Careers | Lancaster University

Personal Statements for Postgraduate Study

HELLO FUTURE

Writing a personal statement for further study

The personal statement is your opportunity to convince academic admissions tutors of your suitability for the programme.

The Lancaster University careers team offer a Personal Statement checking service that can be accessed either through TARGETconnect or by attending a drop in appointment in The Base

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A strong personal statement:

- Should demonstrate academic interest, subject specific knowledge, ability and motivation to succeed.
- Will only be convincing if the points are backed up by strong evidence i.e. examples drawn from academic achievements, work experience and extra-curricular activities (The Lancaster Award is a great way to build this experience and show evidence)
- Needs to be concise and should only include information that is strictly relevant. Try not to tell your life story!
- Will consider the content, structure and style of the statement.
- Will organise the information; focus on one topic or theme at a time and ensure the text logically progresses.
- Is positive, with each section starting with the most impressive evidence or information.

Remember: Always follow the instructions on the form. Word length and content may be specified. Many universities specify what they want to see in the statement, so ensure you address the requirements they outline. If you are applying for a PhD, a research proposal is usually required.

Unless you are applying through a central application point, such as GTTR (Graduate Teacher Training Registry) for teacher training, write a new statement for each course you apply to.

Structuring your statement:

You can change the order to highlight the areas you feel are most important to your application and create a natural flow for the reader. These are some suggestions, you may not have everything under every heading and some may not be relevant for you:

Why this university?

Be specific – it is best not to make generic statements such as "because you are an internationally-renowned university with an excellent academic reputation". You can refer to the institution's reputation by all means, but try and look beyond the headlines too.

- If the university itself made a difference in your choice - what was this? Have you studied there before and enjoy the environment?
- Is location and the opportunity to gain work experience locally a factor?
- Does it have a strong reputation in this particular field of research?
- Are there specific academic staff you want to do research or study with?
- Perhaps it offers something else unique?

Why this subject?

- Your motivation - when did you become interested in this subject and what have you learned about it?
- What is it about the structure of the course, or the choice of modules, that appeals to you? Did you attend an open day or talk to lecturers?
- Demonstrate subject knowledge, through relevant prior learning, projects, dissertations, case studies etc. It could also come through relevant work experience in this field

Academic ability

- Academic achievement - have you got what it takes to do this course? Grades in key relevant subjects.
- Academic prizes, student awards, and any other academic achievements.
- Does it match your learning style - can you demonstrate this? Will you have to do group projects; can you demonstrate teamwork or leadership?
- Can you demonstrate the dedication and resilience required to complete the course? Ability to use initiative, problem solve, manage workload, work to deadlines, work under pressure.
- Other academic skills relevant to the course, computing skills, knowledge of relevant scientific techniques, analytical or research skills etc. (Refer to your CV to remind you)

Your future?

What are your career aims? How will this course help you achieve them? Think about the knowledge, skills, and accreditations with professional bodies that you will develop.

Personal skills & experience

- You can talk about *work experience, volunteering and extracurricular activities* in more depth here, but make sure you link this with the knowledge or skills needed for this course and your future career options.
- Extracurricular interests and achievements help to differentiate you from the crowd. Membership of university societies linked to your area of application (especially if you helped to organise them), taking part in relevant competitions, attendance at conferences, and external lectures are all good examples.
- Playing for a university sports team or being a Course Representative or Student Ambassador shows that you have contributed to the life of the university. Attendance at events organised by the Careers Service; including employer-led events, the mentoring programme, and Lancaster Award show evidence of your commitment to career planning.

Preparation Tips:

- Note any special features of the course that particularly appeal to you by researching the course and alternative choices.
- What distinguishes the course from similar courses? What are its strengths? Are there experts teaching on the course that you would learn from?
- Talk to admissions contacts for the course to find out what they might be expecting to see in the personal statement. Admissions staff can also discuss the strengths and specialisms of a course.
- If you need to provide an academic reference, obtain your referee's agreement well in advance.
- **References:** it is likely that you will need to provide an academic reference. Obtain your referee's agreement well in advance. Include their email under their full contact details with the correct title (Dr, Professor, Director etc.). Update your referees about what you have been doing; for instance you may have undertaken a personal development course, gained work experience, or travelled to gain knowledge and inspiration.

- **Produce a draft:** outline how your previous educational background and work experience have informed your choice. Show how the course content relates to your current interests, professional experience, and career ambitions. Mention courses which might have provided you with a good foundation to what you want to study. Cover topics specified in any guidance notes that the university has provided. Common requirements will usually include:
    - Why you wish to continue studying
    - What interests you about the subject
    - Why this institution (research expertise)
    - How the course fits into your career plans
    - Relevant study (your degree, specific modules, etc.)
    - Research experience (dissertation)
    - Any relevant working experience
    - Extracurricular interests and achievements
- **Review your statement:** use enthusiastic, positive language. Keep your statement concise. Unless instructed otherwise, aim to write about 500 words, no more than one side of A4. If in doubt, ask admissions contacts how much information they expect. Your statement should have:
    - A clear introduction and conclusion
    - Clear and concise language
    - No spelling or grammatical errors
    - A logical flow

Finally, some DOs and DON'Ts

- ✓ Allocate enough time to write your statement and seek advice from Careers
- ✓ Ensure that your personal statement meets the criteria set
- ✓ Write a separate statement for each application you are making, even if the courses are very similar
- ✓ Be direct- don't use language such as 'I believe', 'I feel' 'I might' Proofread your personal statement for spelling and grammar

- ✗ Don't try to flatter the institution you are applying to
- ✗ Don't lie, exaggerate or embellish
- ✗ Don't repeat information that has already been included in other parts of the application

Get in touch:
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