

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Highdown Sixth Form –
Preparing for UCAS



Writing your personal statement

This week we will look at the last, and biggest, part of the application form - the personal statement

Many courses no longer have the time and resources to interview you (but there are exceptions!)

You have 4,000 characters (not words) to 'sell yourself'

And for courses that do still interview, the personal statement is often the starting point for that interview

Don't Panic!

- Having a blank piece of paper in front of you, and being told that you have 4,000 characters to fill in, can be pretty daunting
- This video is a great introduction to writing a Personal Statement
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hFkMAjW-I>

What is the purpose of a Personal Statement?

- To help explain your motivation for choosing a particular course or career
- To help you showcase your academic ability AND potential – some students don't have the most outstanding GCSE results, but really take-off in the Sixth Form
- To show the steps you have taken to show an active interest in your chosen subject
- A well-written personal statement with a clearly planned and refined structure will not only make the information stand out, but it will demonstrate you have an aptitude for structuring written pieces of work – a crucial skill required for all university courses.
- You can use it for other things too, such as gap year applications, jobs, internships, apprenticeships, and you can keep it on file for future applications.

An Admissions Tutor's view

“This is your chance to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment and show us what value you can add to a university. In the vast majority of cases universities are finding ways to make you an offer, not reject you – the personal statement is your chance to make this decision easier for them!”

What should you include?

- Explain the reason for your choice and how it fits in with your aspirations for the future
- Give examples of any related academic or work experience, or volunteering you've done
- Look at course descriptions and identify the qualities, skills, and experience it requires – you can use these to help you decide what to write about.
- If you've developed skills through Duke of Edinburgh, ASDAN, National Citizen Service, the Crest Awards scheme, or young enterprise, include these
- If you took part in a higher education taster course, placement, or summer school, or something similar, include it.
- **MORE THAN ANYTHING – CONVEY YOUR ENTHUSIASM FOR THE SUBJECT**

The importance of the 'supercurricular' and the 'So What?...' test

- It is really important that you reflect on all the experiences you have gathered that link to your chosen courses
- A starting point could be your current Sixth Form courses
- But then think about all the extras you have done – think about the **Supercurricular activities** we have been urging you to involve yourself in – extra books that you have read, podcasts you have listened to, videos you have watched, visits you have made – basically, anything beyond the regular 'Teams Assignments' stuff
- Imagine an admissions tutor reading your personal statement and saying 'So what?' after each sentence – try to make everything relevant

A reminder about 'Supercurricular Activities'

- We have talked about these a lot in assemblies
- If you feel you don't have enough to write about – not a problem – you can do something now, if you get started right away
- University College at Oxford have produced this really useful video to give you some ideas – relevant to everyone, not just Oxford applicants
- <https://www.univ.ox.ac.uk/applying-to-univ/explore-your-subject/>

Supercurricular V Extracurricular

- Try not to just **list** all the extracurricular experiences you have been involved in
- What makes you stand out? – many thousands of applicants will have been prefects, played sports and taken part in school performances
- So think about the ‘So What?’
- That doesn’t mean all your hobbies and extracurricular experiences are unimportant. Many advisers recommend a personal statement that is 80% academic, and 20% extracurricular

Structuring the Personal Statement

- I want to study...

- I have read/watched/visited

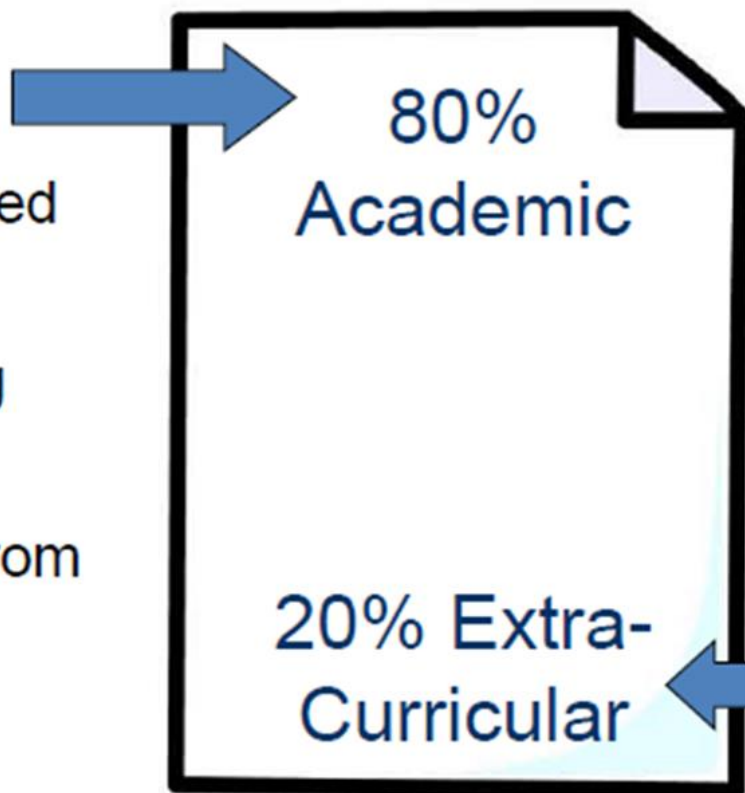
...

- It was interesting because...

- What I learned from this was....

- What was challenging was...

- What I've done to develop my skills is...



- In my spare time I play...

- I had some work experience at...

- And I'm so organised and conscientious...

How to make the 'extra-curricular' more purposeful

- Look at the examples on the next 2 slides
- On the left hand side are statements regarding some really valid extra-curricular experiences, but an admissions tutor might still say 'So What?...'
- On the right hand side, you can see how the same information has been rewritten to demonstrate transferable skills

Example 1

- I am a member of the college chess club. I also play the clarinet in the orchestra.

- I have developed my problem-solving skills through playing chess for the college; this requires concentration and analytical thought. I am used to working as part of a team as I play clarinet in the college orchestra and cooperate with others to achieve a finished production.

Example 2

- At school, I was captain of the school cricket team and wrote for the school's monthly newsletter

- As captain of the school cricket team I have gained good communication skills through working in a team and this has helped me to understand how important teamwork is for achieving success. I write for the school's monthly newsletter which has improved my literacy and editorial skills while developing my creativity. This has given me much more confidence and helped me to express my ideas clearly.

Structure

- Introduction
 - start with an opening sentence that encourages the reader to read on.
- Structure what you want to include in an order that's most relevant to what the universities and colleges are looking for.
 - 3-4 paragraphs with an academic / vocational focus
 - 1 paragraph on hobbies and interests
- Conclusion
 - reinforce your commitment, enthusiasm and skills suited to university/college life.

How to structure a paragraph – Think A B C

A = Activity	Talk about what you have done	Good
B = Benefit	Talk about what you have gained from the activity, what skills you have developed	Better
C = Course	How could these relate to your course	Best

Demonstrate individual thought

- Don't just talk about what you have read or done, but how you interpret it and what you think
- Analyse and demonstrate critical thinking – not just regurgitating ideas or what you have read, but ask questions of the sources and present your own evidence based ideas and arguments
- Go beyond the classroom
- Demonstrate ability to think as an individual



OVERWHELMED?

The next slide will help you to start gathering your thoughts!

Print it off to help brainstorm ideas

Jobs / placements / work experience / voluntary work and skills developed that link to course

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why apply?



Start here

How I plan to use my degree in future:

Work experience and future plans

The course

Interested in [subject]

because:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Tip: show that you understand what's required in that subject, e.g. scientific / mathematical / artistic...

Skills I have that will help me at University:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Personal Statement by

Suitable for course because:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Tip: Think about your skills and experience

Achievements / positions of responsibility / unique attributes

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Skills and achievements

Remember the ABC rule:
ACTIVITIES +
BENEFITS +
COURSE

Link to current/previous studies (subjects/modules)?

Hobbies / interests / social activities & skills developed that link to course

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Notes

Activities I've done (or will do*) that show my interest in this subject:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Writing style?

- Be clear and concise – the more concentrated the points and facts, the more powerful
- Shorter sentences have much more of an impact, than long sentences which last a whole paragraph
- Use professional, formal language, but don't constantly use the thesaurus function to sound clever!
- Insert a personal touch if possible, but be careful with humour and chatty approaches

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

- Be careful to proofread your work thoroughly
- Don't just rely on Spellcheck – *As a student I feel conscientious and manure* – would not get picked up
- Also – check your punctuation – the absence of a comma makes the person below sound like a cannibal
 - *My interests include cooking dogs and interesting people*

Dos and Don'ts – Do...

- Have a go at several drafts in word before you paste it onto the main website - Make sure you save it regularly, as it times out after 35 minutes of inactivity.
- Read other examples – this is research – just don't copy them!
- Make sure everything you say is RELEVANT, ACCURATE and EXPLAINED – Research the courses!
- Keep it clear and concise – UCAS admissions are increasingly paperless – so most admissions tutors/officers will read your statement on-screen
- Show some consistency in your five UCAS choices. It may be difficult for an admissions tutor to take you seriously if your other choices, and references to them, are totally different
- Use positive words such as achieved, developed, learned, discovered, enthusiasm, commitment, energy, fascination...

Dos and Don'ts – Don't...

- Make it specific to one university
- Talk negatively about staff – eg explain it is their fault you got a low grade in...
- Talk too much about health difficulties or other problems – this is better explained by your mentor in their reference
- Use gimmicks or quotations, unless they are very relevant and you deal with them in a way that shows your qualities
- Be tempted to buy or copy a personal statement. Plagiarism software is now very sophisticated and if you are caught out you won't get a place

Be different! - The ten most common opening lines used in personal statements are:

1. From a young age I have (always) been [interested in/fascinated by]... [1,779]
2. For as long as I can remember I have... [1,451]
3. I am applying for this course because... [1,370]
4. I have always been interested in... [927]
5. Throughout my life I have always enjoyed... [310]
6. Reflecting on my educational experiences... [257]
7. Nursing is a very challenging and demanding [career/profession/course]... [211]
8. Academically, I have always been... [168]
9. I have always wanted to pursue a career in... [160]
10. I have always been passionate about... [160]

An important point to bear in mind

The more people you share your Personal Statement with, the more feedback you will receive

This will be very confusing, as there are a range of views on what makes a good personal statement

Avoid sending a draft to everyone – your mentor is the best person to gain feedback from, but perhaps also a teacher who teaches a subject related to the degree course that you are applying for

How do I fit it all in?

- 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 referee, 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".
- Reread your work – have you been repetitive at all? Have you taken 2 sentences when one would do? Have you used too many adjectives?
- Even changing '**I have a particular enthusiasm for...**' could be rewritten as '**I enjoy...**' saving **26** characters – we don't want to limit your skills as a writer – but these tips could help if you really need to edit down to the 4000 character limit

Further research

- <http://www.applytouni.com/applying/personal-statements/>
- <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/how-write-ucas-undergraduate-personal-statement>
- <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/applying-to-uni/tips-for-writing-your-personal-statement>
- <https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/admissions/personal-statement>

What next?

- The final 2 elements of a UCAS application are the Predicted Grades, and the Mentor reference
- Next time, we will be showing you how these work, and what you can do to support this process