

## Personal Statements

### What is a personal statement?

The personal statement is your chance to persuade an admissions tutor that you – rather than dozens of other equally well qualified students - are worthy of a place on their course. Remember, you are aiming to demonstrate: why **you** want to study the subject and what makes **you** the right person for the course!

You have about 4000 characters, (47 lines of text) in which to convince the tutor that: you are a highly motivated student who has researched the courses for which you are applying and is committed to that course of study, that you are self motivated and responsible, and that you are able to manage your time effectively showing a balance between academic work and other interests. The tutor will be looking for evidence that you:

- suit academic study
- understand what the course involves
- are capable of independent learning
- are an interesting person who will contribute to university life
- are mature enough to benefit from university life and will complete the course

A personal statement should be targeted towards a specific area of study, in much the same way that a CV is targeted towards a particular job, so if you are applying for a number of slightly different courses, you will need to find the common thread that attracts you.

Think of your personal statement as consisting of three main sections describing:

1. why you have chosen the course?
2. what have you gained from your studies?
3. what type of a person you are?

Ideally, your statement should end with a sentence, which emphasises your suitability for a university education.

### How should I structure my Personal Statement?

The following paragraphs suggest the type of information you could include in each section.

#### Part 1 - Why have you chosen this course?

Possible reasons could be that you:

- enjoy the subject, or particular aspects of the subject – state which aspects and why. It could be a particular book, a talk or a discussion, which stimulated your interest.
- are looking forward to studying in greater depth – state specific interests
- possess the skills required for the course – state which skills
- are looking forward to putting theory into practice – give details
- have a particular career in mind – state which career and why, plus give details of any relevant work experience/work shadowing/taster courses.

If you want to become a doctor, dentist, teacher, physiotherapist or vet, relevant work experience over an extended period of time is essential. Details of this should form about half of your personal statement.

## Part 2 - What have you gained from your studies?

In this section you can provide evidence that you are suited to academic study and can take responsibility for your own learning. You can do this by:

- explaining the rationale behind your choice of A level subjects
- giving details of the areas you have found most interesting (try to sound enthusiastic but don't go over the top)
- giving examples of instances when you have read around the subject instead of focussing on set texts
- giving details of lectures and courses you have attended, and activities in which you have taken part, that have extended your understanding of the subjects you are studying. Be specific – what aspect of the talk seized your imagination and prompted you to find out more?
- drawing parallels between the skills you have developed through your A level subjects and those needed for your university course

If you are going to try to explain disappointing AS results, this is the best place to do it. Be careful however - emphasise the positive (give details of individual units you have done well on) and make sure your subject tutor also explains any underperformance in their section of your reference.

## Part 3 - What type of a person are you?

This is where you give details of any posts of responsibility you have held, work experience not previously mentioned, and other activities and interests.

Be specific – if you were a prefect, what did you do and what skills did you need and gain? Activities and interests which you could mention, include:

- Young Enterprise
- Duke of Edinburgh Award
- Millennium Volunteers
- Social, sports and leisure interests
- Master classes / Summer schools

Include only those things which are reasonably current, and emphasise the skills you have developed.

Make sure your personal statement is read through and checked by a tutor so make sure that you don't invent experiences or exaggerate your own importance!

If you are planning a gap year you should explain why and give brief details of what you are intending to do.

## Part 4 - The concluding statement

The final sentence should bring the reader's attention back to either your choice of course, or your ability to succeed at university. It is important that you present yourself as somebody that can cope with the academic demands of a degree course and also has the skills to survive away from home. Try one of the following:

- think of an experience which you have not already mentioned, which relates to the course

- think of an experience which you have not already mentioned which relates to your suitability to succeed at university
- identify an area which you have already mentioned, and find a way of building on it for a concluding comment about your course or suitability for university

### What about Similarity Detection?

UCAS check each incoming personal statement, on every application, against a library of all personal statements previously submitted to UCAS. They also sample statements collected from a variety of websites and other sources including paper publications. Each personal statement received at UCAS is added to the library of statements after it has been processed. Any statements showing a level of similarity of 10% or greater will be reviewed by members of the UCAS Similarity Detection Service team.

Universities are notified of any cases where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion of plagiarism. Applicants will also be notified that the UCAS Similarity Detection Service has found that their personal statement merits investigation. The decision about what action, if any, to take regarding notified cases rests with the admissions tutors at individual HEIs.

### Some Helpful Phrases

Use these guidelines and the exemplars to give you inspiration, but above all make your personal statement your own – admission tutors are quick to detect when set phrases are being strung together in order to produce a final “product”. They do after all read several thousand each year!

“Being involved in a busy/professional/successful... *(state type of company e.g. accountancy firm)* allowed me the opportunity to...*(briefly describe the main tasks that relate to the skills you gained)*. These duties developed skills in...*(discuss skills)*”.

“My work experience was an enjoyable and challenging experience. Being a ....*(state job title)* enabled me to be involved in a range of areas such as...*(state area/task)* which developed...*(state skills)*. In addition, I was able to...*(state task which was essential in developing...describe skill)*”.

Working part-time as a...*(state job)* gave me the opportunity to... *(state experience or skills eg work in a team, find out more about...)*”.

“Being a member of the cast for...*(state nature of drama production)* was extremely rewarding. Acting has improved my self-confidence and public speaking skills. I hope to be involved in more amateur dramatic productions at university”.

“Playing...*(state musical instrument)* at grade...*(state grade, if applicable)* has been extremely rewarding. I hope to continue my interest in music at university. I look forward to the opportunity to join the university orchestra”.

“Speaking in front of a large audience as part of the Debating Society has been an excellent opportunity to develop my public speaking skills. I have taken part in a number of debates including ...*(state titles of debates)*. This experience should prove useful on my degree course”.

“As a library assistant my duties included organising the book loan system...*(state any other duties that appear to suggest you are responsible, reliable and organised)*. This experience has shown that I am responsible and capable of dealing with a range of people”.

“Taking responsibility for...*(state responsibility)* has developed skills in ...*(state skills)*”.

“Watching foreign films such as ...*(state title of film)* is a passion of mine and it has led to a broader interest in world literature”.

"I particularly enjoy...(state what you enjoy that is relevant to your application) and it has provided an opportunity to...(state what skills you have developed or what you have learned e.g. such as being more independent than you had believed yourself to be, accepting a challenge).

"I hope to continue to...(state hobby or interest) at university because it provides me with an opportunity to...(state opportunity e.g. meet people)".

"I have endeavoured to learn more about...(state what you have learned e.g. astronomy) despite little information being available at school".

"As...(state responsibility e.g. captain of the school netball team) I have gained the opportunity to motivate others to succeed. Winning...(state success e.g. the 2003 County Trophy) was a major achievement for the ...(state team e.g. school netball team)".

"Being a keen...(briefly state your main individual sports e.g. squash, running, athletics, table tennis) has helped me maintain physical fitness as well as aiding my studies. I find that my mental concentration improves with being physically fit. I hope to make good use of the sporting facilities at university and maintain this balance)".

"Competing in the ...(state nature of competition) and getting...(state position in the competition e.g. runner-up) was a major achievement for the school second Eleven football team. It was during the competition that I learned how to motivate others to succeed".

### **Concluding Statements**

"My work experience at...(state work experience) and my school-based studies make me confident that I am suited to a degree/HND in...(state degree/HND title)".

"It is because of my experience with...(state the experience) that I believe I will make a successful student on my...(state degree/HND title)".

"Having a long term goal of being a ...(state career or job title) I believe that I am particularly suited to a ...(state degree/HND title)".

"My experiences during my post-sixteen studies have enabled me to be ...(state main areas that have been developed e.g. independence, self-discipline) which should prove invaluable/useful preparation for life at university".

"My choice of degree has been carefully selected as a result of my preferred school subjects and work experience".

"My choice of subject study and work experience make me confident that I am well prepared to study...(state nature of course or more generally that you are able to cope with degree/HND level study)".

"I am looking forward to building on my existing experiences of studying...(state a subject or topic which you are studying at present that relates to your chosen course) and the chance to further my knowledge in...(state nature of degree/HND)".