

# The Personal Statement

The personal statement is the university's best indicator of an applicant's passion for the degree, and a strong indicator of his or her suitability for that degree. The Admissions Officer will expect to see:

- ♦ A strong interest in that degree.
- ♦ Evidence of the skills that the applicant has.
- ♦ That the statement is no more than 4,000 characters.

Rather than submitting one whole document on the UCAS platform, students will now respond to three separate questions on their application. Below we have provided these questions, and some tips on how students can respond.

## Question One—Approximately 1,200 Characters

### Why do you want to study this course or subject?

What's your motivation, why does it interest you?

How does it fit into your big plans for the future?

## Helpful Tips

- ♦ Demonstrate a passion beyond school.
- ♦ Evidence ideas with books, lectures, projects, summer schools.

## Common Problems

- ♦ Quotes are often described as lazy starters.
- ♦ Some openers are incredibly common.
- ♦ Don't lie or try to make jokes.

## Question Two—Approximately 1,400 Characters

### How have your qualifications and studies helped you prepare for this course or subject?

What have you studied inside or outside of school related to this?

What skills have you developed from those studies?

What awards have you received?

## Helpful Tips

- ♦ Consider transferable skills: e.g. communication, independence.
- ♦ Specify current course content that relates to specific modules on your chosen course.
- ♦ Identify skills you are gaining that the course is looking for.
- ♦ Take pride in achievement.

## Common Problems

- ♦ Do not list grades.
- ♦ Avoid making lists – instead take time to relate content back to future studies.
- ♦ Make sure there is evidence by using specific school work or tasks.

## Question Three—Approximately 1,400 Characters

### What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

What else have you done that will make you a fantastic student on this course?

## Helpful Tips

- ♦ Ensure that all experiences are made relevant to the degree.
- ♦ Think work experience, volunteering, hobbies, extracurricular activities in school and personal life.
- ♦ Identify skills gained from your experiences

## Common Problems

- ♦ Make sure all experiences are recent and relevant.
- ♦ Explain the relevance fully to the specific degree.

# Personal Statement Planning

Your personal statement is a really important part of your application.

You have 4,000 characters (47 lines of text) to show admissions tutors why they should pick you over other candidates.

The following pages are a guide on how to plan and write an outstanding personal statement. We have consulted admissions tutors to find out what they are looking for.

By the end of the academic year you should have produced a 1<sup>st</sup> draft of your personal statement and submitted this on SMHW.

The personal statement is now broken down into **3 questions**. Each section of this worksheet will help you prepare and plan so that you can provide a strong and convincing answer to each of these questions.

## Question 1

*Why do you want to study this course or subject?*

This question requires you to explain your motivation to study your chosen course/subject area.

### Background reading/Course Research

One of the most likely reasons that students get rejected from courses is because they do not demonstrate an understanding of the course they are applying for.

#### 1. For at least one of your university options, use their website to find out and write down:

What is your course about (what topics and modules do you study)?

*This may be different for different universities, so try to stick to general points.*

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What particular modules/topics of the course sound really interesting to you? Why?

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#### 2. Further background reading

Showing that you understand key ideas about your subject is very important.

You need to spend some time reading recent academic, magazine or news articles, or engage with visual/audio media (movies, podcasts, etc.) about your subject. You will be able to comment on these in your personal statement.

1<sup>st</sup> article:

Name:

Interesting points:

Questions it brought up in your mind:

2<sup>nd</sup> article:

Name:

Interesting points:

Questions it brought up in your mind:

## **Opening Sentences**

You will need to provide a brief but convincing explanation as to why you want to study your subject at university.

Think of the 'personal trigger' that got you interested in the subject. This could be a book, a museum trip, a film, a teacher, work experience, etc. Go on to develop this line of thought with why this subject is important and inspires you. Why are you personally motivated to study it, or why is it relevant to today's society?

Don't just say you love English or Maths, say why, and, never ever say **"I have always wanted to study..."** – it always comes across as cheesy, vague and fails to impress!

### **What was your personal trigger?**

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### **How does your chosen subject relate to society or current affairs?**

*e.g. Last year's famine in East Africa made me acutely aware of the impact famine can have upon different areas of the world; a degree in International Development would help me develop the skills to help those most in need in global society.*

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### **What aspect of the course are you really looking forward to studying?**

*e.g. I am particularly interested in experimental Psychology and I am looking forward to conducting my own Psychological research.*

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**Now tie the best parts of what you have written above into an introduction:**

**This is the answer to Question 1 of your personal statement.**

## Question 2

This question is made of up two main points:

1. Your interest in the subject in school (e.g. your A levels/BTEC)
2. Your interest in the subject out of school (reading, events, trips, etc)

### **In school**

Firstly, you need to explain what you have been doing in school and how this relates to your course. Don't forget that every other applicant (your competition!) will have done school work and school projects – so you shouldn't spend too much time on this. Have any of your A levels/BTEC given you the opportunity to study the subject in lots of detail? Which aspects did you enjoy? Why did you enjoy them and how does it relate to the course you want to do?

If you are studying a new course, which you have not studied at A level, think about the skills that your A levels have taught you e.g. essay writing, logical thinking, problem solving.

<b>A level</b>	<i>Example: English</i>				
<b>Skill it has taught you</b>	<i>Essay-writing</i>				
<b>How it has taught you this / aspects you have particularly enjoyed.</b>	<i>My coursework essay on the Great Gatsby...</i>				

**Now turn these notes into 4-5 sentences about how your A levels relate to your degree:**

*E.g. My History A level has developed my essay writing skills. For example, my coursework essay on the Middle Eastern conflict developed my ability to reference books and academic journals, which will be important for an Anthropology degree.*

*Maths A level has helped me develop my problem-solving skills. These have only been augmented by the coding club I have been attending outside of school for the last 3 years.*

**This is part 1 of the answer to Question 2 of your personal statement**

## Outside of school

The next step is to move onto include what you have been doing outside of the classroom to demonstrate a genuine passion for the subject.

One of the main differences between school and university is that there is nobody looking over your shoulder.

Admissions tutors want students who are self-motivated and are going to get the work done without them chasing you. So, you need to demonstrate that you are a self-starter, who is passionate about the subject, and the easiest way to demonstrate real passion is through the things you have done outside of school.

Be careful: **you need to be honest**. You might get asked about these things in an interview, so if you are going to say that you read the New Scientist regularly, then start reading it!

Fill in this chart to help you. You don't need to fill in every box but you should have at least 4-5 different boxes filled.

Activity	Tick	Description	Why does this make you a good candidate for a degree in your subject?
Outside reading		<i>I read the New Scientist magazine regularly</i>	<i>It keeps me up to date in Scientific current affairs</i>
Taster days/sessions			
Lectures			
Summer Schools/Residentials			
University visits			
Outside reading			
School clubs			
Clubs outside of school			
Museum visits			
Workshops			
Voluntary work			
Documentaries you have watched			
Work experience			

Competitions / prizes / awards you have won			
Other			

**Now turn these into sentences to show the Admissions Tutor just how keen you are!**

*E.g. The ethical issues surrounding stem cell research fascinate me; but attending a recent lecture at UCL on "The importance of stem cell research to medical biology" helped me understand its importance to science...*

*A recent article in "History Today" sparked my curiosity in the French Revolution; something I have not studied at school. I am fascinated about how ideas about causes of events have changed over time; from the Marxist interpretation that the revolution was purely economic, to more recent historical accounts that refute this and attribute the causes of the revolution to luck.*

**This is part 2 of the answer to Question 2 of your personal statement**

### Question 3

This question is where you describe your non-academic achievements and skills either in or out of school.

Cover any extra-curricular activities not necessarily related to your course and give the admissions tutor a glimpse of the kind of person you are outside of the classroom.

Most importantly, you must explain how these activities have developed your **skills**.



Below is a table for you to fill in examples of how you've developed some key skills. Fill in the table as much as you can first – later you can think about which ones would impress the admissions tutor the most.

**This is a good place to include part-time jobs you have or work experience you have completed.**

Skills	Activity
Communication	<i>E.g. Working on the Islington Youth Council team helped develop my communication skills; I went to speak to several different groups of students about why they should vote for the candidate I was working with.</i>
Communication	
Time Management	
Teamwork	
Initiative	
Public Speaking	
Leadership	
Research	

**Now turn these into sentences you can use in your statement:**

*E.g. Working part time at Sainsbury's has developed my time management skills; I work 12 hours a week and have been able to fit this around doing well at school.*

**This is the answer to Question 3 of your personal statement**