



University
of Exeter

Advice on writing a successful personal statement

The personal statement is your opportunity to explain why you want to study a particular course, as well as what will make you a good student. You'll need to demonstrate your enthusiasm, subject knowledge and any relevant skills.

Things to consider when writing your personal statement:

- It's one statement for up to five UCAS choices, so make sure you don't mention a specific university or college by name.
- You're limited to 4,000 characters (47 lines), so keep your statement concise and to the point.
- We suggest that 70 to 80 per cent of your personal statement is focused on the subject(s) you're applying for.
- Try to use recent examples of achievements and accomplishments and tell us what you gained/learned from doing them.
- Some higher education providers may use your personal statement as the basis for an interview, so be prepared to answer questions on it.



Thinking about your motivation

We've said that when writing your personal statement you need to focus on the subjects you're applying to. This means you should consider your reasons for applying. Your chosen universities will want to know why you've selected the subject you wish to study with them. Perhaps you're motivated by your passion for the subject, or perhaps the subject relates to your future career ambitions.

The rainbow diagram on this page offers a structure for drafting your personal statement. Your chosen subject is the core and the first layer is about the specific areas of that subject that interest you. For the second layer, consider the reasons for your choice. The third and final layer is about all the experience you have that you can relate

to the subject. You can create your own rainbow diagram or simply write notes for each heading. This will help you pin down your knowledge and interests related to the subject. It can help you convey that you've undertaken your research and really thought through your decision.



Powerful verbs

When describing your experience, it's important to give examples that focus on your role and what you achieved. Phrases such as 'like', 'enjoy' and 'took part in' aren't so helpful here. Using active verbs can get your experience across more effectively. (This is also the case when completing job applications.) Here are some suggestions to get you started:

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Accelerated | Accomplished | Achieved | Acted | Activated | Adapted | Advocated | Appraised |
| Approved | Captured | Chaired | Clarified | Compiled | Composed | Consolidated | Contributed |
| Customised | Decided | Delegated | Designated | Emphasised | Encouraged | Enforced | Engineered |
| Enhanced | Enlisted | Evaluated | Explained | Expressed | Facilitated | Forecasted | Formulated |
| Fostered | Fulfilled | Hosted | Hypothesised | Identified | Illustrated | Implemented | Improved |
| Incorporated | Increased | Informed | Initiated | Innovated | Inspired | Interpreted | Launched |
| Led | Manipulated | Maximised | Mediated | Merged | Mobilised | Motivated | Navigated |
| Negotiated | Operated | Ordered | Orchestrated | Organised | Overhauled | Participated | Persuaded |
| Piloted | Pioneered | Predicted | Prepared | Prescribed | Prevented | Projected | Promoted |
| Proposed | Questioned | Realised | Reconciled | Recruited | Regulated | Resolved | Secured |
| Specialised | Streamlined | Summarised | Sustained | Tracked | Transformed | Translated | Uncovered |
| Undertook | Upgraded | Utilised | Validated | Verbalised | Verified | Vitalised | Weighed |

Thinking about your skills

Transferable skills are skills you've gained in one area of life that can be transferred to another. Everyone has them, but they can be hard to identify. Your personal statement should include transferable skills that will be useful at university.

The table below can help you identify different activities you've undertaken, skills you've gained and how these might be useful for university. Alongside previous/current studies, you can include hobbies, volunteering, work experience and more. List all the activities you can think of, even if they don't seem relevant at first. We've included an example.

Examples of transferable skills include:

budgeting, verbal/written communication, problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, listening, empathy, organisation, time management, leadership, numeracy, teamwork, confidence, independence.



| Activity | Skills attained | Links with your subject |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Looking after siblings. | Communication, problem solving, independence, listening and organisation. | Communication – needed to speak with students Organisation – managing independent study effectively. |



Personal statement dos and don'ts

Do

- Research your subject(s) and chosen providers
- Write what comes naturally
- Ensure it flows and has a logical structure
- Check that it's free from grammar and spelling mistakes
- Get it proofread

Don't

- Include misleading information
- Take risks with what you include
- Plagiarise
- Use bullet points or lists
- Leave it to the last minute
- Submit it without checking

Make sure you research the admissions policy for each university you're applying to. The way personal statements are used by universities can vary. Preferences for what they want to see included in the statement can also vary. Take a look at university websites and don't be afraid to contact them if you need clarification.



This advice is not exhaustive. There are lots of other useful resources online. The [UCAS website](#) is a good place to start and also includes bespoke advice for carers, estranged students, refugees and asylum seekers.



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