**The Personal Statement**

The personal statement is the university’s best indicator of your passion for the course, and a strong indicator of your suitability for that degree. The Admissions Officer will expect to see:

 A strong interest in the course you have chosen.

 Evidence of the relevant skills that you have developed

 That the statement is no more than 4,000 characters.

**Section One—Approximately 1,500 Characters**

You should demonstrate a passion for the subject and prove that he or she can meet its specific academic needs.

**Section Two—Approximately 1,500 Characters**

You should explain how your other A-levels or GCSEs will help you in studying the degree you have applied for.

**Section Three—Approximately 700 Characters**

You should explain how any non-academic experience will help you in that degree.

**Section Four—Approximately 300 Characters**

Finally, you should summarise the three or four main qualities and/or reasons you will be an excellent student for that degree.

**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](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/9566143/Personal-statement-10-most-overused-opening-sentences.html).

**Helpful Tips**

 Consider transferable skills: communication, independence etc.

Take pride in achievement.

**Common Problems**

 Do not list grades.

 Make sure there is evidence by using specific school work or tasks.

**Helpful Tips**

Ensure that all experiences are made relevant to the degree.

 Section 2 might be longer at the expense of this section.

**Common Problems**

Make sure all experiences are recent and relevant.

 Explain the relevance fully to the specific degree.

**Helpful Tips**

 Encapsulate what sets you out from all others.

Consider unique qualities.

**Common Problems**

Include qualities there is evidence for elsewhere in the statement.

 Brief summary only.

**Personal Statement Planning**

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

You have 4,000 characters (about 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 many admissions tutors to find out what they are looking for.

By Friday lunchtime you will be expected to have written up, in neat, the 1st full draft of your personal statement and email it to your Slaughter and May mentor.

**First half of your personal statement**

This comprises of two main sections:

1. The introduction
2. Your interest in the subject you are applying to do

**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. **Using at least one university prospectus (available on line), find out and write down:**

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

*NB - 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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1. **Further Background reading**

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

You need to spend some time reading recent academic articles or magazine articles about your subject. You will be able to comment on these in your personal statement.

You may wish to find a book or online article about your subject, or articles from the copies of *The Economist* or *The New Scientist,* for example*.*

1st article:

Name:

Interesting points:

Questions it brought up in your mind:

2nd article:

Name:

Interesting points:

Questions it brought up in your mind:

**Introduction**

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 why it inspires you. Why it is relevant in today’s society? Why are your personally motivated to study it?

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 is 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 – which should fit onto the lines below:**

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**This is section 1 of your personal statement**

**Your interest in the subject**

This section is made up of two main parts:

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 **briefly** 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.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A Level** | *Example: English* |  |  |  |  |
| **Skill it has taught you** | *Essay-writing* |  |  |  |  |
| **How it has taught you this / aspects you have particularly enjoyed.** | *My coursework essay on the Great Gatsby* |  |  |  |  |

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

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**This is section 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 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 in.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Tick** | **Description** | **Why does this make you a good candidate for a degree in your subject?** |
| *Outside reading* |  | *I read the New Scientist magazine regularly* | *It keeps me up to date in Scientific current affairs* |
| Taster Days/sessions |  |  |  |
| Lectures |  |  |  |
| Summer Schools (e.g. LSE Choice) |  |  |  |
| University visits |  |  |  |
| Outside reading  (magazines, books, newspapers) |  |  |  |
| 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.*

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**This is section 3 of your personal statement.**

**Second half of your statement**

This has two main parts:

1. Wider skills (extra-curricular activities not related to your subject, non-academic achievements)
2. Summary

**Wider Skills**

This is where you will describe your non-academic achievements and skills either in or out of school and your interests and hobbies. Cover any extra-curricular activities not necessarily related to your course and give the admissions tutor and 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- and late you can think about which ones would impress the admissions tutor the most.

**This is a good place to include any part-time jobs you have.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Skills** | **Activity** |
| Communication | *E.g. Working on the Islington Youth Council Campaign 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.* |
| 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.*

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**This is section 4 of your personal statement**

**Summary**

Finish the personal statement with a one or two line summary of why you want to go to university and why you should be offered a place.

*I feel certain that this subject will provide me with the intellectual challenge best suited to my personality and ambition of pursuing an academic career in the social sciences.*

*Overall I am a hardworking, active person and I am enthusiastic about achieving my goals and becoming a primary school teacher. I am looking forward to university life, both academically and socially.*

*I feel certain that this subject will provide me with the intellectual challenge best suited to my personality and ambition of pursuing an academic career in the social sciences.*

*Write your own summary here:* ……………………………………………….……………………………………………….……………..

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**These are the final few sentences of your statement**

**What NOT to write in your statement**

***Advice from Southampton University***

Good personal statements, unlike happy families, are not all alike, and if you really want to interest admissions tutors you shouldn't work from existing 'model statements'. Bad ones, on the other hand, have a lot of features in common. Would you want to read several hundred versions of the following statement every year? Note the naff introductory quotation (from a source the applicant clearly hasn't read), stilted vocabulary, clichés, formulaic structure, superfluous generalisations, indications of limited reading insufficiently compensated for by effusiveness, lack of focus on the subject, immodest self-advertisement, and inadequate command of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

"Renowned novelist William Makepeace Thackeray once said, 'There are a thousand thoughts lying within a man that he does not know till he takes up a pen to write.' This statement is so true/I have adopted this as my inspirational mantra. I have a passion/thirst /zest/lust for literature. Personally for me, the literature art form offers a release of feeling and great writers are often the most fascinating people of mankind. Studying English gives the opportunity to explore vast cultures within the literary world and to critically analyse the stylistic prose present in many brilliant works. I am an avid/voracious reader, ever since I was a little girl I have loved to curl up with my nose in a book. My reading spans from Dan Brown to Harry Potter, and I have a huge admiration for Jane Austin and Sylvia Plait. I have been intrigued/captivated/entranced/ensnared/enthralled/enamoured by my introduction to 'Cymberline' by the classic, highly influential and universally acclaimed Shakespeare who is undoubtedly my favourite play write, his plays show an incredibly poignant insight into human nature and I excitedly await the challenge of dissecting/delving into/deconstructing more than one work by him at University. My other A levels greatly compliment my work in English. Here are two long paragraphs about all the things completely irrelevant to an English degree that I have achieved while at school. I relish/savour the opportunity, to further hone my writing skills at your University for which I am a perfect/ideal candidate. This will stand me in good stead for the field of journalism of which I have long wanted to be a part of."

*http://www.southampton.ac.uk/english/undergraduate/ucas\_application.page?*

**Your personal statement checklist**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | | | | | | |
| **1. Why do I want to study this course?** | | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | | |
|  | **I have explained...** | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... why I am suited to this course. | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... what I like about the subject. | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... what my career goals are and how this course will help me achieve them. | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | | |
|  | **🡪** |  | |  | **The university now knows why I am interested in learning about the contents of this course!** | | | |
|  | | | | | | | | |
| **2. What experiences have led me here?** | | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | | |
|  | **I have explained...** | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... what I study at the moment and what skills each of my subjects has taught me. | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... what's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about me or my life story and how it links to the course. | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  | **I ...** | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... volunteer | | | **🡪** | I have explained what this has taught me/what skills I have gained. |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... have hobbies | | | **🡪** | I have explained what skills I have gained from this (e.g. working as part of a team, leadership skills, working independently, communication or anything more specific to the hobby itself). |
|  |
|  |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... have a part-time job | | | **🡪** | I have explained what skills I have gained from this (e.g. responsibility, the ability to work under pressure, customer services, representing a company, working as part of a team, using IT in a business context, cultural awareness or numeracy skills). |
|  |
|  |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | ... help out in school | | | **🡪** | I have explained what this has taught me/what skills I have gained. |
|  | | | | | | | | |
|  | **🡪** |  | |  | **I have backed up my motivation with facts and have related my experiences to the university course I want to study!** | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | | | | | |
| **3. What can I bring to this course? Optional if the above seems a bit meagre.** | | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  | **I have explained...** | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | ... why I will be able to contribute to discussions in university. | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | ... which clubs and societies I want to join. | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | ... how I will aim to be a well-rounded individual at university. | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | ... how I will behave as a student (e.g. hard working, committed, involved, interested, friendly, confident, enthusiastic, self-reliant, dedicated or thoughtful). | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | ... what I’ve already read related to my course and/or what I’m planning to read. | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  | **🡪** | |  | |  | **I have shown my dream university what an enrichment I would be to the course!** | |
|  | | | | | | | |
| **4. Conclusion** | | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | **I have summarised why I want this course and why I am the right person for it without repeating all I’ve said in the main section!** | | | |
| **DONE! Now the fine-tuning.** | | | | | | |
|  | | | | | | | |
|  |  | I have checked **spelling** and **grammar**, used the spell-check on my computer and had at least one other person to proofread my statement! | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | I have **avoided**/gotten rid of **clichés**! | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | I have **used specific examples** and **do not only talk in generalities**! | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | I have **avoided**/gotten rid of **famous quotes**! | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | My style of writing is **clear** and to the point. | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | I have avoided/gotten rid of both chatty and slang **language** as well as over the top & flowery language! | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | I feel comfortable with the **words** I’ve used and know exactly what they mean! | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | Not all of my sentences start with **‘I’**! | | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
|  |  | I have **not copied** from anyone else! | | | | |