

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement is one section of the UCAS form where you can tell universities and colleges why you are applying for the course(s) you have chosen and why they should want you as a student. It is primarily an academic statement so you must target it directly towards the subject in which you are interested.

This is your opportunity to “talk” directly to the admissions tutor of the course you want to study. It is a crucial part of the application and you should devote a great deal of time to it. The content, style and presentation are important, so do ask members of staff to look through and comment - but, remember this is meant to be *personal* and reflect your views.

You can use Unifrog to draft and complete your personal statement.

You must not send your UCAS form in until you have had your personal statement checked by the Careers Department and then your Housemaster/mistress.

General Advice:

- You only have 4,000 characters (including spaces) everything you include should be of interest to the admissions tutor - don't waste valuable space.
- The statement will likely contain a number of 'I's - try to break these up by swapping sentences around e.g. instead of 'I enjoy sport...' try 'Sport is important to me...'
- As a rough guide, about three quarters of your personal statement should be dedicated to your academic interests with a quarter on your extracurricular achievements and activities.
- You only write one personal statement for all your university choices - ensure you have consistency in your course choices.
- Take your time. It will take a number of drafts - the process of redrafting is important, but at the same time you need to know when to stop. Don't ruin your statement by over-editing it.
- Do seek the opinions of others, but be selective in who you ask and choosy in who you listen to.

Remember : The admissions tutor only knows as much you tell them!

What to do:

- This is a formal document showing evidence of your intellectual ability and suitability for a course: you might have excellent predicted grades, fantastic work experience and a sparkling personality, but poor spelling and grammar won't put you in the best light.
- Demonstrate your potential for academic debate and intellectual depth by expanding statements like “I read The Economist every week” to include some examples of topics you have found interesting, e.g. 'I have been developing my understanding of the economics surrounding Fair Trade by regularly reading articles in The Economist'.
- What the admissions tutor really wants to see is evidence. If you consider yourself to be an excellent communicator, mention successful presentations you

have made in school or elsewhere. If you assert that law is definitely the career for you, the admissions tutor will be curious to know about how you know this to be true. Have you read around the subject, had work experience in a law firm, for example?

- Be honest. Never suggest knowledge that you have not got, or refer to a book you have not read. If you attend an interview, you may get caught out if you are then asked to elaborate on something you have mentioned in your personal statement.

What to avoid:

- Clichéd opening sentences e.g. 'For as long as I can remember, I have always been interested in...'
- Writing a list of all your achievements/work experience/books you have read. Reflect on your achievements rather than listing them.
- Pretentiousness - keep your style clear, concise and simple. Admissions tutors generally do not like overly complicated language and use of big impressive words for the sake of sounding intellectual.
- Cheesy words and phrases e.g. instead of saying 'I, myself, consider...' why not say 'I believe...'
- Humour/jokes/puns/hilarious anecdotes - this is not the time or place to try to be funny!
- Excessive self-advertisement - avoid letting positive self-presentation appear as immodesty or arrogance e.g. 'My mature approach to studies sets me apart from others...'
- Conformity - too many personal statements are formulaic and say what applicants feel they ought to say rather than what they actually feel.

Things to include:

It is very important that you plan your statement carefully and ensure that you do not undersell yourself by failing to cover all bases.

- Provide convincing reasons why you want to study your chosen subject(s).
- Demonstrate academic interest in the subject - it must mean something to you beyond the classroom and has taken you further than the syllabus.
- For certain subjects (especially medicine, dentistry, paramedical degrees and teaching) provide evidence of relevant work experience or voluntary work you have undertaken. Most importantly - reflect on your experiences and give an indication of what you have learned as a result.
- For courses that will be 'new' to you e.g. law, architecture and engineering, work shadowing will help to demonstrate that you have done as much research as possible to find out what the course and career will entail so that you are making an informed choice.
- Provide evidence of your skills and achievements that demonstrate your potential for your chosen course.
- Demonstrate knowledge of current affairs, especially stories relevant to the subject to which you have applied: do you read a newspaper? can you see the broader picture?
- If applicable, provide details of non-accredited skills and achievements gained through activities such as Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- Demonstrate that you are able to balance academic life with other activities.

Extra-curricular activities and interests and positions of responsibility are useful indicators

- If you are applying for deferred entry, provide details of what you plan to do on your gap year and your reasons for doing it.

Conclusion:

Remind the Admissions Tutor that you are clear about your desire to study your chosen course so make sure you end on a strong, positive note.

And finally.....What not to include:

Your personal statement is not the only thing that the universities will read about you. Your Housemaster/mistress will add an academic reference to your form which will generally cover e.g. positions of responsibility held, your contribution to the School and community, any difficulties that might have affected your academic performance to date, etc. - so you do not need to include this. Likewise all your academic grades are recorded on your UCAS form - you do not need to comment on them in your statement.