

# How much do you know about the UCAS Personal Statement?

## *- TEST YOURSELF -*

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### **AIM**

To familiarise students with key information about the UCAS Personal Statement. By testing the students first, the activity helps to ensure that students take note of some of the detailed information provided.

### **ORGANISATION**

Provide students with the 'Test Yourself' questionnaire. The activity should take no longer than 10-15 minutes. After completing the activity, students should be given a copy of the answers. Discussion could then ensue about each section. In addition, there are further comments about the personal statement for students to read through.

### **NOTES**

Completing the activity can help students to appreciate the importance of spending sufficient time writing the personal statement, as well as understanding that it must be clearly written.

### **TIMING**

The activity can be used early in Year 12 to alert students to the notion of the personal statement. It could also be undertaken during a UCAS preparation event closer to the point when students will be completing their UCAS application form.

### **LENGTH OF SESSION**

This could be as short as 20 minutes, if the answers are given out to students after completing the questionnaire. With structured feedback relating to each question the session could last for one hour, especially if students read through the further comments from admissions tutors.

# How much do you know about the UCAS Personal Statement?

*- TEST YOURSELF -*

1. What is a UCAS Personal Statement?

2. Who writes the UCAS Personal Statement?

3. Who reads the UCAS Personal Statement?

4. What is the aim of the UCAS Personal Statement?

5. What information does the Admissions Tutor wish to see?

6. What should you avoid including in your UCAS Personal Statement?

7. How does the Admissions Tutor use the UCAS Personal Statement?

8. What should you do, at the beginning of your Advanced courses, so that you can write a unique and persuasive Personal Statement when you eventually apply through UCAS?

# How much do you know about the UCAS Personal Statement?

## - THE ANSWERS -

The information in this section was gathered from a survey of seventy admissions tutors from eighteen different degree courses.

### 1. What is a UCAS Personal Statement?

*It is a section in the UCAS application form. It is open-ended: there are no restrictions about the information that can be written in the statement - obviously, no offensive information. It takes up as much space as (approximately) two-thirds of an A4 sheet of paper.*

### 2. Who writes the UCAS Personal Statement?

*You do! The applicant writes the Personal Statement. It is, after all, a Personal Statement. Guidance is available to help you learn to 'sell yourself'. This is a skill that is required beyond university and into the world of paid employment.*

### 3. Who reads the UCAS Personal Statement?

*Admissions Tutors read your Personal Statement. Admissions Tutors are often course lecturers who have been given the responsibility to read your UCAS application and make offers on the basis of your grades, reference and Personal Statement.*

### 4. What is the aim of the UCAS Personal Statement?

*To convince an Admissions Tutor that you are worth an offer on the course for which you have applied.*

### 5. What information does the Admissions Tutor wish to see?

*This varies somewhat between one subject area and another, and according to the tutor's own preferences, but the following advice covers a range of common issues:*

- ▼ Some idea of why you want to do the course: the amount of space you devote to this will vary according to the nature of the course.
- ▼ Evidence of a well-rounded personality: this means serious interests e.g. playing an instrument proficiently or sport played regularly.
- ▼ A well-written statement: the standard of writing in the statement is itself a useful demonstration of your writing ability.
- ▼ A well-presented statement. This shows evidence of pride in your work.
- ▼ Details of relevant work experience: particularly when the course is vocational, for example, medicine, education, or physiotherapy. Even if it doesn't seem "relevant" to the course, work experience can be worth mentioning as it is often a useful way to demonstrate skills: such as initiative, communication and leadership.
- ▼ Anything that can demonstrate wider key skills, such as teamwork and independence, is of interest: the Duke of Edinburgh Award is a good example.
- ▼ Examples that demonstrate your willingness to work hard and to persevere with tasks.
- ▼ Anything distinctive about your Advanced Level Courses, Highers, or Baccalaureate. For instance, if you are applying to study Physics and you took part in a large project as part of your 'A' level course.
- ▼ Positive explanations of "unusual" combinations of 'A' Levels or Higher courses.

## 6. What should you avoid including in your UCAS Personal Statement?

- ▼ Avoid waffle. You don't have to type a very long statement just to fill up the space: 150 well-chosen words would be more effective than 400 words of irrelevant information. It is important to read the subject specific advice for further details about the issue of length.
- ▼ Try not to make assertions about your personal qualities without providing some evidence to support them. Your school reference should cover this aspect.
- ▼ Avoid writing at length about your 'A' level courses except for issues such as special and relevant projects, coursework or particular interests. Apart from this, discuss your studies only if they relate to the course for which you are applying.
- ▼ Very ordinary interests are not helpful to the tutor. Stating that you like going to the pub and listening to the Stereophonics doesn't really say anything useful: so do millions of other young people!

## 7. How do the Admissions Tutors use the UCAS Personal Statement?

Tutors might use the statement to:

- ▼ help select the applicants to whom offers are to be given: this decision is usually made with the information in the confidential reference and, of course, the predicted grades
- ▼ decide which candidates to interview. The statement is usually looked at in conjunction with predicted grades and the confidential reference
- ▼ develop lines of questioning during an interview
- ▼ test whether the candidate understands the nature of the course: particularly when the subject hasn't been studied at school or college
- ▼ help decide, in exceptional cases, whether to offer a place to a borderline candidate when the results are published in August.

## 8. What should you do, at the beginning of your Advanced courses, so that you can write a unique and persuasive Personal Statement when you eventually apply through UCAS?

*Remember that your grades are crucial for entry to Higher Education. However, since many people obtain the required grades, you need to show that you are passionate about your chosen degree course and that you are equipped with the skills required for successful study at university (e.g. independent study and self-motivation). So what will you do to prepare for the Personal Statement and University?*

- ▼ **Get involved!** In which areas of life outside lessons will you get involved? Activities outside lessons can develop and demonstrate a wider skills set e.g. voluntary work, Cadets, Young Enterprise and Sports Leadership.
- ▼ **Research your course!** What research will you undertake to ensure that your chosen course at university is right for you? Do not restrict your research to course titles but look further at the course content over the duration of the degree / course.
- ▼ **Wider reading!** What research will you undertake to show you are passionate about the course? Reading the course texts for your Post 16 subjects is expected of any student: what about extra reading that demonstrates genuine interest in the subject? You could write about this extra research in your Personal Statement.
- ▼ **Develop skills!** Think about the skills you will need for university and future employment. Independence, initiative, team work, self-discipline, balancing the competing demands of part-time work and study, meeting deadlines, social skills, planning, time management, seeing opportunities, seizing opportunities, creating opportunities.

# Further comments about the UCAS Personal Statement

The following advice in this section was provided by:

**Dr. Roger Anderson**, *Optometry*, University of Ulster  
**Dr. Gordon Cockburn**, *Classics*, University of Durham  
**Dr. Donald Macdonald**, *Electrical and Electronic Engineering*, Imperial College, London  
**Dr. Gail Marshall**, *English*, University of Leeds  
**Dr. Catherine Sanderson**, *Health Studies*, Leeds Metropolitan University  
**Mr. Keith Williams**, *Criminal Justice and Policing*, University of Central England

General views on Personal Statements:

***For interviewing:***

“At the interview the statement can often form the starting point for a discussion about what the student has done and what he/she enjoys.”

“When the student cannot be interviewed, by reason of distance, the Personal Statement is the only guide to the applicant’s interest and motivation. It is therefore much more important as offers are often made on the basis of the information in the UCAS form.”

***Advice for applicants for a multidisciplinary course (e.g. Combined Studies):***

“(My course is) very multidisciplinary...I want breadth, I want evidence that they can switch their minds between different discipline bases and different arguments. The depth we can teach them when they get here.”

***Advice for applicants for a single discipline (e.g. English or Economics):***

“It’s more important that they talk interestingly about what they do, however ‘narrowly’ or ‘broadly’ based that is.”

***Advice about applying for a subject that has not been studied at school/college:***

“Showing interest in the course applied for. This is particularly, though not uniquely, vital when applying for a subject not studied at ‘A’ level.”

***Advice for applicants to courses in the medical sector:***

“I wish to see a student who is genuinely interested in optometry as a caring profession rather than looking for a meal-ticket!”

***Advice on ‘wider’ key skills (e.g. teamwork):***

“I do like structured teamwork, like the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. It’s no good making a statement like ‘I get on with other people’, it’s demonstrating it!”

***Concluding comment about the Personal Statement:***

“The Personal Statement provides me with an opportunity to make judgments about applicants which go beyond the academic qualifications: personal qualities and characteristics can be just as important in offering places on this particular degree.”