

Personal statement

Different courses and universities will consider personal statements in different ways. The personal statement can make a difference between an offer and rejection for highly selective and competitive courses.

Top ten tips for personal statements

1. Ensure that the personal statement gives an insight into the student's motivations and interests. The personal statement is the only place in the application where admissions staff **can hear from the student**. They will want to know that the applicant is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the subject. They want students who are going to love studying the subject for three years, or even longer.
2. Check **spelling and grammar**. Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors can imply that the applicant has not given the statement sufficient care or attention.
3. Ensure that everything in the personal statement is **relevant** to the application. Not everything needs to be in there; only include information that is relevant to the subject or the skills required.
4. Encourage your students to express themselves, avoiding clichés and quotes from other people. Leading universities want applicants to demonstrate their **own thinking and ideas**.
5. Make sure that all the information your students include is **supported by evidence**. If a student says they have a particular skill, it needs to be demonstrated.
6. Students should **reflect on their experience and skills** within the statement. Admissions staff want to understand what a student has learnt.
7. Make sure the personal statement is **unique** to the student. Admissions staff want to hear about the individual student. Universities take plagiarised personal statements very seriously and can reject any applicant who has copied a statement. UCAS screens all forms and will investigate any suspicious or fraudulent applications.
8. Make sure your students **avoid jokes**. Admissions staff do have a sense of humour, but sometimes a joke can get lost, or the reader may find it in bad taste.
9. Make sure the student is telling the **truth**. This is their formal application and will form part of their contract with the university.
10. Ensure your students are **positive**. The statement should focus on what a student knows, what they have learnt and how they will make a positive contribution to the course.

Developing the personal statement

Encourage discussion about the personal statement at the start of your students' post-16 studies. This can be led by a teacher or adviser or could be a part of an activity involving students working in pairs. Some universities provide sessions on developing personal statements that are useful starting points for discussion.

The questions to ask each of your students:

“ Why are you applying for this course? ”

- What excites you about this course?
- What research have you undertaken on the course?
- Which aspects of the course interest you?
- How does this course fit into your long-term plans?

“ What do you know about the subject and what aspects particularly interest you? ”

- How are your current studies helping you prepare for university?
- Which aspects of your current studies have generated an interest in the subject?

“ What personal qualities, skills and experience will help you in this subject and how did you acquire these? ”

- Have you undertaken any relevant work experience?
- How have your activities outside your studies taught you about your suitability for this course?
- Have you attended any university outreach events?
- What did you learn from these experiences, both about yourself and the course?

Ask your students to write down their answers and use them in the first draft of their personal statement.

UCAS  has good advice on developing the personal statement.

The balance of content between subject knowledge and interests, extracurricular activity and work experience will depend on the universities and courses applied to. In general, around 70% to 80% of a personal statement should relate directly to the courses applied for and focus on academic interests, knowledge and ability. See **section two**  in the 'How do I help my students apply to university?' guidebook.

