

# PLANNING AND WRITING AN OUTSTANDING UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT

## A STEP BY STEP GUIDE

HOW DO YOU WRITE A  
UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT?



# PLANNING AND WRITING AN OUTSTANDING UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT



## Key Pointers

### **How Important is it?**

The Personal Statement is a very important part of your university application which will be made in the first term of Year 13. Many courses do not interview so the Personal Statement may be your only chance to impress selectors. The London School of Economics (LSE) say: ‘The Personal statement is the most important way we decide between applicants.’

Many universities will score you statement because they are looking for quite specific things.

### **How Much Do I have to Write?**

It is around an A4 side in length (47 lines maximum, 4,000 characters maximum, 1,000 characters minimum, 12 point Times New Roman font). In most cases it will be written between July of Year 12 with a final version in September/October of Year 13.

### **What is it for?**

The Personal Statement gives you an opportunity to:

1. tell the universities and colleges why they should choose you
2. tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study.
3. demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd

### **Get Ahead**



### **Start Early**

If you get the big picture of the application process early and understand what will be needed for the Personal Statement you can begin to collect experiences, evidence of reading and other activities which can be written about when the time comes to write your statement? These are the things you need to start thinking about, doing and keeping on the back burner to make your eventual application a stronger one.

## **Give Yourself an Edge**

It will give you a head start compared to many students who are applying nationally and will give you a competitive edge over other students who have left things till the last minute.

## **Step by Step Personal Statement Guidance**

### **From early Year 12**

- **UCAS** – explore university web sites and their advice about personal statements.
- You can now start thinking about the sort of things you will want to write about in your Personal Statement.

### **July to September in Year 12:**

You now need to begin to think about the Personal Statement in earnest and start writing preliminary drafts.

### **What Should go into the Personal Statement?**

UCAS give the following important pointers about how you should include in your Personal Statement:

- (1) Why you are applying for the course you have chosen?
  - Why does the subject interest you?
  - Include evidence that you understand what is required to study the course
  - What got you interested in the subject?
  - What have you learnt about the subject?
  - Any activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)
- (2) Why you are suitable for the course:
  - Which skills and experience do you have that will help you succeed on the course.
  - What have you done to develop your knowledge of the subject?
  - What evidence is there that you have read, studied, gained experiences outside the confines of your sixth form courses?

### **From July in Year 12**

### **Important Things you Should Do**

**Make sure** that you check to see if the universities you are thinking of applying to have any particular requirements for the Personal Statement.

## Useful Personal Statement Advice

This section of the Which University website gives specific subject focused Personal Statement advice:

<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/personal-statement-subject-guides-admission-tutor-tips>

## What Makes a Good Personal Statement Videos and Podcasts

These videos and podcasts from UCAS and different universities give very sound Advice:



UCAS: <http://www.ucas.tv/ucas/video/WXSch>

Birmingham: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6wGWIIOxpw>

Leicester: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zESqEAXqX-Y>

Kings College: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtm2xtsqMLU>

## Make Sure You Know about the Course You are Applying For

Look them up on university course websites

Use the UCAS entry profiles web-pages which you will find when you begin to search for courses

## Redrafting is Essential

- First, start by looking at the Personal Statement Mind-map on the UCAS APPLY website :



<https://www.ucas.com/file/4251/download?token=KIC9IMgH>

- Use it to help you construct a mind-map focused on your personal aims and aspirations
- Second, use the excellent four page Personal Statement worksheet on the UCAS APPLY website to plan your statement in detail:

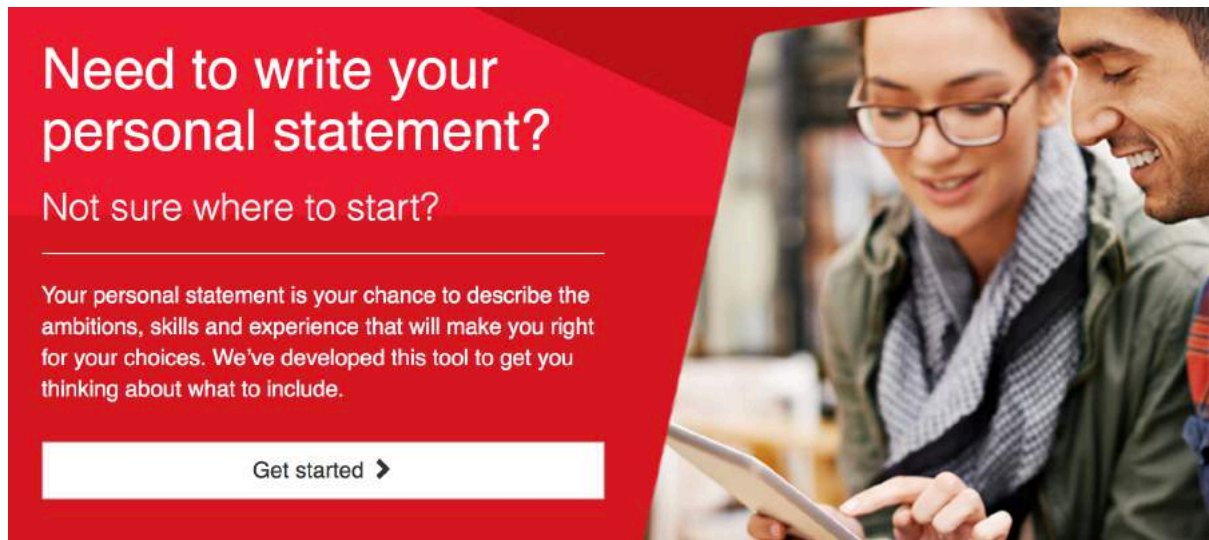


<https://www.ucas.com/file/4261/download?token=u7I6M9Q5>

- The worksheet gives you very clear indications about how much to write for each section Remember: at least two thirds on the course
- Next write out your statement in full and read carefully what you have written and don't be satisfied until you have re-worked it several times
- Your Personal Statement will need **to go through many drafts** before it is right. Read it to others to see what it sounds like and get them to comment on it too.

## UCAS' Personal Statement Tool

- Designed to help you think about what to include in your personal statement, and how to structure it. It also counts how many characters you've used, so it's easy to see when you're close to the 4,000 character limit. But be warned – it doesn't save your work, so it's important you copy, paste, and save your work regularly into a word processing document.

A promotional splash screen for the UCAS Personal Statement Tool. The background is red on the left and transitions to a photograph of a young woman with glasses and a young man looking at a tablet together. The text is white and pink. The main heading is 'Need to write your personal statement?' in white. Below it is the sub-heading 'Not sure where to start?' in pink. A horizontal line separates this from a paragraph of text: 'Your personal statement is your chance to describe the ambitions, skills and experience that will make you right for your choices. We've developed this tool to get you thinking about what to include.' At the bottom is a white button with the text 'Get started >' in black.

<https://www.ucasdigital.com/widgets/personalstatement/index.html#/splash>

### **Do Not Use Pretentious Language**

Write in a natural way using vocabulary you would normally use but don't be chatty either. You are not texting.

### **Avoid Cliché Opening Sentences**

UCAS say the 10 most common opening sentences are such things as:

1. I am currently studying a BTEC National Diploma in...
2. From a young age I have always been interested in ...
3. From an early age I have always been interested in ...
4. Nursing is a very challenging and demanding career...
5. For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated with
6. Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only ...
7. Nursing is a profession I have always looked upon with ...
8. For as long as I can remember I have been interested in..
9. I am an International Academy student and have been studying since....
10. Academically, I have always been a very determined ...

## Avoid Empty statements about Yourself

- I have been interested in philosophy all my life (all???)
- I feel global warming is a really important issue (which aspects?)
- I feel that genes are fundamental in shaping human behaviour (say something original about genetics)
- You need team work and communication skills and I have got them (where is the evidence?)
- Maths is important for helping us understand all sorts of things (give examples)

## Avoid Mentioning Cliché Books

- Show that you have explored beyond the obvious in your reading and say something original about the books you do mention. Everyone will write about Fermat's Last Theorem' for Maths or 'A Brief History of Time' for Physics, for example
- Make sure they are books you can talk about if interviewed
- Anticipate the interview question: 'What have you read since you wrote your Personal Statement?'



## Avoid Exaggerated Language

For example, Maths is.....

'amazing'

'incredible'

'fantastic'

'unbelievably interesting'

'captivating'

Instead, say something more thoughtful.

## What Sort of Language should I use?

- Persuade them that you are like this don't just claim it?
- 'This shows that I am/can.....'
- Use evidence from work experience
- Use evidence from achievements



- Use evidence from voluntary activities BUT not, for example ‘I am a good at team work because I play in a team’.

## Writing About your 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 related to the course
- Make it clear how long was spent on each placement
- Think about how they demonstrate your personality, skills and abilities. Try to link them to the skills and experience required for your course(s).
- UCAS give this example:

NOT

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

BUT

'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.'

For some good advice on how to write about your work experience go to:

<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/personal-statements-how-to-make-your-work-experience-really-count>

Which University

Find a course ▾ Where to study ▾ Get advice ▾ Teachers ▾

Personal statements

**Personal statements: make your experience count**

By Rebecca Hughes  
(Digital content producer, Which? University)  
06 July 2017  
3 min read

When it comes to work experience in your personal statement, it really is a case of quality over quantity. Whatever your experience, here's how to make the most of it...

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## Skills you May Need to Write About

Depending on the nature of the course you may need to write about skills such as the following:

- Practical
- Problem solving
- Caring
- Enthusiastic
- Teamwork
- Good communicator
- Using own initiative
- Work under pressure
- Self motivated
- Working to deadlines
- Organisation
- Leadership
- Self-expression
- Scientifically literate
- Artistic/creative



## Writing about Interests and Activities Relevant to the Course

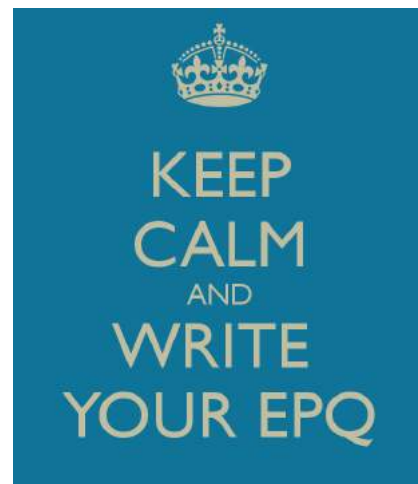
The Assistant Registrar for Undergraduate Admissions from University of Warwick says that:

‘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.’

- Don't just list them
- Say what you got from the activity
- Use telling examples
- Be precise about time was spent on the activity
- Show how it helped to develop your thinking
- Emphasise skills and qualities you developed eg team work, commitment, caring
- Mention particular insights gained

## The EPQ

- If you are involved in this mention it in your
- Personal Statement
- Show how it has helped you to develop intellectually with examples
- Show how it has helped you learn new study and research skills
- Show how you think it has helped you prepare for university
- 



## Applying for Multiple courses and Joint Degrees

- You only write one personal statement to all your choices. Try not to mention a university by name, even if you are 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.

## Do Not Plagiarise

One year, 234 UCAS personal statements contained the following: 'Ever since I accidentally burnt holes in my pyjamas after experimenting with a chemistry set on my eighth birthday, I have always had a passion for science.'



## **BEWARE UCAS Copycatch Plagiarism Software**

- Your PS is checked against at least 1,500,000 statements past and present on the UCAS website, those on other websites and in books
- 30,000 students ‘caught’ in a typical year
- 10% were identical to other applicants personal statements or online examples eg Student Room
- Universities applied to informed so that they can take appropriate action
- Student told by email with details on Track
- Flagged up on Adviser Track for school staff as well

## **The Most Common Reasons for Unsuccessful Applications According to UCAS**

- 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.
- Not expressed a strong enough interest in the subject .

## **Using Example and ‘Model’ Personal Statements**

- The danger of model answers is that you imitate them, risk plagiarism, sacrifice originality and get caught out
- There are similar issues with commercial websites which offer to ‘coach’ you It stops being your work.
- The Student Room website has a library of personal statements:

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

- Be very careful with this website
- Uploaded by students some will be good some bad
- **No monitoring by Student Room** although some have been commented upon
- Not model statements
- Don’t copy. You will be caught!
- Best approach: use them to analyse with other students

- Most useful section of this website is the **Reviewed** Personal Statement Advice for different subjects section.

<p><b>A</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Statement:Architecture 1</li> <li>• Personal Statement:Audiology 1</li> </ul> <p><b>B</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Statement:Biochemistry 1</li> <li>• Personal Statement:Biomedical Sciences 1</li> <li>• Personal Statement:Biomedical Sciences 4</li> </ul>	<p><b>G</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Statement:Geography 1</li> <li>• Personal Statement:Graphic Design 1</li> </ul> <p><b>H</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Statement:History 10</li> <li>• Personal Statement:History 11</li> <li>• Personal Statement:History 15</li> </ul> <p><b>I</b></p>
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[http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/category:reviewed\\_personal\\_statements](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/category:reviewed_personal_statements)

### 5 key Characteristics of an Excellent Personal Statement

- At least two thirds should be about the course(s) and your suitability for it.
- Make it personal and original
- Do not plagiarise
- Provide evidence and examples to back up claims you make about yourself
- When you write about things you have done show what skills you have gained and what they demonstrate about your character and/or personality

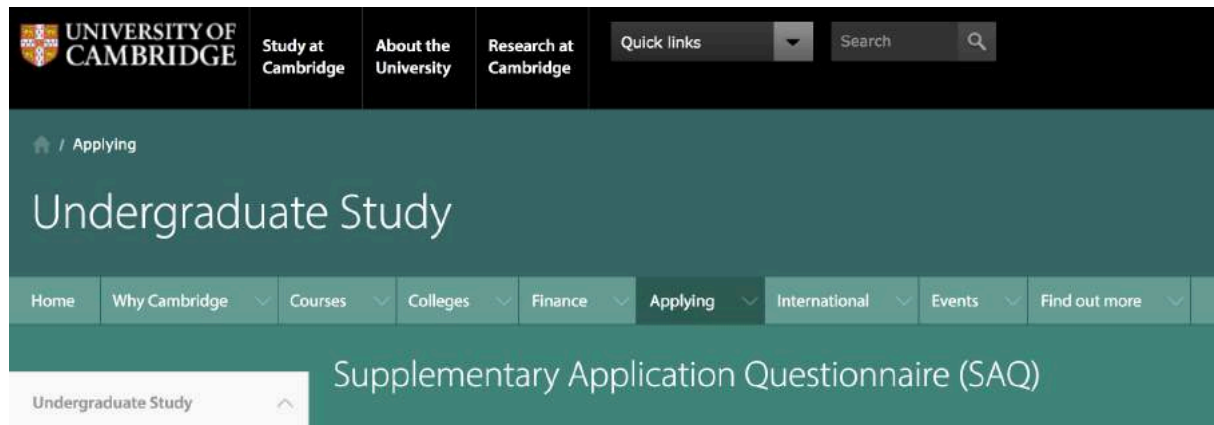


## Applying to Oxford: Personal Statement Advice



- Remember that tutors will be most interested to read about your academic achievements and your commitment and motivation for your chosen degree course.
- Extra-curricular activities may help demonstrate how well you have managed your time, but they do not form part of the selection criteria in any subject.
- Do bear in mind that your UCAS personal statement will be seen by all the universities to which you are applying
- Extra-curricular is secondary
- Honesty is key! Anything included could be a talking point in the interview
- Read PS aloud.
- Students could read each other's statements in pairs
- Read the last paragraph first
- Starting early in Year 12 keep a notebook for anything relevant: books, programmes, lectures, conversations that inspired them about the subject.

## Applying to Cambridge: Personal Statement Advice



- Students are advised to follow the UCAS advice Admissions decisions are based solely on academic criteria (ability, commitment and potential).
- We are looking for an applicant to:
  - explain their reasons for wanting to study the subject
  - demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment for chosen course
  - express any particular interests within the field
  - outline how they have pursued their interest in the subject in their own time
- Such information is often used as a basis for discussion at interview.
- Students are advised to follow the UCAS advice Admissions decisions are based solely on academic criteria (ability, commitment and potential).
- Applicants can if they wish make additional comments particularly relevant to their Cambridge application on their **Supplementary Application Questionnaire** . This is an opportunity to highlight particular features of the Cambridge course that attracted them. This additional personal statement is optional.

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/saq.html>

- Applicants will not be disadvantaged if they add nothing to this section of the SAQ but should not to repeat information in their UCAS personal statement

## Extra-Curricular Activities and Cambridge



- Participation (or not) in extra-curricular activities is not taken into account (unless relevant to the course) and does not affect the chances of an offer.
- We look at how extra-curricular activities demonstrate characteristics that will aid students' transition to life at university, such as the balance of academic and personal commitments, and the development of skills or qualities (perseverance, independence, leadership or team-working).
- However, other university may place more importance on extra-curricular activities.
- Cambridge are much more interested in **super-curricular activities** which show how you have deepened your knowledge and understanding of the subject you want to study.



## Interviews and Personal Statements



- **Chances of Being Interviewed** You will not always be interviewed. More universities do not interview than do, so the Personal Statement is even more important if the university you are applying to does not interview. Some universities will interview every serious applicant, others none. Some will interview borderline applicants only. Check when you are choosing your universities.
- If you are interviewed make sure to read through your personal statement before hand and that you can justify everything that you have written

**Now get the grades!**

