

## How to Write your Personal Statement

The first thing you must remember is that your personal statement will probably be the only opportunity you get to "talk" directly to the admissions tutor on the programme you want to study. It is therefore vitally important that you make this statement as effective as possible! If you do apply to a programme which invites candidates to interview, your personal statement may also form the basis of your interview.

Your personal statement is an opportunity for you to demonstrate why you think you would be a good student for the programme you are applying to and why the University should select your application over those of other candidates. It is primarily an academic statement and you must target it very directly towards the subject in which you are interested, though a University will also want to know something about your more general interests.

### Here are two quotes from admissions tutors on applying to university:

"You spend 3 years of your life at your chosen university so it's important that you find out everything you can about it before you apply. Make sure the course is right for you, by checking out all the details on the web and in booklets and that the place is one you could happily live in. When reading applications I look for enthusiasm, wider reading and a personal statement that is exactly that: personal and that touch different or interesting".

Dr Gail Ashton, *Admissions Tutor, English*, University of Manchester

"Careful research is the key to finding the right course at the right university. When assessing applicants, I look for individuals who understand and show motivation for the course of their choice and who have taken the opportunity to find out about and gain a feel for our university".

Dr Adrian Bell, *Admissions Tutor, Engineering*, UMIST

Your Personal Statement should be between 350 and 500 words in length and contain a number of paragraphs that link together in a logical, well-written style. In the first half you need to explain why you want to do the course and why you are well suited to it. This part should be between 150-250 words. The second half should be about yourself and your interests.

***Paragraph 1 - Reasons for applying:***

Write about how you became interested in your chosen course - how long you have been interested in the subject matter and possibly how it relates to your career aspirations. The opening sentence: This should be interesting and if possible convey your enthusiasm or fascination with your chosen field. It needs to grab the attention of the Admissions Tutor. It might be easier to come back to this opening sentence once you have written the whole thing.

***Paragraph 2 - Experiences that support your application:***

- Draw on relevant experiences that you have had and which help you know that you will enjoy the course.
- Use evidence to support your points, e.g. have you studied the subject at AS/A2 level and what have you got out of your current studies; what aspects, topics, experiences have you liked/preferred; refer to books read, field trips, course attended, websites visited.
- Do your other subjects support your choice?
- Have hobbies or family played a role?
- Relating work experience, paid work, mentoring, job-shadowing etc to your application is absolutely crucial if you are applying for a vocational course. Explain what these placements showed you about the job and how they influenced your decision.

***Paragraph 3 - Give them a flavour as to the kind of person you are:***

- Write about your personal interests e.g. hobbies, musical interests, drama, sports. Include examples of level reached, representative honours, interesting experiences.
- You should include details of any activities that you participated in, both inside and outside of School/College.
- You must make sure that your statement is coherent and logical. It will seem odd if you apply for a course or job that involves sport and yet do not include any sports among your spare-time activities.
- Any positions of responsibility you have held and what you might be interested in doing in the future, e.g. school council, scout leader, etc.
- Include anything that you have done that you are proud of, e.g. Ten Tors, public, speaking, marathon, etc.

***Paragraph 4 - Deferred Entry***

Remember to explain what you are proposing to do during your gap year. This can be a tremendous opportunity to work and travel – or both. If you decide to take a year out, you will have to give your reasons for deferring entry or the start of a planned career and outline the plans you have for the year.

***Paragraph 5 - Conclude by stressing why they should take you?***

- Conclude by stressing your qualities – those that will make an asset to the institution that you join – reliability, motivation, independence and ability to work on your own.
- Link to your future.

**Try to apply this ABC throughout your personal statement**

**Activity – *What you have done***

**Benefit – *What skills it has given you***

**Course – *How these skills relate to your course***

### **More Hints**

1. The opening sentence is the most important one:  
“I have applied to do this course because...”  
“My interest in... was first aroused by...”  
“My fascination with...”
2. Have field work, other course or work experience influenced your choice and if so how?  
What did you do that attracted you to that vocational area?
3. Avoid generalisations:  
Try to give evidence that supports your statement.  
*For example:*
  - Instead of saying “I enjoy chemistry”, explain that you have enjoyed researching the industrial implications of by-products to standard chemical processes such as.....

### **Useful Websites for examples of personal statements and tips**

The best place to start is on [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) this has guides for writing personal statements but also each course will have an Entry Profile which will tell you lots more about the course and what kind of skills they are looking for – this is essential research for your application!

### **Beware of Plagiarism!**

All applications are put through the UCAS ‘Similarity Detection Service’ to detect plagiarism. Applications are checked against all other applications received as well as a library of websites and paper publications. If UCAS have any reason to doubt that your application is anything but your own work they will inform you, your school and the Universities to which you have applied. Feel free to look at websites etc for examples but don’t be tempted to copy!

[www.studentil.com](http://www.studentil.com)

[http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/personal\\_statement\\_library](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/personal_statement_library)

<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/10-things-to-put-in-your-personal-statement>

#### **Do:**

Research      Be positive      Apply early – October Half Term!

#### **Don’t:**

Waffle      Plagiarize      Apply for courses you will not realistically get grades for

## Keywords

Working independently, working in a team, solving problems, giving presentations, good organisation, planning, co-operation, argument, leadership, time management.

Enjoy, gain from, contribute to, participate, encourage, interest, improve, progress, opportunity, involved, show initiative, create, enthusiasm.

Responsible, self-motivated, flexible, determined, keen, ability, capable, persevere, enthusiastic, interested, and hard working.

## Checklist

• Is it between 350-500 words	
• Does it include a number of paragraphs	
• Is it coherent and logical	
• Do you support your points with evidence	
• Does it convey enthusiasm for the subject area	
• Have you checked spelling and grammar	
• Does it show academic capability	
• Have you evidenced motivation, transferable skills	
• Does it include academic interests	
• Have you noted relevant work experience	
• Do you mention career aspirations	
• Have you said what you would gain from University	
• Does it convey a sense of your personality	
• Have you given it to others to read and feedback	
• Have you kept a copy	

## Some Common Questions

Q *How can I write a personal statement about the programme I want to study when I want to apply to three (or more!) different sorts of programme?*

A You can't! Remember, your personal statement needs to convince an admissions tutor that you are the right student for their programme and trying to do that for different programmes on one personal statement just doesn't work.

Q *I think I have achieved some really great things in my life, should I not make sure that these achievements make up the bulk of my statement?*

A Anything that makes you a unique and interesting individual is important but, remember, an admissions tutor is primarily interested in why you want to study their course. Apply the ABC (see page 3).

Q *I am not interesting or unique!*

A Yes you are. Everyone has special skills, experiences or achievements to mention. We don't have any set ideas for what we are looking for, we just want to know what makes you, you.

Q     *Do I need to use long words and elaborate language to impress the Admissions Tutor?*

A     No! An Admissions Tutor will be impressed by the use of good English; a personal statement needs to be well written, in simple English, and laid out carefully. If you try too hard to impress with clever language you will normally make your statement harder to read and your reasons for wanting to study a particular programme less clear.

Here are two example personal statements. Take some time to compare them and decide which student you would give a place to.

## Personal Statement – Example 1

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 Year 9, 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 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 day 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 A level 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).

Would you offer this student a place?

## Personal Statement – Example 2

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 18<sup>th</sup> century French History and dictatorship and to widen my historical scope. A trip to France, where I studied issues relating to 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. I also involve myself fully with the school music performances. Having played in concerts with the keyboard orchestra, I have recently taken piano lessons and gained wider awareness of music, especially 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, teamwork 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 people with IT and language development was extremely rewarding.

I have always enjoyed reading but more recently my A level 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.

Is this a stronger version – if yes, why?