

Writing a brilliant personal statement: A step by step guide



Suggested structure for the personal statement

- Why does this subject interest you? Include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course, e.g. if applying for psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is.
- Why do you think you're suitable for the course(s)? Do you have any particular skills and experience that will help you to succeed on the course(s)?
- Do your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen? If so, how?
- Have you taken part in any other activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)?
- Universities like to know the skills you have that will help you on the course, or generally with life at university, such as any accredited or non-accredited achievements. Also think about any other achievements you're proud of, positions of responsibility that you hold or have held both in and out of school and attributes that make you interesting, special or unique.
- Make a list of your hobbies, interests and social activities. Then think about how they demonstrate your personality, skills and abilities. Try to link them to the skills and experience required for your course(s).
- Include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen course(s). Try to link any experience to skills or qualities related to the course.
- If you know what you'd like to achieve after completing the course, explain how you want to use the knowledge and experience that you gain. How does the course relate to what you want to do in the future?

INTRODUCTION

You will need to provide a brief but convincing explanation as to why you want to study your subject at university. Think of the 'personal trigger' that got you interested in the subject. This could be a book, museum trip, a documentary, a film, a teacher, work experience, etc. Go on to develop this line of thought with why this subject is important and why it inspires you. Be specific don't just say you love English, say why, and never, ever say 'I have always wanted to study...'

WHAT WAS MY PERSONAL TRIGGER?
HOW DOES MY SUBJECT RELATE TO SOCIETY OR CURRENT AFFAIRS? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO ME?
WHICH ASPECT AM I REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO STUDYING IN MORE DETAIL? WHY?

Examples

Since studying Psychology and having the opportunity to carry out work experience in a Sure Start Children's Centre, I am positive that I want to pursue a career that involves working with children who suffer from a range of mental health problems. I want to help individuals to improve their wellbeing and I believe a degree in Psychology will assist me in fulfilling my ambitions.

I remember being given a tour around Greenwich University, where I undertook my work experience in their Chemistry labs, and having the opportunity to see their research department and discover all their current projects and developments at various stages from the initial discovery and theorising through to the final moments and conclusions of the clinical trials. It was at that point that I knew what I wanted to do; to be able to feel that same buzz of excitement each day as I learn about the key foundations of our world and being able to apply it in a realistic and impactful way in people's lives.

EXPRESSIONS TO USE FOR YOUR STATEMENT

Why I am applying for the course

- I am applying to
- This interest has been enhanced by my A level study of the subject.
- I wish to pursue a degree in
- I believe that the A level course ofwill give me a strong foundation to build on at University by pursuing my proposed course of

IN-SCHOOL EVIDENCE OF YOUR INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT

Start with what you've been doing in school to develop your interest in the subject. For example, if it was a law course you were applying for, this paragraph should discuss skills and knowledge you have gained studying Law. Likewise, if you were going into an IT course, you would talk about any IT skills and applications you have worked with. If you are studying a completely new course that is not offered or you have not studied at A-Level, think about the skills you are learning in your current studies that will be useful for your degree, such as essay writing, critical analysis, research or logic.

	Skills
Subject 1	
Subject 2	
Subject 3	
Subject 4	

Examples

'From my A levels I have gained a wide variety of skills I feel would help me with my chosen course. For example Biology has given me a deep insight into the functions of the body and the effect of certain factors on it. It has also given me the ability to carry out in-depth research and experiments independently and given me more confidence in investigations. Through studying Health and Social Care I have gained an insight into aspects of health and disease and a range of concepts of health, such as holistic and positive theories. This subject has also allowed me to develop my communication skills by studying how and when different types of body language and tone of voice should be used'.

EXPRESSIONS TO USE FOR YOUR STATEMENT

My A level subjects

- I have acquired a deeper understanding of various aspects of.....
- I have learnt to further appreciate.....
- The research/communication/analytical skills to which I have gained have greatly improved the quality of my work
- Dealing with evidence has increased my confidence in discussion work
- My essay techniques have also improved steadily
- I have the ability to express my own opinions confidently and strongly participate in issues raised.

OUTSIDE-SCHOOL EVIDENCE OF YOUR PASSION FOR THE SUBJECT

Now you need to move on to what you've been doing outside the classroom. This is where you can really shine because it's the things you've done in your own time which will show genuine passion for the subject. Write down extra-curricular activities you have undertaken in pursuit of a greater understanding of your chosen degree subject, giving brief details on any trips, book, research or experiences you have found inspiring and why.

Below is a list of the kinds of extra-curricular activities that you may have done. Tick all that apply to you and, crucially are specifically relevant to the course you have chosen and make notes in what you learnt that will come useful for your course.

ACTIVITY	TICK	DESCRIPTON	WHY HAS IT MADE YOU MORE SUITABLE?
OUTSIDE READING		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading the Economist regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding economic concepts • Keeping up-to-date with current affairs
THEATRE TRIPS			
EXHIBITIONS			
SCHOOL CLUBS			
CLUBS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL			
VOLUNTARY WORK			
MUSEUM TRIPS			
HISTORICAL SITES			
TRIPS ABOARD			
COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES			
DOCUMENTARIES			
ARTICLES			
HOBBIES			
WORK EXPERIENCE			
COMPETITIONS/PRIZES /AWARDS			

PUBLISHED WORK			
WORKSHOPS/ PROGRAMMES			
SIXTH FORM EVENTS			
SUMMER SCHOOL			
CAREER ASPIRATIONS			
EPQ			
TASTER COURSES			

Examples

‘For my work experience I carried out a placement at Basildon Primary Care Trust at Basildon Hospital Essex, as a medical and reception assistant. Here I had the opportunity to observe the community children’s nurses in practice on a daily basis. I now understand the importance of the need for confidentiality at all times as I got the chance to observe medical procedures being administered to sick children within their homes’.

Outside of school, I have taken a keen liking to politics. I am taking an A-level in the subject but I much prefer investigating the less clear-cut political world which exists outside the course. Like literature, politics seems to operate on multiple levels of meaning – this is probably why I like it. The opinions, debates and scrutiny of the media coverage appeal to my analytical side and I always enjoy the dichotomies and personalities brought out in political drama (The house of Cards being my favourite).

I’m also dedicated to achieving outside of academics, such as attaining grade 5 piano, despite music not being a natural strength of mine. I also have a large focus on other people and the community; volunteering plays a key part in my life from helping in a local primary school by assisting the year six class to being part of a summer community action team for the past five or more years, which I have been approached about the possibility of leading in future years. These sorts of opportunities have also arisen through my role as a Science Prefect by allowing me the chance to work in local schools, performing experiments and supervising their own practicals.

EXPRESSIONS TO USE FOR YOUR STATEMENT

My contribution to school

- I have guided prospective pupils and parents around the school answering queries.
- During my time at Blackfen Sixth Form I have developed leadership, teamwork and management skills.
- I have also participated in.....
- I was also given the responsibility of authority within ...which shows that I have gained trust and respect from my peers

Work experience

- This experience was not only very interesting but also gave me a wider outlook on life after education.
- I have also learnt about teamwork.
- I thoroughly enjoy.....
- I feel that teamwork is a major part of life and thrive off of the success of a team that I am part of.
- I enjoyed the experience and learnt a great deal.

Skills deficit audit

Research conducted at Russell Group universities identified the following core skills that all undergraduates need to have. Anything that indicates that you have these skills is bound to win points in any application.

SKILL	Evidence
An ability to work independently	
An ability to write a clear and coherent essay or report	
An ability to think critically	
An ability to solve problems	
An ability to manage time effectively	
An ability to contribute to a discussion	
Numeracy	
An ability to work in a team	

SUMMARY OF WHY THEY SHOULD PICK YOU

Finish the personal statement with a one or two line summary of why you want to go to university and study the course and why you deserve to be offered a place.

Examples

‘Overall, I am a hardworking, active person and I am enthusiastic about achieving my goals and becoming a primary school teacher. I am looking forward to university life, both academically and socially.

The possibility of being able to discover more about how and what our world is made of and being part of a scientific community at the heart of new developments is an incredibly exciting prospect and something I cannot wait to be involved with.

I feel certain I should carry on with English Literature. I have no doubt the course will be an unprecedented challenge but, I will offer everything I can, with the dedication, enthusiasm and energy I have always held for the subject – I would not have it any other way.

DO'S and DON'TS

DO

- ✓ **Plan Ahead** – Think about what you are going to put in your statement. Have you gathered experiences? Have you researched your chosen course?
- ✓ **Write Clearly** – Write accurately and clearly! Make sure you have checked your spelling and look for grammatical errors.
- ✓ **Be Enthusiastic** – Come across as interested and motivated in your chosen course at university
- ✓ **Seek Advice** – get people to read your statement and ask them what they think. Would they offer you a place? But be careful not to get too many different opinions as this may confuse you.
- ✓ **Be Positive** – Sell yourself without lying! Be proud of what you have done and make the most of the activities you have undertaken and the skills you have learnt.
- ✓ **Redraft** – Expect to do several drafts of your statement!
- ✓ **Keep It Simple** – the purpose of a statement is to give reasons for choosing your course and a few details about you. It is the quality of the reasons, depth and detail of the information provided, authenticity (keeping it real!) and, finally, clarity of the writing that makes a statement persuasive.
- ✓ **Be early – the best applicant is an early applicant**

DON'T

- ✗ **Lie** – You will get caught if you lie! This can be detected easily at interview and your referee will read your statement. Their reference often confirms what you have claimed in your statement.
- ✗ **Copy** – Do not copy other people's statements. Show your own uniqueness and be confident in your own achievements and attributes.
- ✗ **Be Restricted To A Formula** – While this step by step guide helps you to write your statement it is not law! If you wish to do things a little differently then that's fine as well. You can write a little about your course and yourself (nice and simple) and still produce a very persuasive statement.
- ✗ **Use Gimmicks** – Such as quotes or jokes. What you think is funny might not seem so to an Admissions Tutor and they probably have been used before!
- ✗ **Always Mention Skills** – Only mention what is relevant. Everything you do has a skill involved, doesn't mean it is relevant to the course. Likewise some skills are self-evident. So mention the experience and allow for the interview to expand on the skills you have learnt. Thus, it is not always necessary to point out skills. However, sometimes it is worth pointing out, but not after every experience.

KEY TERMS

The following advice should help you write a Personal Statement which is easy to read and is professionally written. Below is a list of phrases to help you connect your sentences and paragraphs as well as to vary the language you use in the Personal Statement.

- **IN ADDITION**

In addition to my work experience I have also gained valuable skills through my voluntary work.

- **AS WELL AS**

As well as my involvement in team games I am also keen on playing individually competitive sports.

- **REINFORCE**

My work experience at a local primary school has reinforced my decision to study a degree in Teaching.

- **STRENGTHEN**

My decision to study Law at University has been strengthened by my enjoyment and success in my A level Law course.

- **FURTHERMORE**

Furthermore, I am particularly suited to a degree in Biology because of my love of the subject and fascination and keen interest into the workings of the human body.

- **APART FROM**

Apart from my involvement in music I am also involved in sports.

- **NOT TO MENTION**

Being involved in community service, not to mention my work experience, has provided me with the opportunity to work with a diverse range of people.

- **MORE RECENTLY**

Although I was concentrating solely on my A levels, I more recently began doing some voluntary work experience at a leisure centre in my local area.

- **ENABLED ME**

The opportunity to play in the school football team enabled me to work as part of a team.

- **PROVIDED ME**

Studying English at A level has provided me with a solid foundation on which to develop my love of literature and writing in an English Degree at your university.

- **OPPORTUNITY**

The opportunity to learn about a variety of different areas of sports was given to me in my studies in PE.

How to use 'I' effectively in a personal statement

Beginning many sentences with 'I' is very easy to do, especially when writing about yourself. Instead, try to create varied sentences with a range of alternative starting points;

Do not write

I am captain of the Hockey Team

I enjoy playing sport

I am studying A levels in

I enjoy socialising

I have gained a number of skills

Instead write

Being a Captain of the Hockey team I...

Having played football...

My A level studies include...

Socialising is important to me because...

The skills I have gained from...