A guide to personal statements

BUILDING THE BRIDGE TO
YOUR FUTURE

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

What is a personal statement?

YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT IS ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTS OF YOUR UCAS APPLICATION.

It's your opportunity to tell universities why you want to study a particular course and demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm for the subject.

Universities use your personal statement to compare you against other candidates with similar grades. Not all programmes require an interview, so a personal statement is an opportunity to present your skills and experience.

A personal statement should combine subject interest with extra-curricular activities. However, the focus of a personal statement should be about the course. For a well-rounded personal statement we suggest that 75-80% of the content should be academic and 10 -15% should focus on extra-curricular activities. Your introduction and conclusion should cover the rest.

THINGS TO INCLUDE FOR A SUCCESSFUL PERSONAL STATEMENT:

Extra-curricular activities – anything you do outside of normal classroom activities in school, such as playing sport, learning an instrument or completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Transferable skills – are skills that can be applied to lots of different situations. For example, participating in a theatre performance could give you skills in public speaking, or being captain of a netball team might have given you skills in leadership.

Super-curricular activities – are ways that you have taken your subject beyond your school studies. They demonstrate your motivation and enthusiasm for the subject. For example, participating in a MOOC online course or entering a national writing competition.

Ready, set, go

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT BRIEF

PLANNING

- You only have one personal statement for all five choices, so don't include specific details about each university
- Investigate the course content on your chosen universities' websites and try to tailor your personal statement accordingly - this shows the university that you have done your research!
- Think carefully about the points you need to include

FACTS

- Your reasons for choosing the subject
- Prove you are enthusiastic about studying the subject
- How the subject relates to what you have previously studied
- Relevant work experience, volunteering or placements you have undertaken
- Hobbies and activities that might relate to the subject or add to your skillset

WRITING

- **Introduction**: begin with an opening sentence that captures the readers' attention
- **Structure**: remember that your academic interests should always be at the forefont of your personal statement. Start with academic content first, then discuss relevant work experience and extra-curricular activites.
- **Conclusion**: this should be a summary of the points you've made already and emphasise why you're a good candidate
- Check your grammar, spelling and punctuation

REMEMBER

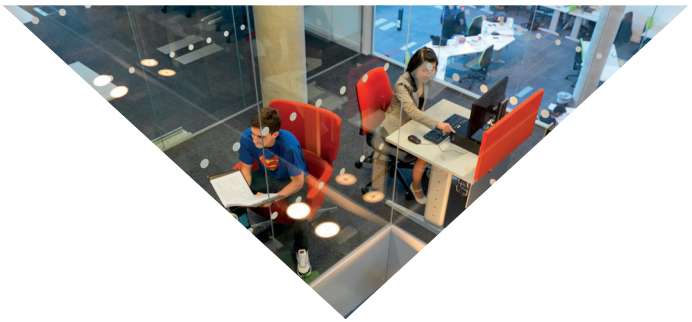
- Start early, remember school deadlines are there for a reason. You will need time to get feedback
- Do not copy! UCAS have software to detect plagiarism
- You can write up to 4000 characters which is roughly 500 words or 47 lines of text
- Make sure to reference any research articles or authors
- Be honest about your achievements
- Use paragraphs
- Keep a copy - personal statements are often used as a starting point at interviews

Examples to get you thinking

INTRODUCTION – Chemical Engineering: Much of the advancement in the modern age has been underpinned by developments in Maths and Chemistry. Our future will depend on the innovation of fuel cells, medicine and alternative energy solutions. My ambition is to be a part of this innovation and contribute towards any of these crucial projects. Recently, I have been following the incredible work of pioneers such as Elon Musk. His innovations in battery technology, such as the ones used in Tesla cars, SpaceX and ambitions to colonise Mars are all supported by Chemistry and Maths. One of the greatest parts about Chemical Engineering is the numerous possible career paths that it may lead to, all of which may be vital to the progress of society. All of these things together are what have inspired me to study Chemical Engineering.

ACADEMIC INTEREST – Mechanical Engineering: Engineering combines Physics and Maths which are two areas in which I have an ever-growing interest. My interest in Mechanical Engineering was specifically enhanced when I attended a workshop for A Level Science students. I was able to interact with university students and discuss their subjects, which offered me an insight into what a university degree entails. The areas that I found most interesting use Maths to analyse problems, such as how materials and their structure move through fluid and the stress and strain of materials. Mechanics is my favourite Maths module as it involves Maths and Physics through problem solving. In my controlled assessment, I explored the use of low-level programming language systems such as Python. My enthusiasm for computing and skills in this area will aid me in the future delivery of engineering projects at university. Some of my most enjoyable times have been conducting practical work at school, particularly in Physics. This was very important as it has developed my organisational skills and my ability to interpret data, allowing me to construct conclusions and understand theories on a visual level. Practical work has helped nurture some of my best qualities as a problem solver and the ability to work in groups effectively.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR – Physics: I have gained many skills, endurance and stamina, having completed Team Mountain climbing, rambling and some cave exploration. These expeditions have enhanced my team working skills like co-operation, effective communication and listening skills. Being the student ambassador for the Mathematics and Physics department has further helped me



develop my leadership skills. Volunteering in the Schools Community Service teaching younger students Mathematics and Science has developed my confidence and management skills.

SUPER-CURRICULAR – Economics: Reading the 'Economics Today' journal allows me to understand the core foundations of economic theory. It has given me a greater understanding of the events in the last recession, external factors at play and why many economies were unable to predict the economic downturn. The work of Jeffery Sachs and his book *Common Wealth* has changed my view of global politics. The idea of politicians not learning from economic history will continue a trend of instability in the markets at the detriment to long term growth. I look forward to broadening my current knowledge by reading diverse economic perspectives while at university.

CONCLUSION – Sociology: I have often questioned how society functions and I wish to truly grasp the complexity of the discipline when I get the opportunity to study the subject at university. I am looking forward to encountering new, challenging concepts that will test my intellectual abilities. I anticipate discovering new cultures and languages at university and am determined to undertake the demands of this degree.

OPENING LINES TO AVOID

In 2015, UCAS conducted a study on the most common opening lines in personal statements. Those below were the most overused:

From a young age I have (always) been [interested in/fascinated by]...
(seen 1,779 times)

For as long as I can remember I have...
(seen 1,451 times)

I am applying for this course because...
(seen 1,370 times)

I have always been interested in...
(seen 927 times)

Throughout my life I have always enjoyed...
(seen 310 times)

To make your personal statement stand out, it's worth avoiding the sentences above and coming up with your own way of expressing yourself.

DON'T FORGET: it is equally important to have a good closing statement at the end. You need to summarise the key points and include a sentence or two about where you hope the future might take you after completing the course.

What do we mean by ABC?

WHEN APPLYING TO A UNIVERSITY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO SHOWCASE YOURSELF AND THE SKILLS YOU POSSESS AS A POSSIBLE FUTURE STUDENT.

Everything you do at school, both in the classroom and outside, will give you transferable skills. To help you discover the skills you have developed, start by using the letters ABC - Activity, Benefit, Course.

ACTIVITY: Volunteering in the local community or captaining a sports team.

BENEFIT: Can you pick out the transferable skills you have gained from your experiences? For example - teamwork, communication and leadership.

COURSE RELEVANCE: It is important to stress why this activity is relevant to the course you are applying for. You need to make a connection between the activities you have taken part in, the skills you have developed and the course you have chosen. Almost all courses will include group work and therefore strong communication and leadership skills could be considered useful.

Use the space opposite to think about your transferable skills.

ACTIVITY:

BENEFIT:

COURSE RELEVANCE:

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

2,300+
Placement partners

34
Minutes to London by rail

TEF Gold
Gold award in the Teaching Excellence Framework

£130m
Investment in accommodation

5,000
Rooms in student accommodation

8460-0418