

Personal Statement Workshop

1. Write a love letter to your subject...



2. What is a personal statement?

The personal statement is your opportunity to tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study. It is part of your online application to universities. You only write one personal statement and it is available to all the universities or colleges you have applied to.

In your personal statement you need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd. You can enter up to 4,000 characters (this includes spaces) or 47 lines of text (this includes blank lines), whichever comes first. You do not have to use all the space provided.

3. Getting started

Make a list of everything you've achieved since year 10. Try and group it under the headings below. These sections will form the main body of your personal statement. There is a useful grid on the next page to help you organise your achievements and the things you want to get across in your personal statement.

Why do you want to study the subject? Why are you passionate about the subject?

Sell yourself as a good potential student. Why do you like it? Why will you do well? Maybe mention what sparked your interest in the subject, if appropriate. Talk about specific things within the subject area that you would like to explore in more detail or learn about for the first time.

What do you currently enjoy in your A-level studies that feeds into why you have chosen the degree subject you have?

If you have been particularly interested by something, or have done excellent coursework etc, you could mention what it is. This might be something you'll be asked about in an interview. Try and find skills that you use in one subject that will help you in your chosen degree. Are there any particular modules/periods/books you have enjoyed which helped you make your decision?

Any outside reading / interest in the subject?

You should try to show that you are interested in the subject outside of the classroom as well as inside it. You might get asked about these in interview, so don't lie! However if you don't read things related to your subject outside of the classroom then now is the time to start. It doesn't matter what subject it is, as this will help you in many ways.

Any (ideally relevant) work experience / voluntary work / clubs etc?

Say what it taught you or how it helped you, not just what you did.

Spare time

You can mention how things involved responsibility, time management, leadership, community work etc, rather than just listing things you do. If you have a part-time job, it is relevant. Likewise, if a lot of time is taken up with babysitting siblings or acting as a translator at home, make sure you put this in to so that tutors understand the demands on your time.

**Do not waste time talking about attendance, punctuality, teamwork etc
This is not a job application!**

<p>Why do you want to study the subject? Why are you passionate about the subject?</p>	
<p>What do you currently enjoy in your A-level studies that feeds into why you have chosen the degree subject you have?</p>	
<p>Any outside reading / interest in the subject</p>	
<p>Spare time</p>	

4. The first draft

- Use the list you already have to construct your personal statement, with a paragraph for each heading.
- Try to make your first sentence catch your reader's attention – you must use it to show your passion for your subject. This does not mean you need to start with a quote, as thousands of people do so every year. The last paragraph should end on a positive and enthusiastic note – perhaps mentioning how much you are looking forward to studying the subject at university. If you find these bits the hardest to write (and many do), write the rest of the personal statement first and then the first and last sentences or paragraphs.
- Ensure that all paragraphs flow and connect – there is nothing worse to an admissions tutor than reading a statement that jumps all over the place.
- Show, don't tell. Don't just say how good you are, show it by mentioning an achievement of which you are particularly proud. On the other hand, don't just say "I did this, I did that" – mention what you enjoyed about doing whatever it is you did, or what skills you learned or used.
- At this stage, don't worry if it's too long, you can cut it later. Just ensure that everything you want to say gets said.
- DO NOT LIE. Don't even bend the truth. If you say that you've read a book, you need to make sure that you've read it before an interview, because the chances are that you will be asked about it. Be sure that you can talk about anything you write about.

5. Fine tuning

- Underline all the sentences beginning with "I," and restructure so that there aren't so many.
- Edit out duplicated words and boring words – don't use "interesting" over and over again – get out a thesaurus and find some synonyms. "Challenging," and "exciting" are good alternatives.
- At this point it will probably be too long – cut anything irrelevant or waffly, summarise as much as you can. It needs to be 550 words or less.
- You don't have to mention every job you've ever done or every sports team you've ever played on – it's more important, especially for Oxford, that you show your academic ability and enthusiasm than that you've done thousands of extra-curricular things.
- Make sure that your spelling and grammar are perfect. The spell-check feature in Word is useful but parents and teachers are more so. Book titles need to be accurate, as do authors' names.
- Read it aloud. If there are bits that "clunk" or that make you trip over your tongue as you read, re-word them.
- Get feedback from parents, teachers, friends – but you don't have to take on board everything that they say. It's *your* personal statement, and although it should sound formal, your personality must still come through.
- Don't stress about it – it's only one piece of information among many, and it doesn't have to be perfect. Good grades, a good reference and a strong performance at interview are just as important.

More information is available at:

www.ucas.ac.uk/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement