



UK Personal Statement Guide

Personal Statement Writing

The UCAS personal statement is your chance to stand out from the crowd and explain to an admissions person at your chosen universities why you have chosen his/her subject. Use this opportunity to demonstrate your interest and commitment to the subject by writing about the things that you have already done to pursue your interest, why it inspires you and what you hope to achieve by studying it.

1. Use Your Space Well!

You have 4,000 characters and 47 lines to explain to the university that you are the best candidate for their course. Don't use all 4,000 characters for the sake of it, or make your text too dense. Paragraphs help your reader and brevity (within reason) can be better than filling all available space.

2. Write a Coherent Narrative

Make sure the statement 'flows' - read it through and ask yourself if it jumps around or moves from one point to another without a transition.

3. Be Yourself and Be Honest

The personal statement is your opportunity to show the university your personality. It may also be the basis for interview questions, so make sure you can answer them!

4. Remember Your Audience

- The person reading your statement is an expert in your chosen area of interest so they will want to know the reasons why you have chosen the subject.
- If you mention your personal interests and hobbies, try to link them to the skills and experience required for the course.
- Remember it's just one statement for all courses you're applying to, so avoid mentioning any universities by name.

5. Stay Positive

Avoid dwelling on negatives or making excuses (e.g. for a subject you dropped) - stay positive and interesting.

6. Check and Check Again

Don't rely on spellcheck - make sure you proof read your work several times before you submit it. A statement with grammar, punctuation or spelling errors can make a negative impression on the admissions person and look careless or unskilled.

Plagiarism and Similarity

- UCAS has a dedicated team and purpose-built software to detect copied or similar personal statements. They keep *every* previous personal statement on file and compare new applications automatically through the software with those already submitted.
- Remember your personal statement goes to all courses and all universities, so avoid mentioning any by name.
- The declaration you make in your application is a legal document, so if you aren't submitting your own work, you leave yourself open to potential very negative consequences. In other words, it's not worth it!

Planning Your Personal Statement

Make notes before you start writing on the things you could include about yourself. Make sure that you have evidence and examples of the core areas admissions officers look for below:



Formative Interest in Subject

- What was your original inspiration for studying your subject?
- Was there a moment when your perspective on it changed?
- Who are your role models?



Subject Interest Outside the Classroom

- Have you signed up for clubs, volunteered, done any at-home projects?
- Have you participated in competitions to show your commitment to your subject?



Hard Work and Diligence

- Have you committed to something difficult in addition to your studies and succeeded?
- Have you shown yourself to be hard-working?



Critical Thinking, Skills and Aptitude

- What reading have you responded to?
- Have you disagreed with any thinkers in your subject?
- What evidence do you have for the skills the university wants?



Qualifications and Awards

- Have you studied a musical instrument/ theatre and achieved gradings?
- Have you won any prizes at school or been elected head of any clubs/ societies?



Work Experience and Extra-Curricular Activities

- Have you committed to something difficult in addition to your studies and succeeded?
- Have you shown yourself to be hard-working?

Extras that you may also wish to include:

- Your career goals (e.g. if you know why you want to study your subject)
- Any unusual impressive achievements (e.g. you have been published/ are a concert pianist)
- Anything special about you that makes you memorable and stand out (e.g. you speak 4 languages)

Worksheet to Prepare Your Statement

Questions for you to think about

- How do your A Levels, IB or AP subjects connect to the course you're applying to?
- How have you shown an interest in your subject outside of the classroom? (e.g.: work experience, volunteering, clubs/ societies)?
- What achievements do you have that might show you have the skills needed?

Formative Interest: Why Do You Want to Study Your Subject?

Subject Interest Outside the Classroom: How Have You Shown Commitment?

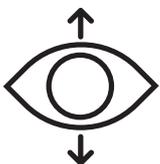
Hard Work and Diligence: What Evidence Do You Have of Hard Work?

Worksheet to Prepare Your Statement

Critical Thinking, Skills and Aptitude: Evidence You Have for Course-Related Skills

Qualifications and Awards: What Have You Achieved?

Work Experience and Extra-Curricular Activities and Anything Else to Include



In BridgeU, you can go to the Strategy Advisor and log your experiences, and then find out areas where you can improve to demonstrate all the skills, attributes and evidence that admissions officers look for.

Advice from Admissions Tutors

- ✓ Make a list of your ideas before attempting to write a full narrative.
- ✓ Show enthusiasm for your subject through your writing.
- ✓ Expect to write several drafts, so start early!
- ✓ Ask people you trust for their feedback
- ✓ Check university and college prospectuses, websites and entry profiles
- ✗ Use unnatural or overly flowery language
- ✗ Talk too much about things that aren't relevant to your subject
- ✗ Exaggerate - you'll very likely get caught out in an interview!
- ✗ Leave it to the last minute - it will seem rushed!

"For highly competitive courses which attract applications from many more candidates than there are places, comparing all applicants' personal statements helps us to identify the most committed and suitable candidates. In addition, if you're offered a conditional place and narrowly miss the required grades for the course, the university is likely to look at your personal statement again to see if your interests and experience demonstrate any extra skills that could help you on the course. So it can make a difference later in the application process as well."

Assistant Registrar for Undergraduate Admissions from University of Warwick

"Grammar and spelling skills are the basics that academics will expect from someone at this level of education. Incorrect spelling, poor grammar and punctuation can make a poor impression on the reader. For courses such as English, these skills are of paramount importance."

Undergraduate Admissions Manager at the University of Nottingham

Your Personal Statement Structure

Make notes on what you might write under each of these sections:

1. Introductory statement

2. Why you're an academic fit: please remember that this will be read by experts in the subject/s for which you are applying, so don't explain the course!

3. Talk about what you're studying, your projects and any relevant reading. Introduce the skills you have cultivated (e.g. data collection, analysis, evaluation, debate); include non examined subjects if relevant. The more academically competitive the course you are applying for, the more essential it is to develop these thoughts as evidence of a genuine commitment and interest in studying the course.

4. Work experience/volunteering/ shadowing, where relevant to your course or skills.

5. Other achievements/interests and if you have a gap year what you're doing: In reality they will do little to help your application unless you can include something of direct relevance.

Your Personal Statement Writing Guide

Introductory Statement

A good first sentence sets your personal statement up for success. Your reader will want to continue and will be interested to learn more. A bad first sentence is dull, generic or confusing.

Do

Introduce why you're interested in your subject and show enthusiasm.

Don't

- Use generic-sounding phrases
- Start with something that isn't true/ isn't you.

Famous First Words

Don't fall into the trap of using the same first line that everyone else uses! UCAS have compiled the most popular first lines (there are 1,000s of people using the same or very similar ones each year!). See if you can be a bit more original and avoid the most common ones, listed below:

- "From a young age I have (always) been..." or "For as long as I can remember I have..." or "I have always been interested in..."
- "I am applying to this course because..."

Over 150 people opened their personal statement with the same Nelson Mandela quote ("education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.")

Example first lines from real personal statements (to NOT copy!):

Mathematics (University of Cambridge)

I enjoy exploring mathematical ideas and puzzles, because unlike in most other subjects, progress seems to come mainly from genuine understanding rather than learning.

Economics (University of Edinburgh)

Until recently, I saw myself as an independent and discrete social unit. Economics knowledge has changed that perspective.

Geography (University College London)

Huge changes in the physical and human patterns of life mark the twenty-first century, and it is the direct effects of those changes on the lives of people globally that I want to study at university.

Philosophy & Physics (University of Oxford)

My desire to understand the nature of reality has inspired me to apply for Physics and Philosophy: I am excited by the chance to study the fundamental laws and structure of the universe and deepen this understanding through the analysis of the assumptions and methodology underpinning physics.

English Literature (University of Stirling)

The advice I always receive when embarking on a new project is 'write what you know'.

The First Half: Inspiration and Academics

Your opening should clearly establish why you're interested in the subject you've chosen to apply for, express your enthusiasm and provide some further insight into why this is a personal choice for you. It should also start to provide concrete evidence for your aptitude to study this subject, which can be in the form of work experience, classroom evidence (e.g. debate, wider reading) or skills that are required by the university. Make your examples and evidence personal - it will allow the admissions officer to get to know you. **Hot tip: be genuine - don't try to be someone you're not.**

Do

- Deep-dive into what led you to decide to apply to your subject.
- Include examples of personal inspirations (e.g.: experiences, books you read that had an impact on your choice).
- Give evidence of your passion for and commitment to your subject both in and out of the classroom.

Don't

- Use generic-sounding, vague phrases like "I am passionate about X" without explaining why.
- Make long lists (e.g. books you've read) - explain why you've included each one you have.
- Include many or long quotes. The admissions officer wants to hear from you, not Karl Marx!

Key

Yellow: Formative Interest in Subject

Green: Critical thinking, skills and aptitude; Hard Work and Diligence

Blue: Subject Interest Outside the Classroom

Example 1: Philosophy & Physics - accepted to Oxford, Sheffield, Nottingham and Bristol

My desire to understand the nature of reality has inspired me to apply for Physics and Philosophy. I am excited by the chance to study the fundamental laws and structure of the universe and deepen this understanding through the analysis of the assumptions and methodology underpinning physics. My **interest in philosophy was awakened when I questioned my childhood religious beliefs**; reading Blackburn's "Think" **convinced me to scrutinise my assumptions about the world and to ensure I could justify my beliefs**. This course is especially relevant as **physicists tackle issues previously considered to be in the domain of philosophy** such as why there is something rather than nothing, and the extent to which it is meaningful to talk about an observer-dependent reality. The search for a theory of everything currently being conducted by physicists is of particular interest to me and in "The Grand Design" Hawking proposes a collection of string theories, dubbed M-theory, as the explanation of why the universe is the way it is. Although he opens by proclaiming that philosophy is dead, **many of his arguments (like his proposal of Model Dependent-Realism) are philosophical, and I was disappointed by his reluctance to aim for a more unified theory**. I look forward to studying the theories of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics and their philosophical consequences: while I have read introductions to these topics in books such as Feynman's "Six Easy Pieces" and "Six Not-So-Easy Pieces" and qualitative descriptions of their consequences in New Scientist, **I crave a more fundamental mathematical understanding. My interest in particle physics led me to arrange work experience at JET for October.**

The First Half: Inspiration and Academics contd.

Key

Yellow: Formative Interest in Subject

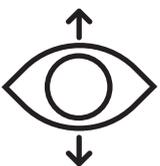
Green: Critical thinking, skills and aptitude; Hard Work and Diligence

Blue: Subject Interest Outside the Classroom

Example 2: Geography - accepted to Imperial College London

It was on a recent sports tour to the Far East that I was immediately struck by how much of my work in Geography was apparent. At first hand I was witnessing the 'haves' and 'have nots' that have emerged from the process of globalisation. **This proved a fascinating, if humbling, experience for me, and my decision to read Geography beyond A Level was cemented here.** I have really enjoyed my A Level Geography course as it has provided me with **a clearer insight into processes that are likely to shape world events in my lifetime and this is a discipline that I honestly feel I can contribute to.** To bolster my learning and understanding of the subject, I have read beyond the specification reading list. **I subscribe to National Geographic and have furthered my research into cultural Geography by reading Barbara Demick's 'Nothing to Envy'.** This was an incredible book and it has supported my subsequent work well. I have also read Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring', which explores the impact of technological change on global geographies.

Currently, I am studying Maths and Economics in addition to Geography. **Economics has been a valuable tool, providing the 'nuts and bolts' to economic processes and my geography has provided a spatial and temporal element.** Maths has supported my fieldwork investigations well and has given me experience in hypothesis testing and statistical analysis. **This was vital when I was analysing data collected in the field on the south coast. Maths has also improved my problem solving skills and numerical literacy - both of which will be vital to my undergraduate work.**



In BridgeU, you can go to the Writing Builder and interact with personal statements which have been annotated to indicate how they are strong and where they incorporated their strengths into the narrative.

The Second Half: Further Evidence, Work Experience and Interests

The second half of your statement should build on the first half, giving concrete evidence for your aptitude to study and be successful in the field. It should include more detail on how your interest has developed, and how you have pursued your academic studies and subject interest outside the classroom. Make sure you have examples of hard work and resilience.

Do

Give evidence of the skills you claim to have through commitment, participation and achievement.

Don't

List extra-curricular activities without linking them to your skills or course and explaining why you're including them.

Key

Pink: Work Experience and Extra-Curricular Activities

Green: Critical thinking, skills and aptitude; Hard Work and Diligence

Blue: Subject Interest Outside the Classroom

Example 2: Geography - accepted to Imperial College London
(contd. from same statement overleaf)

Last year **I completed a two week work experience at Imperial Pharmacy** and a lot of the time was spent observing and shadowing the chief pharmacist. Although the work itself was not directly related to my field of studies, it gave me an insight into life within a professional atmosphere. Moreover, **I work as a qualified lifeguard for the local cub pack and the leisure department at my school.** My computer skills have been boosted with my work at a firework company where I maintain the company's website and produce PowerPoint presentations for sales.

I am a keen sportsman and represent the school at first team level in rugby, swimming and hockey. I play for the U19 team at Woodford RFC. **Recently, I have started learning kickboxing and mixed martial arts and have obtained the purple belt in kickboxing.** It is my ambition to gain my black belt whilst at university. It is through these activities that my confidence and determination have increased; all of these require a great deal of personal motivation and focus. This was most apparent last year in what proved to be a very difficult season for the 1st XV Rugby team. However, a combination of these skills and an excellent team ethos saw us through tough times. **This year I was selected to be Vice Captain of the 1st XV Rugby team and Captain of Swimming which will allow me to further develop my leadership, teamwork and organisational skills.** At present I hold the rank of sergeant having participated in the School's CCF for 5 years, I am a prefect for the new Year 7 pupils which has helped improve my patience and understanding; as I have discovered, these are both qualities needed when supporting younger members of the School! At present I am **working to complete my Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award** and I am also editor for the School magazine. In addition, **I assist in editing the School's Geography magazine, which has allowed me to research more subject areas which are not linked to my subject specification and view topics from a slightly different angle.**

Closing

Finish with a punchy sentence or two that summarises why you're an incredible candidate for this university and they'd be lucky to have you!

Do

Communicate your commitment and confidence in your aptitude and skills.

Don't

- Just tail off
- End by introducing a completely new concept

Key

Blue: passion/ commitment to the subject

Yellow: connects course to career aspirations

Green: personal achievements and traits

Example last lines from real personal statements (to NOT copy!):

Earth Sciences (Imperial College London)

My aspiration is to follow a course that combines **my passion for Mother Earth and my compassion for people so that I can then accomplish something meaningful in my future, such as aiding in the prediction of natural disasters**. Our planet is **such a captivating entity and I am excited and highly motivated** to pursue a course that allows me to discover and understand as much as possible about why the world around me is the way it is.

Medicine (Imperial College London)

Interest in Medicine aside, other enthusiasms of mine include languages, philosophy, and mythology. It is curiously fitting that in ancient Greek lore, healing was but one of the many arts Apollo presided over, alongside archery and music. **I firmly believe that a doctor should explore the world outside the field of Medicine, and it is with such experiences that I hope to better empathise and connect with the patients I will care for in my medical career.**

Economic History with Economics (London School of Economics)

The highlight of my extra-curricular activities has been my visit to Shanghai with the Lord Mayor's trade delegation in September 2012. **I was selected to give a speech at this world trade conference due to my interest in economic and social history**. I focussed on Anglo-Sino relations from a youth perspective and discussed the social and economic advantages of a closer relationship between the two countries. **The preparation of my presentation and accompanying report in a short space of time was a good test of my organisational abilities**. The trip gave me the opportunity not only to attend some excellent talks by senior decision-makers, but also interact with them. **I particularly enjoyed the seminar format, and look forward to experiencing more of this at university. My keen interest and desire to further my knowledge of history and economics, I believe, would make the course ideal for me.**

Well done! Hopefully now you've created a good first draft!

Now, do a read-through and check that it flows, puts you in your best light, makes sense, is grammatically correct and avoids cliches.

Some final thoughts from our team of advisors:

- ✓ Ask for feedback, but only take it on board if you agree and it feels like *you*.
- ✓ Take a break if it's feeling overwhelming or you're not making progress.
- ✓ Write from your heart - only you know why you want to study your subject: share it!
- ✓ Write simply and honestly - you are different from other candidates.

Good luck from everyone at BridgeU!

BridgeU

