** During your Personal Statement you will need to provide evidence of your interests, experiences and strengths. You might consider having three or four paragraphs which directly relate to observations about your subject, based on your experiences and personal study. Try to make sure that everything you mention is evidence-based.

2. **Making connections:** If you are applying to study an academic subject you should refer to books or papers you have read that show your interest beyond the set texts or material which is compulsory to study for the syllabus. This might mean keeping up with the latest research available (think about subscribing to relevant magazines) or keeping an eye out for relevant newspaper articles or referring to current affairs if they relate to your subject. Reading around your subject and making connections between the different materials you have studied demonstrates that you are capable of thinking in a mature and informed way.

3. **Be unique!** It is very impressive when students appear to have done or read or arranged experiences for themselves, rather than relying on school or parents to provide all the opportunities. Do try to include examples which show that you have taken the initiative to research material for yourself.

2. **Relevant skills and extracurricular activities:** The final paragraph of your personal statement can be used to explore some of your wider interests – although it is good if you can relate these back to the subject you are applying for. You might want to consider what you have gained from the courses that you are studying in school and also look at work or voluntary experience that demonstrates your qualities or says something interesting about you.

It is worth thinking about your subject and the kinds of qualities needed for study. What type of person are they looking for? Someone who is curious? Tenacious? Committed? A risk taker? Capable of multi-tasking? (see “Further research” below). At the very least you might like to demonstrate that you have the “sticking power” to complete the course. A TES survey in 2017 found that more than 6% of students drop out of university within the first year. Mentioning something that you have been committed to over a certain period of time – such as a regular job, playing in a sports team, being in a play or undertaking a programme like The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, illustrates that you have the ability to finish something you have started!

3. Further research: Some courses and some universities look for people with particular qualities (e.g. see “soft skills” required by medics www.bussats.com/assets/fittobeadoctor-softskills.pdf.) Some seek to recruit candidates who will give to the wider community and take part in university life, but others might prefer a more academic approach and pay less attention to extracurricular activities. You might think about tailoring your personal statement according to the kind of universities you are applying to. For further advice speak to your teachers, look at the university websites (many of them have sections explaining what they are looking for in candidates) or try to attend an Open Day where you can speak in person to members of staff.

The Conclusion

1. Ideally your conclusion should tie together your arguments, perhaps referring back to your opening sentence. You might consider mentioning how you would use the qualification in the future to fulfill your goals. Try to use the conclusion to convey concisely your key message.

2. Avoid using clichés, such as “I will give 110% to the course” or “I am so looking forward to studying at your university.”

Final word

It is important that the personal statement is your summary and above all that it is true. You are allowed to accept advice from teachers or family members, but remember that ultimately it must be your voice and your words on the application form. Every year a few students are caught out by copying or extensively using phrases that have been submitted by other candidates. Your application will be rejected if you go down this route. All personal statements that go to UCAS are put through a “similarity detection programme” so it is not worth taking the risk!

You should also check the personal statement before you submit it to make sure there are no spelling mistakes or grammatical errors.

HOW TO WRITE A CV

Opening doors...

It can seem a little daunting to write a CV when you haven't had much work experience and you are applying for jobs straight after school. However, most employers understand what you are up against (remember that once they too had to start out for the first time!) and want to give opportunities to young people, especially if they appear to be keen and motivated. Indeed, sometimes being relatively "untried" will play to your advantage because you will be coming into the workplace without any preconceptions about how things should be done. Employers like taking people on and being able to train or mould them in a particular style, so that they are specifically equipped to do the job.

Online profile: Many applications are now made online, so you might think about creating an online profile, as well as having something available on paper. On that note, do remember to watch your "brand" as 40% of employers check up on your social networking! According to The Times employers are trawling social media sites to check job applicants' activities, to learn about your "unofficial" persona. The sort of things you might want to keep an eye on are your use of "language", any compromising postings and who you are friends with. Now is the time for you to make sure your privacy settings are in place and that there is no material readily available which you would prefer them not to see. What might seem like amusing banter amongst friends could be regarded in a much less tolerant light by a prospective employer.

Even if you are applying to university and are completing a personal statement you may also find it useful to create a CV as well. Having one on file makes it easier when you are applying for holiday jobs or internships. You will have to adapt each one to make it applicable to the job you are seeking, but once the template is there this is already much easier than starting from scratch.

1. Writing your CV:

Getting Started

Keep it short – usually not more than two sides of A4. If you have also had to fill in a separate application form, you might want to cut it down a little further. You will need to give the following information:

Full name and address (+ date of birth which is optional, but recommended) Other contact details (email, mobile etc.) and photo
Objective & Opening Statement: This is a one or two sentence summary of your talents and objectives. You should try to encapsulate what you have to offer (talents, skills etc) and what your goals are – i.e. what is your INTENT

For e.g.

I am an enthusiastic student chef looking for a hard-working role in a top catering company. I want to develop my skills base, building on the reputation of my prize-winning Student Cook Book – featuring recipes inspired by those collected during my holiday job at the Cardiff International Food Festival.

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I am a friendly, reliable person who works well in a team but also on my own. I am looking for work in the hospitality sector. Volunteering as a helper at a day care centre has helped me to develop my listening and communication skills and I am happy to take on new challenges.

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A highly motivated and hardworking student, seeking an apprenticeship in the engineering industry. My career goal is to become a fully-qualified maintenance or electrical engineer, with the long-term aspiration of moving into project management.

Remember:

Your opening statement might change in tone to suit different applications

Job History and relevant experience:

You should include anything which shows you have taken the initiative to gain experiences of work beyond your studies at school. This could be work placements, holiday jobs, volunteering, and positions of responsibility within your school or wider community. Pick what you include carefully. You should aim to have at least three examples which showcase your skills best. Do not list too many jobs - the employer will understand that you are young and haven't had the opportunity for much professional work.

The experience you have had may not be directly connected to the position you are applying for, but many of the qualities you have displayed (such as reliability, hard work, creative thinking, problem solving, communication skills etc.) will be transferable. You should list the experience in date order (starting with the most recent) and follow it with a brief outline of your duties: For e.g.

Waiter, Goldington Holiday Camps, July 2017- August 2017: Responsible for serving sandwiches, snacks and beverages to families attending play events over the summer. Duties included working in a team, handling food, clearing tables, maintaining hygiene standards and dealing with members of the public in a friendly and efficient manner.

Junior Lighting Director, Willingdon School Drama Department, June 2016, May 2017: Responsible for working closely with the cast and back stage team to create lighting effects

for school performances. Duties included setting up and operating equipment during rehearsals, following safety guidelines and procedures.

Education:

List the name of your school and address and include all public exam qualifications you have successfully taken (or are currently studying for). E.g.

Willingdon School, Kent TN11 9LT

BTEC, Applied Science Level 3 – due to take June 2018

GSCE:

Maths A

Combined Science B

English Language C

Art C

Geography C

Other Skills:

You may also wish to include other relevant qualifications such as certificates in First Aid, Life Saving, etc. Also extracurricular activities such as sport, music, reading, cinema etc.

References:

Ideally choose two people who know you well and can outline your strengths and skills. One is likely to be a teacher from your school and the other might be a work placement employer, minister or community leader. Do make sure you ask them if they are willing to do this before giving their details on your CV! You should include their job title, name and address, phone number and email.

Your Online Profile

74% of employers use social media to attract candidates, according to the 2015 Recruiter Nation Survey, so if you aren't looking at what is available online you could be missing out on some great opportunities. Think about the following to help you create an online profile:

- Creating an account with LinkedIn/ Twitter
- Writing Blogs, creating your own website
- Adding your CV to online job sites

Online CV or LinkedIn profile:

What is LinkedIn?

It's a social network for professionals. Whether you're a school leaver or student looking for first time work or senior business executive, it helps you look for future career options. On

LinkedIn you add "connections" in the same way that you'd make a friend request on Facebook. The difference is that all your professional experience and achievements are laid out in an organised profile to show off to other users. In general, if you know how to use Facebook or other social networking sites, LinkedIn is similar.

Your HEADLINE (this is the equivalent of the Objective and Opening Statement – as discussed above) Keep it professional, but memorable. Use a good profile picture, where you look relaxed but professional (this is not a chance for you to do a posed selfie as that will not give the right impression!) URL customisation: Make it easy to search for YOU

Be creative – you can use videos, images, audio etc. Try to paint a portrait of your skills & experience (not just lists of duties). It is helpful if you can use appropriate words to describe industry experience – see what experienced employees are saying and how they refer to trade-specific tasks and equipment. As always, WATCH SPELLING, GRAMMAR etc.

Email communication:

These should be business-like, friendly but formal. Use 'title' until invited to use first names. Again, do remember to check spelling and punctuations and don't use emoticons or "textese". If you apply for a job by email, do remember to check for responses and try to answer them speedily.