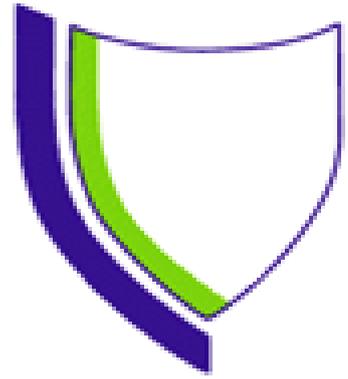


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Your UCAS
personal statement

UCAS

at the heart of connecting
people to higher education

Your personal statement

Tell the universities and colleges why they should choose you

The personal statement is your opportunity to tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study. You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, **ensure that you stand out from the crowd.**

Key points

Explain **why you want to study the course** you are applying for. If you mention your personal interests and hobbies, try to link them to the skills and experience required for the course.

The personal statement could be used as the basis for an **interview**, so be prepared to answer questions on it.

This may be your only written work that the course tutor sees before making a decision: make sure it is organised and literate. **Get the grammar, spelling and punctuation right.** A statement filled with errors will give a negative impression of your skills and the effort you have put in to being accepted.

The Undergraduate Admissions Manager at The University of Nottingham says:

'These types of skills are the basics that academics will expect from someone at this level of education. Incorrect spelling, poor grammar and punctuation can make a poor impression on the reader. For courses such as English, these skills are of paramount importance.'

Writing about yourself is probably not something you do very often, so you might need to practise writing in this particular style. It is a good idea to list your hobbies and achievements, and then you can decide which ones demonstrate your strongest skills and personality

Applying to multiple courses

Remember that you only write one personal statement so it will be used for all your choices. Try not to mention a university or college by name, even if you're applying to only one university - your personal statement cannot be changed if you apply to a different place later.

If you're applying for a joint degree you will need to explain why you are interested in both aspects of this joint programme.

If you're applying for different subjects or courses, you need to identify the common themes and skills that are relevant to your choices. For example, both mathematics and law are subjects where you have to think logically and apply rules.

You may like both subjects because you enjoy solving problems, using theory and natural or man-made laws to come to a correct conclusion.

If your chosen courses can't be linked by a common theme, think about your reasons for applying to such varied courses - it might be useful to speak to your Learning Mentor or Head of Year to get some guidance.

If you mention a subject in your personal statement and are applying to other courses, you may be asked by the university or college for additional information about why you have chosen alternative courses.

Attention-grabbing

Some statements start with quotes, some include jokes, and some set out to be unusual or eye-catching. Sometimes it works, but it might have the opposite effect to what you hoped. The admissions decision maker may not share your sense of humour so be careful when trying to make your statement stand out.

Write what comes naturally

Which of the following examples would you write?

- a) Objective consideration of concrete evidence compelled me to realise the phenomenon was not unprecedented.
- b) I realised this often happened.

This is not a serious example; but it shows that good writing is often concise, which is very helpful when you have a limited word-count.

In your personal statement you need to put your meaning across directly and simply. You can do this by keeping your sentences to an average of 12-20 words, and using language in a way that is natural to you. Avoid sounding either over-familiar or over-formal and write to get yourself and your message across clearly. Check that each sentence adds something new; otherwise it is just adding to the word count rather than adding value.

The quality of your writing reflects the quality of your thinking. Show that you know your strengths and can outline your ideas clearly. Use words you know will be understood by the person reading your statement; you might find it easier if you imagine you are talking to them across their desk. In fact, you can sometimes spot where your statement doesn't work well by reading it aloud.

What to include

Most courses have an Entry Profile that you can view in Course Search - these explain what the university is looking for in their students and what qualifications or experience you'll need for the course. Check these because they'll give you some ideas about what to include in your statement.

Below are some suggestions of what to include in your personal statement. These are guidelines only so don't worry if some of the suggestions do not apply to you.

Writing about the course

Two of the most important things to include are:

- **Why you're applying for the course you've chosen:** this is particularly important when you're applying for a subject that you have not studied before. Tell the university the reasons why that subject interests you, and include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course, e.g. if applying for psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is.
- **Why you're suitable for the course:** tell the universities the skills and experience you have that will help you to succeed on the course.

Also think about:

- how your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen
- any activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)
- Why you want to go to university or college.

Looking at some of the reasons why applications were unsuccessful indicated these responses that were sent to applicants last year:

- Your personal statement does not strongly support your desire to study your chosen degree.
- Your personal statement did not show sufficient understanding, relevance or knowledge about the course you are applying for.
- You failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and interest in the subject in your personal statement.
- There is a lot of competition for places on this course and your personal statement and experience was not as strong as other applicants this year.
- Application form (including personal statement, reference and predicted grades) does not evidence accurate understanding of or motivation for subject.
- Unsuccessful as you have not expressed a strong enough interest in the subject area in your personal statement.

This should give you an idea of how important it is to show **why you want to study the course** and **what you can bring to it** - especially because it might be compared with other applicants applying for the same course.

Skills and achievements

Universities like to know the types of skills you have that will help you on the course, or generally at university. They also like to see if you've been involved in any accredited or non-accredited achievements. Include:

- non-accredited skills and achievement which you have gained through activities such as:
 - CREST awards
 - Duke of Edinburgh Award
 - Ouseaward
 - Young Enterprise.
- any other achievements that you are proud of, e.g. reaching grade 3 piano or being selected for the county cricket team.
- positions of responsibility that you hold/have held both in and out of school, e.g. form prefect or representative for a local charity.
- attributes that make you interesting, special or unique.

Hobbies and interests

- Think about how your hobbies, interests and social activities demonstrate your skills and abilities. If there's anything that relates to your course or to the skills needed to complete a higher education course, include it - the more evidence the better.
- The Assistant Registrar for Undergraduate Admissions from University of Warwick says that:

'The strongest applicants are those who can link their extra-curricular activities to their proposed course of study.'

- Your statement will be more convincing and personal if you write about why an experience, activity or interest makes you a good candidate for the course. Include enough additional information to make it interesting and to demonstrate your own interest. Rather than making a statement such as *'I enjoy badminton'*
- Try to provide context and show what you have learnt
- *'I play badminton twice a week with a club that plays in local competitions and I play in both singles and doubles matches. Doubles matches requires good team working, an ability to support your partner, to devise a game plan but be able to adapt it as required and fast'*

reactions. I enjoy the social side of the club and take responsibility for organising the social activities and fundraising events. This gives me an opportunity to develop my organisational and planning skills. Fitting in all these activities while keeping up with my academic studies demands good time management and I think I do that very well.'

Work experience

- Include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen course(s). Try to link any experience to skills or qualities mentioned in the Entry Profiles. For example, rather than just saying:

'I spent two weeks working at a department store. I enjoyed speaking to customers and helping them with their enquiries'

you could say,

'I spent two weeks managing customer enquiries at a department store. I learnt how to interact with customers and handle complaints. The experience highlighted the importance of positive communication between a business and its customers, and taught me how to manage difficult enquiries effectively. I would like to develop this skill further by studying a degree in public relations.'

Future plans

- If you know what you'd like to achieve after completing a university course, explain how you want to use the knowledge and experience that you gain.

Dos and don'ts

- **Do** expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy.
- **Do** ask people you trust for their feedback.
- **Do** check university and college prospectuses, websites and [Entry Profiles](#), as they usually tell you the criteria and qualities that they want their students to demonstrate.
- **Do** use your best English and **don't** let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your statement.
- **Do** be enthusiastic - if you show your interest in the course, it may help you get a place.

- **Don't** feel that you need to use elaborate language. If you try too hard to impress with long words that you are not confident using, the focus of your writing may be lost.
- **Don't** say too much about things that are not relevant - if you think that you are starting to, take a break and come back to your statement when you feel more focused.
- **Don't** lie - if you exaggerate you may get caught out at interview when asked to elaborate on an interesting achievement.
- **Don't** rely on a spellchecker as it will not pick up everything - proof read as many times as possible.
- **Don't** leave it to the last minute - your statement will seem rushed and important information could be left out.
- **Don't** expect to be able to write your personal statement whilst watching TV or surfing the internet - this is your future, so make the most of the opportunity to succeed.

Size and presentation

Structure and format

- Think about the structure of your statement - it needs to look and sound good. A bad statement can say a lot, so make sure you check spelling and grammar as well.
- A representative from Ulster Business School says:

'The presentation of the personal statement is of critical importance to demonstrate use of English language and grammar at a standard suitable for entry to higher education.'

How to provide your personal statement

- You can enter up to 4,000 characters (this includes spaces) or 47 lines of text (this includes blank lines), whichever comes first. You do not have to use all the space provided. When you save text, the system will tell you how many characters are still available or if you have used too many characters. You can preview your statement after you have saved it.
- Please note that you cannot use *italics*, **bold** etc in your personal statement - the system will automatically remove these when saved. This will not disadvantage your application.

- **We strongly recommend that you prepare your personal statement offline using a word-processing package and copy and paste it into the Apply system.** Whether you are typing your statement directly into the box, or amending a statement that you pasted in, you should click 'save' regularly because Apply will time-out after 35 minutes of inactivity. The countdown on the screen displays how much time you have left before it times out.
- If you want to send more information, contact your chosen universities and colleges to check that they are happy to accept further details. If they are, send it direct to them after we have sent you your welcome letter and Personal ID. Do not send it to us.

Similarity detection

UCAS Similarity Detection Service - guidance for applicants

All personal statements sent to UCAS are tested for similarity.

There are some example personal statements on the internet that have been used by applicants, in some cases word for word. The service we use, called Copycatch, finds statements that show similarity, works out how much of the statement may have been copied, and reports the findings. It helps admissions staff at universities and colleges judge applications, and it is the institutions who decide what action, if any, to take regarding notified cases.

Research has shown that the majority of UCAS applicants do write their own personal statements. However, the number making use of other people's material was high enough to justify the introduction of the Similarity Detection Service.

What the Similarity Detection Service does

Each personal statement is checked against:

- a library of personal statements previously submitted to UCAS
- sample statements collected from a variety of websites
- other sources including paper publications.

Each personal statement received at UCAS is added to the library of statements after it has been processed.

What happens if a personal statement has similarities?

- Any statements showing a level of similarity of 10% or more are reviewed by members of the UCAS Similarity Detection Service Team.

- Applicants, universities and colleges are notified at the same time by email when an application has similarities confirmed.
- Admissions tutors at individual universities and colleges decide what action, if any, to take regarding reported cases.

Does it matter?

- Some course tutors find personal statements crucial when making decisions, whereas others might not put as much emphasis on them. Since you do not know who will be looking at your statement, the safest thing is to do a good job. In many cases, applicants are not interviewed, so this may be your only chance to make the case for you to be offered a place.
- The Assistant Registrar for Undergraduate Admissions from University of Warwick says:
- *'For highly competitive courses which attract applications from many more candidates than there are places, comparing all applicants' personal statements helps us to identify the most committed and suitable candidates.'*
- If you're offered a conditional place and narrowly miss the required grades for the course, the university is likely to look at your personal statement again to see if your interests and experience demonstrate any extra skills that could help you on the course. So it can make a difference later in the application process as well.
- Remember that the person reading your statement is an expert in your chosen area of interest so they will want to know the reasons why you have chosen the subject.

Make sure that your personal statement is your own work

- UCAS put all applications through similarity detection tests, which identify statements that have been copied from another source. Don't be tempted to copy another person's application materials, or download your personal statement from a website. There could be serious consequences to using other people's work. If any part of your personal statement appears to have been copied, we will inform all the universities and colleges that you have applied to. They will then take the action they consider to be appropriate.

Finally, GOOD LUCK!!!