



Universities use the Personal Statement along with your GCSE results, your School Reference and your predicted grades to decide whether to interview you or, if they do not interview applicants, to decide if they offer you a place and also what level of offer they make.

How do I prepare for my Personal Statement?

- You need so spend time thinking very carefully about what subject you want to study and why. Do this by writing notes and really scrutinising yourself, your motives and what you want to do. Some students find it useful to write a love letter to their subject and explain why they love it.
- Make a list of your academic subjects and your skills. Write down what you think your strengths are. Write down all the ways you have developed in terms of your studies, personal skills and attitudes.

When should I start writing my Personal Statement?

Do not underestimate how many drafts you will need to make. It should take at least 10 drafts to get it right. It is worth spending this amount of time.

- By now you should have... Started planning your Personal Statement
- May, Year 12: Start writing your Personal Statement
- July, Year 12: You should have shown and received feedback on your draft Personal Statement from your Tutor and the subject teacher who fits most closely with the degree course you are applying for.
- Start of summer holidays, Year 12: write another draft
- End of summer holidays, Year 12: write another draft and show it again to your Tutor and teacher.

What is the purpose of the Personal Statement and what will the Admission Tutors be looking for?

The aim of the Personal Statement is for the University to whittle down the hundreds of applications they get and bring them a step closer to deciding who they should offer a place to.

Universities are looking for, in this order,

1. Passion and interest in the subject – that you are obsessed by it, that you are, in effect, a geek when it comes to it
2. Subject ability – that you have developed and have the potential to go further
3. Skills – that you have developed and are developing the skills you need to go further

Basic points of Personal Statement

- You only have 4,000 characters, including spaces.
- Do not lie.
- Do not criticise yourself or give them impression that you are currently struggling.
- Do not copy phrases or sections from others. UCAS have their own plagiarism software and you can guarantee that if you have come across a good example online and use its phrases then others are too.

- Avoid the thesaurus. Avoid long, complicated words. Avoid long complicated sentences. You do not need to impress with them with your vocabulary.
- Use 'normal' words. Say things directly. Do not beat around the bush.
- Do not use two words where one will convey the same message.
- Every word must count. You cannot afford any verbal flab or waffle. If there is a shorter way of saying the same thing, say it that way.
- Avoid quotations. They can land you in difficulties in interview if you do not fully understand the implications of the quotation.
- Avoid the word 'passion'.
- Ensure your English is perfect, grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Do not use contractions like "isn't" or "haven't".
- It is better to be quirky than boring. Avoid being dull and pedestrian.
- Do not be jokey or try to be funny; it is likely to backfire.
- If you are not White and British, use your ethnic background where appropriate. It can make you more interesting. However keep it relevant to the course you are applying for.

Imagine a University Tutor having to sit down and read through 200 or more applications. It is late and they are tired. They want to do their best but they do not want it to take up all of their time. They will look more kindly on those who are to the point, clearly keen and clearly fit what they think is necessary for the course. They tend to read the first paragraph carefully and from this decide how carefully they want to read the rest. You want to keep them reading carefully until the end and in that way a much better chance of securing an offer.

What skills should I mention?

You need to mention specific skills which you have developed. The following are some of the skills which University courses require, in no particular order. You should mention a majority of these and explain how you have developed them (i.e. relate them to a subject or an activity)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| • Essay-writing skills | • Hypothesis forming |
| • Research skills / investigative skills | • ICT |
| • Keeping to deadlines/ word-counts | • Logical thinking skills |
| • Presentation skills (oral and written) | • Persistence and determination |
| • Time-management | • Exam technique |
| • Autonomous learning / individual studies | • Using resources e.g. libraries |
| • Opportunities for practical application | • Interpersonal skills |
| • Precision | • Dealing with members of the public |
| • Attention to detail | • Leadership skills |
| • Working under pressure | • Ability to take direction and feedback |
| • Communication skills | • Initiative |
| • Analytical skills | • Team-working skills |

How important is work experience?

Work experience is always preferable and for some subjects it is crucial: medicine, nursing, veterinary, law, journalism, engineering, sport, business, art and design, health and social care and courses related to any of these. It is less important for some subjects: history, English, philosophy, mathematics and modern languages (but time spent in the relevant country is highly desirable instead).

Any work experience can, and should, be discussed in terms of the skills acquired which Universities are looking for. As with everything you write it must be made relevant to the degree subject and to University study in general.

How do I structure my Personal Statement

Depending on what course you are taking in the Sixth Form your structure will be slightly different. In all cases, think of your Personal statement split into seven paragraphs.

Bear in mind that you hopefully have many, many things you could mention, so you therefore will have to be selective and judicious in your selection.

A Level students

The split here is 80% academic and 20% social/cultural/extra-curricular. If you need to move away from this split, you can go 90% academic and 10% other.

1 st para	Why this subject is important to you and why it is important in general terms/to society. Be enthusiastic. You can mention work experience here but not in any detail, just to say it made you even keener. This section is (relatively speaking) the most important as it must make the Admission Tutor want to read on rather than feel she or he has to read on.
2 nd para	Write about each of your main/most relevant subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the skills you learnt as part of the subject.• Pick a few topics you really enjoyed and flag them. These show your knowledge of the subject and are also 'carrots' which you can then discuss in more depth at interview, so chose ones you will be prepared to talk about at interview.
3 rd para	
4 th para	Write about your other subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain these subjects in terms of the skills you have gained which are relevant to the course you are applying for and to University study generally.• You do not have to cover all the skills but you must cover the overwhelming majority of them.
5 th para	
6 th para	Write about extra-curricular areas. This is (relatively speaking) the least important section but can be crucial in differentiating you from other people. Explain your work experience here. You cannot mention everything you have done. Above all relate it to skills. It can be almost a list.
7 th para	In your final paragraph you need to show that you will stay the course at University (they do not want to have someone likely to drop out as they lose funding). Reinforce your commitment, enthusiasm and perseverance.

BTEC Applied students

The split here is 75% subject and 25% social/cultural/extra-curricular. If you need to move away from this split, you can have 80% subject and 20% other.

1 st para	Why this subject is important to you and why it is important in general terms/to society. Be enthusiastic. You can mention work experience here but in no detail, just to say it made you even keener. This section is (relatively speaking) the most important as it must make the Admission Tutor want to read on rather than feel she or he has to read on.
2 nd para	Write about each of your main subject, which will be most relevant for the course you are applying for <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the skills you learnt as part of the subject• Pick a few topics you really enjoyed and flag them. These show your knowledge of the subject and are also 'carrots' which you can then discuss in more depth at interview, so chose ones you will be prepared to talk about at interview.
3 rd para	
4 th para	Write about the other skills you have which the University is looking for. These can be linked to things you have done outside (or inside) the classroom <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You do not have to cover all the skills but you must cover the overwhelming majority of them.• You must relate everything to the skills and the course you have applied for.
5 th para	
6 th para	Explain your work experience here. You cannot mention all your work experience and above all relate it back to skills.
7 th para	In your final paragraph you need to show that you will stay the course at University (they do not want to have someone likely to drop out as they lose funding). Reinforce your commitment, enthusiasm and perseverance.

Once it has been sent off, is that the end of my Personal Statement?

If you are called for interview, then you will need to read over your Personal Statement to remind yourself what you wrote and to identify any of the possible questions they might ask. You should do this two weeks before your interview so you have a chance to do some research or revision of topics. The night before the interview you should read your Personal Statement again. All of this is also true for your School Reference, which you can ask the Director of Sixth Form for. The interview is likely to use these two documents to come up with questions for you.

Where can I find more information?

Speak to your teachers, especially those who teach subjects closest to the degree subject you want to study. There is also a great deal of information and ideas on the internet as well as examples of Personal Statements (also on moodle). Be careful that you do not plagiarise phrases or sentence from these; it is likely to backfire.

The school Library has a number of books which can be very helpful, however bear in mind other people may want to use them so do not hog them.

In addition the UCAS website (www.ucas.ac.uk) and individual University websites may offer some advice and insights.