

Teacher Information Sheet

Personal Statements: hints and tips

This information is designed to provide advice for those staff in schools and colleges who are involved in supporting the UCAS application process. It provides general information and is not intended to be comprehensive or to provide a blueprint: different universities apply different criteria for assessing applications and you should ensure that you and your students are aware of any particular requirements. We hope, however, that this will help you and your students address some of the issues in writing an appropriate personal statement for entry to higher education.

How can you support students with their Personal Statements?

- Suggest the use of an impactful first paragraph and powerful verbs and action words to convey a sense of participation, involvement and accomplishment (see 'Powerful Verbs List' taken from www.getintouni.com/Free/PowerfulVerbs/ at end of document).
- At least three-quarters of the statement should be about the subject the student is applying for and should explain why they are interested, demonstrate their enthusiasm and provide evidence of their commitment beyond the classroom.
- Be wary of providing complete examples of previous personal statements as UCAS now subject applications to similarity detection tests, designed to identify work copied from other sources.
- Stress the importance of highlighting and expanding on any accomplishments and interests versus just giving information. See below for a 'before' and 'after' example:

Before

I enjoy history lessons so have decided to pursue the subject at degree level. I look forward to examining a range of historical subjects. I am particularly interested in French history and trips to France have broadened my historical perspective.

After

I have always been fascinated by the past beginning with a childhood interest in time travel and mythology. School exchange trips to France and Germany provided me with the opportunity to study 18th century French history and World War I & II in depth.

Important points to remember:

- It should be no more than 4000 characters (including spaces) and no more than 47 lines long (this will show automatically on the screen)
- It is best to prepare it offline as a word processed document and paste the final version into the form
- Use plain text – no bold, underline, italics or foreign characters, such as á, ë, ñ
- If writing on-line, it must be saved regularly as the site times-out after 35 minutes of inactivity

Do's and Don'ts

There is lots of advice on the internet about how to fill in personal statements but much of it is contradictory. How to complete it and what to include depends to some extent on the course applied for and its academic requirements. What matters is that the student is articulate and chooses a style which suits them. They can use paragraphs, headings, note form or bullet points, although we recommend a plain prose approach.

The personal statement MUST:

- be free of grammar and spelling mistakes
- be focused
- convey motivation and enthusiasm
- be at least three-quarters directly relevant to the choice of course
- be checked by tutor or subject teacher
- be original work – UCAS subject applications to similarity detection tests, designed to identify work copied from other sources.

DO:

- create a list of ideas before attempting to write the real thing
- expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy
- ask trusted and appropriate people for their feedback
- check university and college prospectuses, websites and entry profiles, as they usually list the criteria and qualities that they want their students to demonstrate
- be enthusiastic – if interest is shown for the course, it may help to gain a place

DON'T:

- let spelling and grammatical errors spoil the statement
- feel the need to use elaborate language
- lie –students may get caught out at interview when asked to elaborate on an interesting achievement
- rely on a spellchecker as it will not pick up everything - proof read as many times as possible
- leave it to the last minute – the statement will seem rushed and important information could be left out

What to include:

1. reasons for applying for a particular degree(s) and how this relates to current/previous studies and experiences such as extra curricular activities and interests (this is particularly important when they're applying for a subject that they have not studied before).
2. reasons for the choice of subjects taken at A level or equivalent
3. what the student can offer - evidence of a willingness/desire to learn at a higher level and evidence that they understand what is required to study the course, eg if applying for psychology courses, show that they know how scientific the subject is
4. details of relevant activities and achievements. Any of the following might be appropriate to include but students should consider carefully and only include those which are relevant. Instead of merely listing these they should demonstrate skills and knowledge gained and note how they will apply this to their future studies:
 - employment, work experience and other positions of responsibility
 - hobbies, interests and volunteering
 - accredited and non-accredited skills and achievement which they have gained through activities such as Young Enterprise
 - any other achievements that they are proud of, e.g. reaching grade three piano or being selected for the county cricket team.
5. Why they want to go to university/college and what contribution they hope to make to the institution

Further Information

<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/undergraduate/applications/application.php>

<http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/startapplication/apply09/personalstatement/>

- Accelerated
- Accomplished
- Achieved
- Acted
- Activated
- Adapted
- Addressed
- Adjusted
- Administered
- Advanced
- Advertised
- Advised
- Advocated
- Aided
- Allocated
- Analysed
- Answered
- Applied
- Appraised
- Approved
- Arbitrated
- Arranged
- Ascertained
- Assembled
- Assessed
- Assigned
- Assisted
- Attained
- Augmented
- Authorised
- Awarded
- Balanced
- Began
- Boosted
- Briefed
- Budgeted
- Built
- Calculated
- Captured
- Catalogued
- Centralised
- Chaired
- Charted
- Checked
- Clarified
- Classified
- Coached
- Collaborated
- Collected
- Combined
- Communicated
- Compared
- Compiled
- Completed
- Composed
- Computed
- Conceived
- Conceptualised
- Condensed
- Conducted
- Conferred
- Conserved
- Consolidated
- Constructed
- Consulted
- Contacted
- Continued
- Contributed
- Controlled
- Converted
- Conveyed
- Convinced
- Coordinated
- Corresponded
- Created
- Critiqued
- Cultivated
- Customised
- Debugged
- Decided
- Defined
- Delegated
- Delivered
- Demonstrated
- Designated
- Designed
- Detected
- Determined
- Developed
- Devised
- Diagnosed
- Directed
- Discovered
- Dispensed
- Displayed
- Dissected
- Distributed
- Diverted
- Documented
- Drafted
- Earned
- Edited
- Educated
- Effected
- Eliminated
- Emphasised
- Employed
- Encouraged
- Enforced
- Engineered
- Enhanced
- Enlarged
- Enlisted
- Ensured
- Entertained
- Established
- Estimated
- Evaluated
- Examined
- Executed
- Expanded
- Expedited
- Experimented
- Explained
- Explored
- Expressed
- Extended
- Extracted
- Fabricated
- Facilitated
- Fashioned
- Finalised
- Fixed
- Fit
- Focused
- Forecasted
- Formed
- Formulated
- Fostered
- Found
- Fulfilled
- Furnished
- Gained
- Gathered
- Generated
- Governed
- Grossed
- Guided
- Handled
- Headed
- Heightened
- Helped
- Hired
- Honed
- Hosted
- Hypothesised
- Identified
- Illustrated
- Imagined
- Implemented
- Improved
- Improvised
- Incorporated
- Increased
- Indexed
- Influenced
- Informed
- Initiated
- Innovated
- Inspected
- Inspired
- Installed
- Instituted
- Integrated
- Interacted
- Interpreted
- Interviewed
- Introduced
- Invented
- Inventoried
- Investigated
- Involved
- Issued
- Joined
- Judged
- Kept
- Launched
- Learned
- Led
- Lifted
- Listened
- Located
- Logged
- LECTURED
- Maintained
- Managed
- Manipulated
- Marketed
- Maximised
- Measured
- Mediated
- Merged
- Mobilised
- Modified
- Monitored
- Motivated
- Navigated
- Negotiated
- Netted
- Observed
- Obtained
- Opened
- Operated
- Ordered
- Orchestrated
- Organised
- Originated
- Outlined
- Overcame
- Overhauled
- Oversaw
- Participated
- Performed
- Persuaded
- Photographed
- Pinpointed
- Piloted
- Pioneered
- Placed
- Planned
- Played
- Predicted
- Prepared
- Prescribed
- Presented
- Presided
- Prevented
- Printed
- Prioritised
- Processed
- Produced
- Programmed
- Projected
- Promoted
- Proofread
- Proposed
- Protected
- Proved
- Provided
- Publicised
- Purchased
- Qualified
- Questioned
- Raised
- Ran
- Rated
- Reached
- Realised
- Reasoned
- Received
- Recommended
- Reconciled
- Recorded
- Recruited
- Reduced
- Referred
- Regulated
- Rehabilitated
- Related
- Remodelled
- Rendered
- Reorganised
- Repaired
- Replaced
- Reported
- Represented
- Researched
- Reshaped
- Resolved
- Responded
- Restored
- Retrieved
- Reviewed
- Revised
- Revitalised
- Routed
- Saved
- Scheduled
- Screened
- Searched
- Secured
- Selected
- Separated
- Served
- Shaped
- Shared
- Simplified
- Simulated
- Sketched
- Sold
- Solved
- Sorted
- Spearheaded
- Specialised
- Specified
- Spoke
- Sponsored
- Staffed
- Standardised
- Started
- Streamlined
- Strengthened
- Structured
- Studied
- Suggested
- Summarised
- Supervised
- Supplied
- Supported
- Surpassed
- Surveyed
- Sustained
- Synthesised
- Systematised
- Targeted
- Taught
- Terminated
- Tested
- Tightened
- Totalled
- Tracked
- Traded
- Trained
- Transcribed
- Transformed
- Transmitted
- Translated
- Travelled
- Tutored
- Uncovered
- Undertook
- Unified
- United
- Updated
- Upgraded
- Used
- Utilised
- Validated
- Verbalised
- Verified
- Vitalised
- Volunteered
- Weighed
- Widened
- Won
- Worked
- Wrote