



*If you want to do it,
it will write itself.*

Personal Statement 2024

what to know

Your parents or teachers will have once written that they wanted to go to University/College, what they enjoyed in their subjects say that they had done DofE, played football and a parting sentence to say they would 'contribute' wherever they went. We have moved on, and so have the Academics and Admissions Tutors that read your Personal Statements.

'Ever since I was a child' or 'Ever since a young age' have become the clichés of the noughties personal statement.

headlines

Start with something interesting, pick something from your chosen field, and introduce it. There's a good chance the person reading it will have heard about it, but if you're the only applicant that has it on their statement, it's a winner!

evidence

If you've got a personal reason that is emotive, then use it, but don't dwell on it. By this point you will have already got the attention of the reader with a brilliant opener, but they don't want to be bored by the same point for the first three paragraphs. Back up what you say with evidence, if you don't know what exemplification is, look it up. Don't be afraid to be critical of things you've read, or things you've seen on work experience. Being an academic is all about critical analysis, start here!

experience matters

If you're applying to a course that requires you to have some Work Experience, you need to do more than just explain what you did. A commentary of your experiences should reflect not just on the good points of the job, but those that are a bit more challenging as well. What did you see that you didn't particularly like? What challenges do professionals have? Where some of this discussion may be political, your ability to demonstrate awareness, understanding and compassion is useful. Employers are looking for reliable & honest graduates with integrity and the ability to demonstrate concision when needed.

how to finish

If you've covered everything in what you've written, and explained everything really well then you could ask if you really need an ending. There has been a long tradition of writing a statement at the end, explaining what a wonderful contribution you would make to the university, but really, it might just be better to end on something a bit interesting, or an analytical point.

be genuine

UCAS has a similarity detection service that checks for similar statements. If you 'borrow' from elsewhere the University and your School get notified. Clichés are common, and you must avoid the well-trodden path of mentioning the Banking Crisis, Freakonomics, Brexit, making Aspirin and reciting the plot of your A-level English texts. The admissions tutors have heard all of this before and they know what's on your A-level Specification; probably because they wrote it!

80/20

The split on academic interest and personal attributes has shifted. The universities are looking for affirmation that you're really interested in the subject, the course and the material within it. This is largely because students write the same things about their personal qualities. Young people invariably do lots of the same things; play an instrument, play in a team, enjoy reading. For the 20% at the bottom you're going to have to think really carefully about what you do, or have done outside of School that makes you stand out. It doesn't have to be an expedition to the back of beyond, but it does have to be meaningful, and you have to explain what it did to develop you.

nominalisation

You will probably go over the 4000-character limit. Go through the statement and get rid of unnecessary words; why use four when one will do? Check that you haven't over used 'I' too many times, or you may have a particular verb that appears frequently. Change verbs like 'analysed' to 'the analysis' creating noun phrases. This will improve the tone of your writing, making it more impersonal but retaining a command of the discussion. The use of technical and specific language is useful to demonstrate articulation, but students frequently over-complicate a very simple statement.

supercurricular

Most of your subject discussion should be based upon what you can find online, new ideas and of course challenges in your chosen field. If you're looking at Chemistry, knowledge of who has won recent Nobel prizes, and what they were for may be a start! There are supercurricular magazines in the Library for lots of subjects, but a few hours of online research are worth it. If you can talk about it, you're interested in it. Remember it must be current, the last five to ten years would be the best timescale in which to work. Looking back into the 1920s, the discovery of Penicillin and DNA isn't really what we're looking for!

where & who

Family and friends are great to help proof read your writing, but take care! The family member that may have worked in University admissions 15 years ago may be looking for you to discuss your school subjects, and could unknowingly un-do a lot of the hard work. Show it to one teacher at a time, as conflicting advice can make you feel overwhelmed.

Remember, if you do change your mind about what you're applying for, your work isn't wasted. Some of the content may have to change, but you will have developed the skills to change it.

links to look at

[The Manchester Phrasebank](#)
[Birmingham University – Personal Statements](#)
[UCAS – Personal Statements](#)
[Unifrog – Personal Statements](#)
[Two Minute Read – The Guardian](#)
[How to write in plain english](#)

