

How to Prepare a Strong Personal Statement

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Personal Statements

- The personal statement, that accompanies an application to university, or the personal letter, that accompanies an application for an apprenticeship or a job, is an important document.
- You want it to be as strong as it can be but don't get over-anxious about it or aim to write the perfect statement. There isn't one!
- The following should help you write one that does you justice and maximises the chance of nailing whatever is your first choice.

Personal Statements

- should be “personal”
- at least 80% academic
- not downloaded
- not complicated
- not deliberately made “intellectual”

Simple and clear doesn't mean “simplistic”, it just means it's easy to read and easier for it to make an impact. (The average time taken to read a statement is less than 2 minutes so they won't take time to unravel meaning, they'll just reject it).

Personal Statements

...are usually put into piles according to the likelihood of an offer being made :

- a DEFINITE pile
- a PROBABLE pile
- a POSSIBLE pile
- a REJECT pile

The following 3 slides show real statements that were submitted to Oxford Brookes. Which pile would you put each in?

Application for Business and Marketing

I have always enjoyed Business Studies but have become interested in marketing specifically since working in a local supermarket, where the use of marketing techniques (attractive packaging, positioning of goods, advertising etc.) is all pervasive.

In Year 12 I have been Marketing Manager of a Young Enterprise group, a role which has tested my powers of persuasion, taught me team work and organisational skills. In Business A-level I particularly enjoy modules on advertising and human resources & taking A-level ICT now enables me to generate & analyse lots of data, including spreadsheets & sales information.

At school I help younger students with reading & outside school work in an old peoples' home, both of which help me develop my communication skills & understanding of other people. My main hobby is football & I play drums in a band, both of which I hope to pursue at university. I think I am a reliable & enthusiastic person & will enjoy the independence of being at university.

Application for Marketing

I didn't do very well in my GCSEs as I wasn't very organised. I got level 5s but am working a bit harder now & hope to get Cs in my A-levels.

My main hobby is watching T.V., although I like Socialising & Shopping. I sometimes read books but I usually don't have much time for anything bigger than a magazine. I have a part time job on a checkout. Its really boring and people can be really rude but it pays quite well.

I started the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award last year but gave up when I found out that you had to go camping. If we could of stayed in hotels I would have carried on. I am a keen mountaineer & last year made the fastest ever ascent of Ben Nevis, which I enjoyed.

I am generally reliable & try to get homework in on time. I am proud of the fact that I only handed half of my assignments in late last year. My teachers were really surprised!. I want to study marketing as I want a career in marketing & to earn lots of money.

Application for Geology

My early interest in Geology was fuelled by reading *Down to Earth* & I became an obsessive collector of the *Treasures of the Earth* series. When I was 14 I attended “Scottish geology Week”, a fascinating 5 days of geological discovery, visiting the BGS in Edinburgh, viewing a cretaceous-tertiary boundary & looking for grapholites in Dobbs Lynn. As my school did not offer Geology GCSE, I found a private tutor & we had two years of great 1:1 study. My coursework involved a study of faulting & folding & involved two great areas for study, the North York coast & Peak District. My lab experiment investigated the different effects of acid rain on limestone & granite. “Rock Shops” have always lured me & I have collected a wide variety of specimens, my current pride & joy being a section of a Brazilian geode with amethyst crystals. I am currently looking at a study of a quarry face section of the Cleveland Dyke, near my home, & at investigating the alignment of phenocrysts & the degree of metamorphism in the host rocks.

I am a keen First Aider, have received four awards in National Maths competitions & play golf off a 4 handicap. My aim however is to take Geology as far as possible.

The outcomes

No 1 was deemed a PROBABLE

No 2 was REJECTED

No 3 was a DEFINITE

Hopefully you agreed.

The key in each case was EVIDENCE of having thought carefully about the subject, a keenness to study it, of being interesting to teach and likely to do well on the course.

What not to write...

“I am a dynamic figure, an abstract artist, a concrete analyst and a ruthless bookie. I write award winning operas, I am an expert in stucco and an outlaw in Peru. I have played Hamlet, I have performed open-heart surgery and I have spoken with Elvis but I have not yet been to university so please offer me a place at yours”.

... an example of what NOT to write!

This is a spoof (from Birmingham University) and it illustrates three points:

- don't try to be witty as it stops you being taken seriously;
- be honest;
- the key thing about a personal statement is that it is **personal** and is a true picture of **you**, that your friends and teachers can recognise.

From actual statements

“I think it is true to say that my interest in Geography has elements of Kantian metacognition about it”.

Meaningless drivel and **rejected!**

“I was most impressed when Dr. Martin Luther King said...”

The candidate hadn't even been born then, so it's rubbish!

Memorable mistakes

“ For the Help The Heroes charity I did the 3 Peaks Challenge of Ben Nevis, Scafell and Everest in 24 hours.”

“I was hugely inspired by Anne Frank’s dairy.”

“I have arranged work experience with a psychopath in London” (just as well that was spotted in time!).

Can you spot the mistakes?

Applying for Medicine?

“When I was 6 years old my pyjamas caught fire and I was so impressed with the treatment I received, when I was rushed to hospital, that I’ve wanted to do Medicine ever since”.

Some years ago **137 candidates** wrote that on their UCAS form, having downloaded it from a website because they thought it would sound impressive. They were all disqualified from applying that year. **Do not download or copy from someone else.** UCAS now has sophisticated software to spot such things.

Russell Group skills audit

The Russell Group universities wrote that what they were looking for in their applicants was evidence of the following:

- Ability to work independently
- Ability to solve problems and think critically
- Ability to share ideas with others
- Ability to write coherently
- Ability to manage time well

What evidence do you have?

Can you provide evidence that shows you have each of those skills identified in the Russell Group Skills Audit?

Do your own audit (assessment) of these skills.

Think - what are the skills needed to be good at what you're applying for (a good doctor or historian etc.)? What is the evidence that you have them?

Do your own audit (assessment) of the skills needed for the course/apprenticeship/job you are applying for.

A good ...needs
to be...

Historian: sceptical, curious to know why things happened as they did, open-minded, empathetic, argumentative and a keen reader

Mathematician: logical, enjoys problem solving, patient, determined, wants to know how things work

English specialist: empathetic, open-minded, imaginative, avid reader, good communicator and independent thinker

Scientist: keen to know why things work as they do, to test things out, patient, determined, with good practical skills and an eye for detail

A good ...needs to be...

Medic: keen problem solver, love of continued learning, empathetic, dedicated, can inspire trust and confidence, works very hard, a good communicator

Lawyer: logical, analytical, able to cut through detail to key points quickly, articulate, empathetic, well organised

Economist: sceptical, analytical, avid reader, good at maths, a good communicator

Engineer: keen problem solver and analyst, good at maths, able to see the finished product, meticulous, a good communicator and team worker

Where to get evidence from

- Reading
- Open Days (real/virtual)
- Website research
- TV/radio programmes
- Ted Talks
- Newspaper articles and editorials
- Work experience
- Work shadowing
- MOOCs (online courses)
- EPQ
- Lectures

READ

RESEARCH

ENJOY!

What to do with your evidence...

- What you've read
- What you've done (especially using your own initiative)
- How you've reflected on it and **what it's led you to do as follow up**
- What lectures have you attended, courses have you done, programmes have you've listened to and **what did you get from them?**
- Note the emphasis on how you've followed up.

**Keep an
evidence log...**

What I have done	Date	As a result I have...
e.g. completed a MOOC*	May 2020	Conducted further research into...

* MOOC stands for 'massive open online course' such as those provided by Future Learn: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses>

- Go back to Years 10 and 11, what have you done and what have you gained from it?
- Anything from work experience to peer mentoring.
- Log it!

Lacking in evidence?

- If you think you haven't got much evidence, **from now on** do **four** or **five** extra things **each month**, specifically to build up your evidence log.
- Log the most interesting and thought-provoking TED talks, MOOCs, lectures, radio programmes, debates and visual media you have accessed.
- If you have a part time job or have done some work experience, what did you learn about the job? What did you learn about yourself? Put this in your evidence log.

How to write it up in statements

Don't say "I went to a lecture", be more specific. What was it on, who gave it, what did you think of it and why? How did you follow it up?

Do say that a particular interest you have is why you may have chosen to apply to certain universities because they will give you the chance to pursue it further.

How to write it up in the statement

Don't just write lists...

Reading 12 books doesn't necessarily make you twice as good as someone who has read 6!

Say what you got out of them.

"I read this and enjoyed it because... and it led to me reading that"

"I listened to a Ted talk on...and found...particularly interesting so I did further research on..."

"After meeting patients with dementia, I did research on how it may be diagnosed earlier. This included..."

**Too much to
say?**

Most students wonder how they are going to fill the 4000 characters available. You may have the opposite problem. You can't fit in all the evidence you have!

If that's the case, talk to your tutor, who can then mention some of the things you haven't had room for. It always sounds impressive if a referee can vouch for all you've put in the statement and can then say "and there's more".

**Get
family/friends
to check it over**

- Be brave enough to get a couple of friends or members of your family to check your statement for any errors, spelling mistakes, things that don't make sense etc.
- They can also remind you of things you have done that you may have forgotten.
- But DON'T LET THEM WRITE IS FOR YOU!

Timing of UCAS applications

Some of you will have an October 15th deadline, so you need to get your application into school by October 5th to give them time to write a really supportive reference.

The deadline for everyone else is January 15th but try to get forms sent off by November 16th. A strong application, submitted earlier, is much more likely to attract a good offer.

Departments in university hear in December how many places they'll be financed for the following September. If it's less than they thought, the buying price for a place will inevitably go up.

Any Questions?

Don't hesitate to ask for help at all stages of the application process.

The Sixth Form team have a lot of expertise and will know where you can get help from, if it's needed.

Go for it and best of luck!