

Writing a Personal Statement 2021

Student:

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Guidance for Writing a Personal Statement

The personal statement forms a crucial part of your UCAS application. It is your opportunity to tell prospective university admission tutors why you are applying for the course and demonstrate your interest in the subject. For courses that do not involve admissions interviews, the personal statement is your only chance to directly communicate with university tutors and convey why you should be selected. There is no single way of completing the personal statement but you must focus on making an excellent impression, so great care and attention is essential. However, this booklet will outline a basic structure. Your personal statement is likely to have a decisive bearing on whether you receive offers from universities, particularly for institutions at which there is a high level of competition for places.

Your personal statement must stand out, and be engaging to read. This will mean having to write several drafts of your statement, carefully reflecting upon certain phrases and sentences in order to produce the best statement possible. You are able to enter up to 400 characters (including spaces) in 47 lines and you will be able to change the presentation by using features such as bold, italic and underline. Admissions tutors want to know why you have applied for the course. You need to demonstrate that you have researched courses thoroughly and understand what the programme of study entails. Many universities provide information on the sort of attributes that they are looking for in successful applicants. These may include leadership and teamwork skills, problem solving, relevant experience and intellectual curiosity. You need to ensure that your academic work and wider experience of extra-curricular activity reflects these skills or highlights the potential to develop them during undergraduate study.

It is also worth bearing in mind that this intensive process of writing and reflecting upon yourself will also greatly benefit future applications that you will write in the future - further study courses, employment, grants and other voluntary opportunities.

How do Admissions Tutors make a decision?

University departments receive a high volume of applications from well-qualified prospective students. They use your UCAS personal statement to find out more about you, beyond your GCSE results and predicted grades. They look for well-rounded individuals who are motivated to study, are enthusiastic about the subject and have a range of academic interests. They are also looking for students with a responsible attitude, who are sufficiently organised to cope with university study.

Your personal statement can also make a difference later in the application process. If you narrowly miss your required grades on Results Day, an admissions tutor may look at your personal statement again to see if your interests and experiences demonstrate extra skills that could help you on the course. In the event that you enter the UCAS systems of Adjustment or Clearing, your personal statement will also be used again by university tutors.

Be enthusiastic and focused

You should be focused on your subject choice and remember that it will not be possible to apply for a number of unrelated courses, as this will make a personal statement very difficult to write.

Be positive and genuine

Advice from friends and family members can be helpful, but do not be tempted to borrow parts of the examples that can be found online. UCAS operates a 'similarity detection programme' which will identify plagiarism, and tutors will respond positively to work that is original and thoughtful.

Be clear and concise

Ensure that every sentence you write adds something to the personal statement, and if you choose to use quotations, titles of books or names of academics, make sure you accompany these with an explanation or context, so they are a positive and meaningful addition.

Analysis of a Personal Statement

Here, Joe shares his thought processes with writing his UCAS Personal Statement applying for Economics:

These two pages shows each part of my final personal statement and why I wrote it this way.

Examination of any quality newspaper will probably demonstrate that more of the headlines address economic problems than any other topic. The importance and relevance of economic related disciplines to the modern world have led me to want to pursue the study of the subject at a higher level.

Here I'm telling the reader that I think Economics is a genuinely useful subject and that I would like to study it.

I am particularly interested in the behaviour of firms and organisations from an economic point of view and I have based my A-level coursework in this field.

Here I move onto myself - I tell the reader one of my particular interests about the subject and more importantly what I did in relation to this interest.

There's no point stating you are interested in a subject and not saying either why or what you did about it.

Last year, I took part in an economics and business project called Young Enterprise in which I set up a small company and sold products to students at our school. I enjoyed the chance to put some of my business economic theory into practice and was able to enhance my management and communication skills. I also gained a distinction in the associated exam.

Here I talk about practical experience and what I feel I had gained from it.

It tells the reader that I take part in group activities and practice group management and communication skills. It also shows that I can put the skills I have into practice by doing something like this.

To gain practical experience in the workplace, I worked for two weeks at a small software company specialising in financial software. I currently have a part time job and this has taught me much about teamwork, responsibility and time management in the workplace.

Again, discussing my work experience - I mention what I did, why I did it and what I learned

In my spare time, I enjoy reading, swimming, sketching and solving puzzles and logic problems. I have redesigned and been responsible for the maintenance of my school's website (www.schoolsurlhere.sch.uk).

The main reason I included them is because I thought I needed some interests other than the standard reading and going out with friends.

I decided not to put down my computer and web design skills because they had been mentioned already, but did write about how I designed my schools' website.

I also wrote I maintained it, showing I have a position of responsibility.

I believe that I will gain a highly marketable set of skills from the study of economics at university. I have found economics to be a challenging and diverse discipline and I am interested in both macro and micro economics. It is this variation of perspective, combined with its real world importance, that makes economics an appealing subject to study at university.

Finally, I finished with a short sentence on what I thought I would get out of university. I would have put what I was going to do afterwards but didn't really know.

I rounded off my personal statement with my personal opinion of Economics. As well as the first line, the last line is probably quite an important part of the personal statement.

Personal Statement Subject Examples

History Personal Statement

Growing up in London, I have been exposed to the city's history from a very young age. While appreciating the myriad historical eras that have shaped the development of London, it is the Victorian era that fascinates me the most. Throughout this period of significant change, from the Industrial Revolution to the suffrage movement, London has incessantly remained at the centre of history. Recently I have developed a particular interest in how changes such as the decline of the Liberal party and the rise of the Labour party have deeply rooted themselves in our society, and continue to be felt in our political system today. In this way history has shaped contemporary life and continues to mould, influence and develop it. My affinity with the Victorians reached its fullest this year when I studied 19th and early 20th century British politics. As such, the study of History has opened up my eyes to the textures and contours of society as we see it today, allowing me a greater understanding of contemporary issues.

History holds a unifying thread in all the subjects I study at A Level. My pursuit of English Literature is driven by my love of Classical works, which are not only interesting and engaging, but also facilitate my thirst for knowledge of the contrasting characteristics of earlier societies. Through studying Philosophy and Ethics I have learned how to structure a coherent and consistent argument which is essential in the study of history. I particularly enjoy the synoptic unit of A2 history in which I combine my use of historical sources and historical explanations as well as looking at the historical significance and the role of interpretations in history. Each lesson is set up as a mini 'tutorial' which allows me to exercise my independent learning skills. This assignment also allows me to work on a personal area of interest as I have chosen the controversial topic of the historiography of the French Revolution. The Revolution is considered vital as it marked the beginnings of social justice in France, and provides an interesting comparison to progress in social justice in the UK. To broaden my understanding, I ventured to the British Library, looking through the archives and researching my chosen topic. Research is one of my favourite elements of history. I have acknowledged the fact that history is heavily weighted to reading and the acquiring of information. I can confidently say that I do not consider this as an obstacle or a challenge as I enjoy reading and assimilating ideas. Since starting sixth form, I have started reading academic articles from History Today and Modern History Today. I particularly enjoy these articles as they challenge my thinking and most offer different interpretations about periods of history.

My fervour for History at a higher level was particularly apparent in my AS year when I was awarded the History Student Award for outstanding achievement and progress throughout the year. Furthermore, I was also chosen as a History ambassador for which I represented my school on the 'Lessons at Auschwitz' field trip to the Nazi death camps in Auschwitz, Poland. This opportunity allowed me to experience history first hand. Being able to visit the death camps that had such an immense influence on humanity allowed me to reflect on how the past has shaped and structured contemporary society.

During the summer of 2013 I completed a six week internship at BP, during which I worked closely with highly accomplished members of the oil trading team. My work placement allowed me to pick up the key transferable skills that I was seeking. At the end of a vigorous six weeks I gained skills such as independent research across regular and bespoke systems, analytical skills and team working skills all of which I will utilise throughout my History degree. Studying History at university will further my knowledge as there are so many avenues that I have yet to explore and I hope that university will fill in these gaps in my knowledge.

Psychology Personal Statement

The foundations to a person's mind are based on the principals both instilled into and gathered from experiences as a child. As children grow older, they soon start interpreting this information to decide for themselves which of their actions are right and wrong. What draws me to study Psychology is this mental processing, and how it affects a person's current and future disposition. I am particularly interested in child psychology, because it is at this stage when a person's personal identity begins to build up, as children are easily influenced by their environment and what they learn from experiences, they carry their entire lives.

Studying human psychology was always a great passion for me, and certain many factors have developed my love for the subject. At the age of 11, I often took on the responsibility of watching over my young nephews, one of whom has autism. This allowed me to observe their behaviour, and notice the irregularity of autism. It wasn't long before I found myself mentally noting down every action of the autistic child and figuring out a way to interact with him using the information I had gathered. My yearning to study the mental processing of children further grew when I volunteered to teach a class of infants. There was a language barrier between the children and I, and I found it fascinating how their young minds were still able to convey their thoughts through actions, and thereby breaking through that barrier.

I am currently studying Mathematics, Biology, and English language for my A levels. Calculus is of particular interest to me because of how several methods can produce the same result. Relating this to Psychology, I find that there are several actions that bring about a single reaction in an individual. Studying Biology has honed my ability to experiment and assess, and to notice the symptoms of many disorders. The subject has enlightened me on how the physical body works, and I am now curious to understand how the body's psyche works. English language is developing my verbal and written language skills, which I know are greatly essential for my chosen course, and whatever path it leads me to.

My spare time is filled with light reading into subjects that interest me, and I have developed some knowledge on a wide variety of subjects. Although certain circumstances don't allow me to go out very often, I am quite athletic, taking part in outdoor sports that range from basketball to skateboarding. I am also fond of travelling for I am greatly interested in different cultures and traditions, and what significant roles they play on an individual's psyche. As a reliable and hard-working individual, I believe I can make a worthy contribution, and perhaps more so, during my years at the university. I am very passionate about Psychology, and would eventually like to pursue a career in the field.

As someone who plays many roles in observation, it would deeply satisfy me to be able to devote myself into something that can better the mutual understanding between people's behaviour and perhaps promote a better society.

Biology Personal Statement

The direction of my interest in how the world functions has definitely changed and augmented over the years, but within the last few years it has been humans and higher organisms that have captured me most. When learning about natural selection in A-level Biology I began to realise that understanding survival of the fittest could be the key to the explanation of why every living organism functions and behaves the way it does. I read Darwin's 'On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection' and ever since have found myself relating everything I observe in the world back to natural selection. There are however limits and boundaries; the challenges of pinning down the behaviour of higher organisms and humans to biological processes, and then to genes, and then to survival of the fittest enthral me and is where my passion lies.

Studying both chemistry and biology at A-Level I am constantly making links between the two. I now feel that they cannot be separated if I am truly going to understand the human body. My desire to understand the chemical basis of behaviour has led me towards the field of neuroscience. The work of Rebecca Saxe on how we think about other people's thoughts has deeply influenced me. After watching online lectures by her and reading 'Words, Thoughts and Theories' by Alison Gopnick; I am committed to spending a career in learning and researching about the brain and the cognitive processes that are key to understanding consciousness.

To further my knowledge of life and its origins I have completed an Open University module called 'Human Genetics and Health Issues'. Not only did I gain fascinating knowledge on modern genetics, I also learnt to discipline myself and manage my time more effectively. This was a useful skill to further develop as I am constantly juggling college, extracurricular studies, part-time work as a waitress, hobbies and a social life which has been a formidable challenge.

My curious nature has led to my own small research projects. This year I entered one of my projects for the Google International Science Fair and my submission was chosen to be the only UK semi-finalist. The project explored the topic of whether it is possible to use our sense of taste as a means to find a reproductive mate that is genetically compatible. I am a dedicated musician and love to compose my own music; I recently re-scored a short film which was shown at Shambala Festival. I have played the piano and sung for 10 years achieving up to grade 5 in piano so far. My ability to speak publically improved and my skills in reasoning and analysis of argument were enhanced when my debate team won the Iain Duncan Smith debate competition at the House of Commons this year.

The idea of being in an environment where people aren't afraid to ask questions and find the answers for themselves is tremendously appealing to me. I am really looking forward to beginning my undergraduate degree not just because it's a stepping stone for a research career but because I love to learn.

Mechanical Engineering Personal Statement

From a very young age, I had aspirations of becoming an engineer, because I wanted to build machines that did not require direct human energy inputs to operate. I achieved this for the first time a few weeks later, designing a vehicle that carried its energy stored in rubber-bands; it wasn't a roaring success, but the fact that it wasn't perfect only increased my desire to learn more about engineering. Soon afterwards, I became a serious motor sport enthusiast, and to understand the sport more, I began assisting my dad and his mechanic in the maintenance of our family cars and electricity generator. I quickly learnt and understood the function of every part of the generator and before long, my dad ran out of answers to my questions, like: 'Why do high performance engines often have up to six valves per cylinder when two would do the job?'. He therefore encouraged me to read further about engineering, and a few books later, I knew what I was devoting my life to.

The more I learn about mechanical engineering, the more assured I become that a career as a mechanical engineer is suited to me. A few years ago whilst researching for a physics assignment, I discovered that most cars are 20 to 30 percent efficient at best. This statistic is unacceptable, and it had a big influence on my decision to study mechanical engineering, with my focus being engine design. In addition, learning subsequently of the rotary engine, continuously variable transmission (cvt), pneumatic and desmodromic valve control, hydraulics and many other interesting concepts has further strengthened my decision to study mechanical engineering, and it is my belief that I really can make a mark in the automobile industry.

I believe that success, as an engineer in this day and age, requires technical competence and a combination of management, leadership, communication and business skills. Leadership is something that I have naturally and my school recognised this by appointing me a senior prefect, which I believe has further improved my leadership and communication skills. In addition, I recently set up a maths club in my school where sixth-formers who are good at maths help pupils from the junior school with their study and homework. This has improved my communication and presentation skills tremendously. Reading Robert Kiyosaki's book, 'Rich Dad, Poor Dad', taught me the importance of having financial and business skills. To improve these skills, I volunteered at my local British Heart Foundation shop for a few months, to understand how charities make money. This turned out to be a very valuable educational experience.

When I have time outside my curricular and club activities, I am a very enthusiastic sportsman. My main sporting interests are football and the high jump. Presently, I am in the process of starting up a football team for the sixth-formers in my school, to improve general physical fitness and to foster a sense of belonging among the new sixth-formers in my school. I am also working towards a sports leadership award. In addition, I am involved in Greenwich council's Gifted and Talented program called 'xtrahot', and I have attended a number of seminars and workshops as part of the program.

It is my hope that a degree from your university would serve as a solid base for a successful career in engineering, where hopefully, I would be involved in the development of new technology for cleaner and more efficient transportation systems.

Sports Science Personal Statement

Throughout my life, I have always enjoyed engaging in Physical Education and would like to pursue my career in the field of sports science. I have always had a keen interest and have felt very passionately when it comes to the practical and theoretical work concerning Physical Education. I am very aware of the importance of exercise and the related issues of diet and fitness on the prevention of injury in the human body

I am currently studying A2 Physical Education, A2 Psychology, and AS Biology. These subjects have appealed to me because of the variety of topics that they covered. The aspects of Biology I find particularly interesting are about health and nutrition and how the body is affected by exercise and nutrition. In Psychology, I am very interested in what makes people unique and how the psychological or mental conscience could affect an individuals thinking. During my time studying Physical Education, I have undertaken research assignments in a variety of topics such as motivation, reinforcement, and local provisions. Completing these assignments has always been a challenge and it gives me a chance to work hard and improve my knowledge in Physical Education

I have been awarded my 'Community Sports Leadership Award (CSLA)'. As part of this course I was required to complete a number of hours of voluntary work putting my skills into practice. My voluntary work included helping to organise an indoor sports competition, taking P.E lessons for a primary school, and assisting with badminton sessions at my local leisure centre. I have also achieved a 'First Aid' qualification which has enabled me to acquire the knowledge when dealing with dangerous or life threatening injuries. I am now fully qualified to work with children of all ages participating in sporting activities

I am an active person with a wide variety of interest outside college. I have a keen interest in sports and have represented my school and college cricket teams as well as representing my local club. Other sporting interests include playing Badminton, Squash, Football, Hockey, and Volleyball. I enjoy going to the gym, and like to travel around the U.K during my holidays

Studying Sports Science will require commitment and hard work, and I am determined to use my time and dedication in this field as I hope to achieve my career aspirations by studying sports science, which would hopefully lead me to the direction of becoming a successful sports therapist.

American Studies Personal Statement

The main aspect of the U.S.A that interests me is their political history. Civil rights, particularly the story of Martin Luther King Jr. and how he fought for freedom despite facing extreme challenges, has inspired me to learn more about the U.S.A, from the Founding Fathers and George Washington, to Barack Obama himself. Currently, I'm reading 'To Be President, Quest For The White House 2008' by Ian Leslie, which documents the recent election and is helping me to understand how the American government works.

In GCSE history, I was intrigued with our topics on the Gold Rush, the first cowboys, outlaws, vigilantes and the manipulation of the Native Americans which led to their ultimate demise. In English, we are reading 'The Handmaid's Tale' by Margaret Atwood, learning her views on the oppression of women within modern society. Doing further research on dictatorships and the dominance of power such as in the U.S.A has fascinated me greatly. Reading 'The Big Sleep' by Raymond Chandler last year was exciting due to the links with 1930's prohibition America and the corrupt police force; all dramatised as a novel. Studying it allowed me to formulate my opinions about the novel into an analytical argument under a strict deadline.

The American penitentiary system has also become a fascinating insight into modern America to me. From watching 'The Green Mile' and Fox news, reading online American news articles and 'Women On Death Row' by Mike James, I have started to research the use of capital punishment, particularly the controversy that extended into the early 2000s of the electric chair or 'Old Sparky' as it was informally known and whether it was a cruel and unjust punishment.

When I worked in the entertainment department and at the congregation ceremonies of my local university in 2008, it not only started my dream of being a student, but made me consider a future career at a university: maybe in the international office recruiting new students. I have also considered maybe working for the government in a British embassy abroad. I have been commended for my GCSEs at my awards evening and in particular, my effort and progress in English. During sixth form, I volunteered in the English department with lower school students helping them with their reading and essay writing skills. I feel these commitments prove I have the capabilities to succeed by working hard within my degree. On top of this, I was presented with the Lion's Community Service shield, given to highlight the effort I gave towards the school community - as a prefect and chairperson of school council in Year 11. This shows my commitment and determination in trying to improve things wherever I can. Furthermore being a part of the School Council helped me to develop my teamwork and communication skills. I also was given the responsibility to help supervise younger children on a school trip to France. This was daunting, but I improved my leadership and how to deal with situations.

Outside of school, I am part of a youth radio station. We have taken part in many local events for charity and I have been able to enhance my management skills by planning these events. I would be keen to participate with any voluntary projects within the university community whilst I am studying as, aside from SNYA Radio, I have done charity work raising money over Christmas. In my spare time, I like to watch sports. I enjoy NFL American Football and NBA Basketball on TV and I am a devoted season ticket holder at Norwich City FC. As well, I really enjoy travelling, which is a factor for choosing the four year course and I am looking forward to experiencing student life at an American university.

Structuring your Personal Statement

Section 1: Your chosen course

You should clearly outline the reasons for selecting your course. Explain exactly what it is that excites you about studying in this area and make explicit references to examples of practical work, research, projects, lectures and reading outside the syllabus. Where you are applying for a joint honours degree, you should do this for both subjects. If you have not studied your proposed degree subject at school, explain exactly what has attracted you to it, and offer details of research you have done in the area. You might also want to explain how your chosen subject links with your other Specialist courses.

Section 2: Your academic abilities and studied courses

This section will focus on your academic abilities and achievements. You may want to refer to scholarships, prizes and participation in external competitions. You may also give some indication of your career aspirations, if appropriate, and discuss relevant work experience, especially in Medicine, Law and other courses with a vocational focus. It is essential to explain exactly what you learnt from work placements or shadowing and reflect on the ways in which you benefited from these experiences.

Section 3: Your individual strengths and extra-curricular activities

This is an opportunity to highlight your individual strengths and qualities, and impress admissions tutors with your potential to contribute to university life. Include examples of activities which demonstrate leadership skills, teamwork, enterprise or originality, contribution to the community and determination to stick to a task. Activities to discuss may include sporting, musical and artistic talents, or charitable work and posts of responsibility.

Section 4: Your concluding sentence

The aim is to establish that you are an interesting individual, with your own ideas and values, who will clearly benefit from both the course and university life. This could be encapsulated in a short concluding sentence.

Structuring your Personal Statement initial notes

Section 1: Your chosen course


Section 2: Your academic abilities and studied courses

Section 3: Your individual strengths and extra-curricular activities

Section 4: Your concluding sentence

Structuring your Personal Statement draft

Section 1: Your chosen course

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Structuring your Personal Statement draft

Section 2: Your academic abilities and studied courses

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Structuring your Personal Statement draft

Section 3: Your individual strengths and extra-curricular activities

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Structuring your Personal Statement draft

Section 4: Your concluding sentence

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Ten Top Tips

- Aim for 500 words – that way, you'll meet the 4,000 character limit.
- Check university course criteria and qualities that tutors look for in applicants.
- Be enthusiastic and show your interest in the course.
- Focus on the academic content – around 75% of the personal statement should discuss your commitment to study of the subject and your academic strengths.
- Make sure everything you say is relevant and adds to your potential as a student.
- Be confident and genuine – if you exaggerate you may get caught out at interview.
- Use clear sentences and do not let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your work.
- Remember how the personal statement fits into the application and avoid repetition of information that may be included elsewhere.
- Give yourself plenty of time and do not leave it until the last minute.
- Ask people you trust for their feedback and proof-read as many times as possible.

Useful Information

<https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/universities/applying-to-university-and-ucas-deadlines/top-tips-for-writing-the-perfect-personal-statement/>

<https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/choosing-university/how-write-ucas-personal-statement>

<https://www.studential.com/university/applying/UCAS-application-guide/personal-statements>

<http://purepotential.org/personal-statements/statement-library/>

<https://www.which.co.uk/money/university-and-student-finance/getting-into-uni/how-to-write-a-personal-statement-a3bfp7h4yv7s>

<https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/applying-to-uni/tips-for-writing-your-personal-statement>

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/tips-for-sussex>

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/advice/personal-statement-tips>

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=49108>