

Your guide to Personal Statements.



WELCOME TO YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT GUIDE

This guide has been produced by Canterbury Christ Church University, with the aim of helping you to write your personal statement. The advice here has been carefully collated to ensure that we give you the best support possible, however the content of your statement will be completely original as it is about you. We can't write it for you, but we hope that with the help of this booklet you will become familiar with the look and content of what a good personal statement should be.

Don't worry; it doesn't have to be perfect. Even the best personal statements will have weaknesses, what is more important is that you show enthusiasm and a sound knowledge of the course you are applying for. Remember, the admissions tutors and academics that read your application are experts in their fields so you should think about what they want to hear when writing your statement.

QUICK TIPS

DO

- Brainstorm and write several drafts;
- Use excellent English;
- Show your drafts to people who know you;
- Create a sensible email address;
- Research the course for hints and tips;
- Link everything to your chosen subject;
- Be enthusiastic.

DON'T

- Make jokes or try to be funny;
- Sound arrogant or pretentious;
- Lie or embellish the truth;
- Repeat things already on your UCAS form;
- Include boring phrases, quotes or hobbies;
- State the obvious for your age;
- Copy anything word for word.

THE ESSENTIALS

THINGS TO INCLUDE:

- What you want to study at university and why;
- Which specific aspects of the course interest you;
- Examples of coursework you have completed, practical work you have enjoyed and how these relate to the course you have applied to;
- Work experience or voluntary work that is connected to your course;
- Personal experiences which lead you to the decision to study this subject;
- Any future plans you have about using your degree to gain employment;
- Experiences that show you are a reliable and responsible person – these could be a part-time job, community or charity work, sixth form committee, helping out at school events or open days;
- Any awards you have completed such as Young Enterprise, Duke of Edinburgh, ASDAN, debating societies and what you've gained from these experiences;
- Your interests outside of school or college, what you like to do in your free time such as sport and leisure activities, subjects you study which are not examined, musical instruments that you play or languages that you speak;
- Why you think you would make a good student, what qualities and attributes you would bring to university.

GETTING STARTED

IF YOU'RE NOT SURE WHERE TO START, TRY FILLING IN THESE BOXES TO GATHER INFORMATION THAT YOU THINK MIGHT BE RELEVANT. ONCE YOU HAVE COMPLETED THIS, YOU HAVE MADE A START ON YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT.

COURSE CHOICE

What course(s) do you want to apply for or are you interested in?

When did you become interested in them and why?

Are there any specific parts of the subject you enjoy and why?

What personal qualities do you have that make you suited to this course?

Do you have any specific career aims in this subject area?

Can you think of anything else that relates to your interest and course choice?

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

What do you enjoy about your current studies?

What area of your chosen subject would you like to study in greater depth?

Have you been on any trips or events that have inspired you?

Have you completed any projects, large scale essays or presentations?

Have any of your teachers inspired you and why?

Anything else you can think of...

NOTES

WHAT IF I AM APPLYING FOR A COMBINED DEGREE?

THERE ARE TWO WAYS YOU CAN USE TO TAILOR YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT TO COMBINED DEGREES (ONES WHERE YOU TAKE TWO SUBJECTS E.G. ECONOMICS AND POLITICS).

YOU CAN:

- 1 Talk about just one subject that you feel is most important and not mention the other. This has the advantage that you can apply for two different combined degrees and only talk about the common element e.g. for economics and politics or politics and law, you would only talk about politics. If you decide to do this make sure you talk about the qualities you have which show you are suitable for the other part of your combined degree.
- 2 Talk a bit about why you want to study both subjects.

The approach you choose will probably depend on how closely related your subjects are.

NOTES



WELL DONE! YOU'RE BUILDING UP LOTS OF INFORMATION FOR A GREAT PERSONAL STATEMENT.

IN THE NEXT FEW PAGES YOU WILL FIND AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO TURN A GOOD STATEMENT INTO A GREAT ONE AND HOW TO PLAN YOUR PARAGRAPHS. REMEMBER, THE BEST PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW IS DOING YOUR BEST TODAY!

YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

SKILLS	SHOW HOW YOU HAVE USED THIS SKILL	WHY MIGHT IT BE USEFUL AT UNIVERSITY?
Commitment		
Communication		
Using a computer		
Determination		
Responsibility		
Teamwork		
Working independently		
Organisational skills		
Using your initiative		
Empathy		

WHAT ARE YOUR SKILLS?

THE FOLLOWING ARE WORDS THAT YOU CAN USE TO DESCRIBE YOURSELF OR ANY SKILLS YOU HAVE LEARNT:

SELF-RELIANCE SKILLS

If you are able to work by yourself, decide which task or job is more important, set yourself goals and achieve them, and you want to succeed, then you can include some of the following words:

Self-awareness	purposeful, focused, self-belief, realistic
Proactive	resourceful, driven, self-reliant, independent
Willingness to learn	inquisitive, motivated, enthusiastic, confident
Self-promotion	positive, persistent, ambitious
Networking	initiator, relationship-builder, resourceful
Planning/action	decision-maker, planner, able to prioritise

PEOPLE SKILLS

If you can work with people and are able to listen to their instructions whilst passing on important information to others, then you can include some of the following words in your statement:

Team worker	supportive, organised, co-ordinator, deliverer
Interpersonal skills	listener, adviser, co-operative, assertive, diplomatic
Oral communication	communicator, presenter, influencer
Leadership	motivator, energetic, visionary
Foreign language	specific language skills

GENERAL SKILLS

Look at the following list to see if you have any of these skills:

Problem solving	practical, logical, results orientated
Flexibility	versatile, willing, multi-skilled
Business acumen	entrepreneurial, competitive, risk taker
IT/computer literacy	office skills, keyboard skills, software packages
Numeracy	accurate, quick-thinker, methodical
Commitment	dedicated, trustworthy, conscientious

Maturity, being successful, able to develop more as a young adult, good communication skills, career aspirations, ability to handle responsibility, articulate, hard-working.

EXAMPLES

THE 'BEFORE' VERSION

A student has written a personal statement to support an application to study History. The following is an early draft, which needs improving.

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to pursue the subject at degree level. At university I look forward to examining a range of historical sources. I am particularly interested in French history, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness.

As a school prefect I hold many responsibilities: organising and attending school functions, delivering speeches to the school body, being an active member of the school council, working effectively with other students. Having played in school concerts with the keyboard orchestra when I was in year nine, I have recently taken up piano lessons.

I am a keen sports player and I am a member of the school hockey team, netball team, the athletics squad and the volleyball team, earning me the 'Sports Personality of the Year' award. I have taught information technology skills to younger students and helped a particular student to overcome language difficulties. I have organised sports days and Christmas parties for the elderly; and written, directed and performed a series of short plays.

I have always enjoyed reading but more recently my A level studies have enabled me to explore foreign literature.

Currently, I am involved in the European Youth Parliament competition in which I will be representing my school at a residential debating conference. The winner will represent the United Kingdom in Cyprus. This venture enhanced my general knowledge (specifically of genetic engineering and drug legislation).

THE 'AFTER' VERSION

The student has now improved their personal statement from the earlier draft.

I have always been fascinated by the past, beginning with childhood interests in time-travel and mythology. This interest continued with student exchanges to France and Germany, which gave me the opportunity to study 18th century French history and dictatorship and to widen my historical scope. A trip to France, where I studied issues relating to the World Wars, confirmed my interest in History and my decision to pursue the subject at degree level. At university I look forward to analysing varied interpretations of history and the original sources upon which they are based.

As a school prefect I have held many responsibilities such as organising school events, delivering speeches, and participating actively on the school council. This experience has taught me to use my own initiative, and developed my skills of public speaking and diplomacy. I also involve myself fully with the school music performances. Having played in concerts with the keyboard orchestra, I have recently taken up piano lessons and gained a wider awareness of music, especially of Debussy and romanticism.

Playing in various school sports teams has earned me several awards including that of 'Sports Personality of the Year', and taught me the importance of communication, teamwork and self-reliance. Organising a series of plays and other events for the elderly was a fulfilling challenge. I also found that the experience of assisting younger students with IT and language development was extremely rewarding.

I have always enjoyed reading, but more recently my A level studies have enabled me to explore foreign literature. Brecht is particularly absorbing for his insight into the way people attempt to overcome the horrors of war.

Currently, I am helping to produce a film for the European Student Travel Company concerning the career opportunities for young people in Europe. Also, I represented my school at a national selection conference for the European Youth Parliament. This venture not only enhanced my general knowledge, but also improved my teamwork, language and debating skills, which will be particularly useful for my course at university.

PARAGRAPH PLAN

HERE IS A FIVE PARAGRAPH PLAN FOR A PERSONAL STATEMENT THAT YOU MIGHT FIND HELPFUL WHEN WRITING YOUR OWN PERSONAL STATEMENT.

PARAGRAPH 1

Experience, knowledge and skills you have gained and learnt from your sixth form courses, how this leads into what you are applying for and if you know what you want to do as a career afterwards.

From English A Level, you might comment on presentations to the rest of the class, speaking or performing in front of groups, writing analytically and critically about challenging literary texts or researching and working as a member of a team. Give examples: "When reading 'King Lear'...."

THIS SHOWS THAT:

You are a serious student and you have made excellent use of the opportunities offered to you in education so far. You are interested in academic study.

PARAGRAPH 2

Responsibilities and contributions you have made within school. Being a prefect, joining in with clubs, drama festivals, music concerts, school trips, school prizes etc. Helping out at drama club once could be considered as "taking responsibility for organising and leading younger students in a weekly drama club, where you enjoyed developing positive relationships with younger students and fostering a sense of community within the school at large".

THIS SHOWS THAT:

You have shown a willingness to participate and to take on responsibility in wider areas of your school than just academic study.

PARAGRAPH 3

Responsibilities at work and in other areas out of school. Include and make the most of any work experience, especially if it relates to your chosen course; visiting and helping out at a nursery a couple of times could turn into: 'Already having gained valuable and extremely enjoyable experience working as an assistant with nursery age children, participating in early literacy activities...' How the warmth of the bond that was established between you and the children inspired you; you are now committed to doing nothing else with your life but nursery education.

THIS SHOWS THAT:

You have demonstrated that you are responsible and reliable and that you can work with people outside of a school environment.

PARAGRAPH 4

Interests and hobbies. Maintain a bias to include activities connected with your chosen course as well as a wide range of other interests. If it is a language based course for example, you might write about your passion for travel and your experiences of living with a Swedish family who didn't speak a word of English, for a month during your last summer holiday. Or how you worked as an extra in the filming of 'Les Miserables' and thereby learnt a considerable amount of useful information about film-making, for the Media module of the degree course you would like to take.

THIS SHOWS THAT:

You have demonstrated that you are a whole person, interesting in your own right. You have a range of qualities and would offer these to the benefit of your college or university.

PARAGRAPH 5

Why you are personally suited to the university/college and specific course or subject you are applying for. Dedicated, committed and reliable – after all, working as a trapeze artist, being responsible for catching your fellow acrobats above the circus ring floor in the roof of the big top, whilst touring Eastern Europe during your recent vacation job, shows that you have skill in working as a member of a team. Or being chosen as the youngest ever captain of your local hockey club shows you are popular and able to take on serious responsibilities.

THIS SHOWS THAT:

You have personal qualities and skills which prove that you are ready for student life in the broadest sense.

OUR ADVICE TO YOU

YOU SHOULD NOW HAVE LOTS OF BULLET POINTS ABOUT YOURSELF, ALL OF WHICH WILL BE USEFUL IN PREPARING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT.

JUSTIFY IT

If you don't seem to have done much from the list – don't worry. Just think about things you've done which show your best qualities. The important thing is that you have a good reason why you want to study the course and go to university; it doesn't matter if the reason sounds silly at the moment – you can work on the language later. All admissions tutors will be looking for people who are enthusiastic and passionate about the subjects they want to study and about being an undergraduate, so make sure that you demonstrate that passion.

EDIT IT

Remember, you only have a limited amount of space – but don't let this put you off. A long personal statement can easily be trimmed down. It's harder to increase the length of a short personal statement but there is no requirement that you fill the entire space. It's better to have a short and well written statement than a long and irrelevant one.

READ IT

Make sure you get other people to read it; your family, friends, teachers and anyone else who you think will be able to give you a good opinion. As well as checking for spelling and grammar mistakes, they will be able to tell you if they think there is anything you've missed out. Also show it to your head of year or career advisers – they will have seen a lot of statements and have a good idea about what they should contain.

SAVE IT

After looking at your statement again and showing it to other people you should have some changes to make to your original one. Before making these changes, save a copy of your original statement so that you can go back to it if you need to. It's not unusual for people to have written 10-20 drafts (though many people do much less) before they are happy with the final version.

AVOID THESE COMMON MISTAKES

HERE IS A LIST OF COMMON MISTAKES THAT STUDENTS MAKE WHEN WRITING THEIR PERSONAL STATEMENTS:

- Repeating information already on the UCAS form;
- Listing everything you have completed in your life;
- Mentioning one particular university;
- Making a list of what you have achieved without explaining;
- Letting the statement 'fizzle' out without a proper ending;
- Thanking the reader;
- Not showing your personality.

The School and College Engagement Team

For more information about
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