



Discover our hints and tips for finding the transferable skills you've developed during lockdown and Covid-19

How to write your personal statement for university

Your complete guide to planning, writing, and submitting a personal statement that'll catch the eye of undergraduate admissions tutors and help you find a place on your dream degree.

2023

Contents


- 2 Introduction
- 3 What is a personal statement?
- 4 What do admissions tutors look for in a personal statement?
- 6 How to write a personal statement | Step by step
- 12 And finally...submit before the deadline

Introduction

Writing an eye-catching personal statement could be the very thing that earns you a place studying your dream subject at your favourite university.

It might be the first time you've written anything like this, and with so much advice out there on personal statement 'dos' and 'don'ts', how can you tell what's best?

All of our advice comes from university staff who read and assess personal statements every year. These guidelines come stamped with our 'admissions team seal of approval', so you know they're guaranteed to help you find a place on the course of your dreams.

 **Admissions tutors understand that it's been difficult to gain new experience out there in the world during Covid-19. Throughout this guide we've added some tips and ideas for discovering the transferable skills that you will likely have developed during lockdown – whether you're aware of them or not.**

So read on to discover everything you need to know about writing your personal statement for university.



What is a **personal statement**?

The personal statement is a vital part of your UCAS application. It's your first opportunity to showcase your ambitions, skills, and experience in your own words to university and college admissions staff.

A personal statement also communicates your passion and flair for your subject. **It's a piece of writing that's personal to you.**

While it might seem an impossible task to fit all of this into just a few paragraphs, it can be done, and we'll help you with some easy steps.

The Basics

Even if you're applying to five universities, **you only write one personal statement**. What you write must reflect your suitability for all courses you're applying to.

Your personal statement should be:

- no more than 4,000 characters (including spaces)
- in size 12 font
- in clear paragraphs
- the truth
- written by you, to university admissions staff
- new information, and shouldn't repeat anything already on your form

'The personal statement is the first thing we actually see that you've written. It's so important to keep your knowledge up to date. Read newspapers, current affairs, and be aware of what's going on in the world now and use it.'

Josh, in the Law School Admissions Team

What do admissions tutors **look for in a personal statement**?

Though personal statements written for different courses will need to include slightly different things, there are some universal qualities that all admissions tutors look for.

You'll need to include:

Why are you applying to study this subject?

Think about what interests you about your subject and why you want to spend the next three years studying it. Tie it into your ambitions and future career.

Why do you want to enter higher education?

Many students forget to include why they're interested in going on to further study. Is there particular knowledge you need for your dream job, or are there personal skills you want to develop as you study?

Are you a part of any other relevant activity?

Include any extracurricular activities, clubs, or societies you belong to. Don't forget the skills you've gained through programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh, ASDAN, the Scout Association, National Citizen Service, and more.

What makes you suitable for the course?

List any relevant experience you have or achievements you've gained while at school or college.

Work experience could come in here, too. Think outside the box and look for transferable skills. After all – if you're planning on studying archaeology you may never have been on a historical dig but you might have been metal detecting or volunteered at a museum.

Have you taken part in a higher education taster course?

Don't forget to mention if you've taken part in a higher education placement, summer school, or taster course. Describe how what you learned impacted your decision to go on to higher education.

Attending these courses demonstrates your dedication to preparing for academic life early.



Don't worry if you've struggled to gain extra experience during the Covid-19 pandemic, admissions tutors will recognise that it's been a difficult time. To support you, we've sprinkled some ideas throughout this guide to help you come up with transferable skills and extra experience that you never even knew you had, so keep reading!



How to write a personal statement?

STEP 1: DO YOUR RESEARCH

This is the time to start getting organised.

Think back over the past few years and **list your attributes and reasons for applying** on [this downloadable UCAS worksheet](#). You don't even need to write in full sentences at this point, just get down as many points as possible before you forget them.

If you're struggling for ideas, try thinking outside the box. You'll have developed lots of valuable transferable skills from clubs, societies, hobbies, or part-time jobs.

If you're stuck for ideas, ask one of your subject teachers for advice.



BONUS TIP FOR 2023 ENTRY:

Admissions advisers know that it will have been difficult to find new work experience or volunteering opportunities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Start your research by thinking back over the last few years – what have you done that demonstrates your skills?

Once you've done that, start thinking about any new interests or hobbies you might have developed during lockdown. We'll talk a little more about transferable skills you might have developed during the pandemic in the 'Middle' section of this guide.

'I used a mind-map to get all my ideas out there, even if I didn't end up including them all. There's a great structuring sheet on the [UCAS website](#), which is a great tool to help plan your personal statement.'

Emily, Geography graduate

How to write a personal statement?

STEP 2: STRUCTURING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

In the same way you might when you write an essay, it's easiest to break down your personal statement into smaller, manageable chunks.

The Opening

Your opening should be memorable, strong, and get to the point quickly. You need to prove that you know what you're applying for, and that you're prepared to get stuck in.

It must communicate your excitement, enthusiasm, and motivation to succeed. Don't just say you find the subject interesting – explain **why** you find it interesting.

Be succinct and draw the reader in, but don't be tempted to use gimmicks or puns. Be honest, and use personal examples to demonstrate your commitment to studying your chosen subject. Write what comes naturally, and if your own personal tone of voice starts to filter through, that's a good thing (as long as you don't stray from the point you're making!)



'A big 'don't' tends to be to try and be overly witty or humorous, as it doesn't always go down very well!'

Rachel, English Literature and Language graduate

'Get the first sentence right. When I read a personal statement, the first sentence is really crucial to make that first judgement.'

Simon, Undergraduate Admissions Tutor for Marine Technology

'Avoid generalised statements. You've a limited amount of space on the application form, so try to stay clear of them. Instead, write things that set you apart from others and show why you want to study the subject.'

Adam, Degree Programme Director
Contemporary and Popular
Music BA (Hons)

The Middle

This is where you flesh out your suitability and experience and is the main body of your personal statement.

As you start to include everything you noted down earlier, keep checking your work to make sure you've included a good balance of:

Academic skills

If you're already studying the subject, include which parts of it have inspired you and why. If you're applying to study a new subject, think about how your current subjects link to your chosen degree and how they nurture your interest.

Interpersonal skills

Pepper the middle with transferable interpersonal skills that an admissions tutor might be looking out for.

Always back up each skill with a practical example of how you've applied it in the real world, whether it's at a part-time job, by taking part in sport, or by winning an award.

Hobbies and interests

Link these to your course if you can, but even if you can't, they'll demonstrate that you're a well-rounded person who actively takes part and isn't afraid to get involved.

Don't forget to include why you enjoy what you do and how it's all helped to make you who you are today.



BONUS EXPERIENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Think about any new interests or transferable skills you might have developed during the pandemic, such as:

Resilience – times you've succeeded at your goals during a period of contact change

Independent learning – being pro-active in your approach to studying at home and managing your time

Determination – dedication to getting your school work done during challenging circumstances

Online research – developing the ability to conduct independent research using different websites, resources, and digital platforms

Time management – balancing school work, family, and home life during a period of constant change

Teamwork – working with your family to make all that extra time at home a positive experience for everyone

Adaptability – learning to work, study, and live in new ways during Covid-19 and lockdown

Vocabulary and Grammar

Write your personal statement naturally, letting your passion and positivity shine through. Keep sentences short and simple. The easier it is for admissions tutors to understand what you're trying to say, the better!

Think about any particular words that might show an admissions tutor that you've done your research. Scan through course information on university websites, and write down the words and terms to use when describing your interest in particular subjects.

Always be specific when giving examples of your experience, naming companies you've worked with or volunteered for.

Using active and dynamic words can really help to make your personal statement pop. Show your academic prowess and personal skills with words and phrases like:

Well-organised

Meeting deadlines

Critical thinking

Research

Evaluation

Analysing

Investigative

Experimental

Working independently

Problem-solving

Responsible

Co-operating and team-working

Time management

Independent and pro-active

Efficiency

Trustworthy and reliable

Using initiative

Self-motivated

The Ending

Think of this as the part where you bring together your passion, suitability, and motivations.

Succinctly revisit the key points you want the admissions tutor to remember the most, and summarise how they all contribute to making you a great candidate for the course.

Another approach is to include a few words about how the university experience will help you develop as a person. This could be building your confidence when meeting new people, or living and learning independently from home.

Finally, make your ending forward-looking, dynamic, and optimistic. You don't need to plan out the next 20 years of your life, but try to show how your chosen course ties into your future career plans.

And finally, don't leave on a cliffhanger!

'Show your ambitions. Show what you plan for your career and how ultimately studying this programme will shape your future.'

Tom, Director of Education
(Population Health Sciences
Institute)

'For me, I'm looking for interest and drive for the subject. I'm also quite keen to see that it's grammatically correct and doesn't have any spelling errors. You'll be surprised how many of them do, and that can give the wrong impression.'

James, Associate Dean (Education),
Faculty of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Editing and Proofreading

Your personal statement mustn't exceed 4,000 characters (including spaces).

It's sometimes easier to write more than you need in your first draft, and then edit out unnecessary words. This way, you'll still include all of your examples but in a more concise word count.

- Ask a parent, sibling, or friend to read your personal statement through for spelling mistakes or typos
- Read what you've written out loud, slowly
- Print out a copy. Sometimes it's easier to edit on a paper copy than via a screen
- Our brain automatically 'corrects' wrong words inside sentences. Try reading your personal statement backwards to notice each word individually
- Change the font or size to see your personal statement in a new light
- Make sure one read-through is just for punctuation, particularly missing full stops, upper and lower case text, and apostrophes

And finally... submit before the deadline

After you've tried some of our proofreading techniques, do at least one more complete read-through before you submit. Try to do it on a day when you haven't been working on your statement at all.

Give yourself enough time before the deadline to not have to rush. The UCAS deadline for dentistry and medical courses is 15 October, 2022, and the deadline for other courses is 25 January 2023. Find out if your school sets its own earlier deadline.

And there you have it

Follow our step-by-step guide to crafting a captivating personal statement and you're already on your way to finding a place on your dream degree.

Here are some further resources to help you as you plan, write, and proof-read your personal statement:

[UCAS personal statement worksheet](#)

[UCAS's advice on how to write a personal statement](#)

[Which? University's personal statement examples](#)

'And finally, prove to us that out of all your A Levels you really do want to do this one subject.'

Andrew, Undergraduate
Admissions Tutor for
Chemistry

