



Writing a First Draft of  
your Personal Statement

Year 12 – Summer / Autumn 2023

# Key Deadlines for your Personal Statement & UCAS Applications



First draft of Personal Statements due **Friday 29th September** to Tutors



Deadline for Oxbridge Admissions Tests Entry - **Friday 29th September**



Oxbridge Admissions Tests - **Wednesday 18th October**



Internal Deadline for UCAS Applications - **Friday 17th November**

# The Basics:

- **47 lines**, or **4000 characters** – strict limit.
- No formatting (*E.g. indenting, bold, italics*).
- Write in Microsoft Word and when finalised, copy and paste into your UCAS Application.
- Personal Statements are advised to be weighted as follows:
  - **Why that course / subject? (10%)**
  - **Academic experience (70%):**
    - Super-curricular activities linked to your chosen discipline
    - Evidence of your skills / prowess in that subject
    - *Volunteering – only if necessary for your chosen discipline*
    - *Work Experience – only if necessary for your chosen discipline*
  - **Interests (20%):**
    - What hobbies / interests you have that show you are a well-rounded student

# Top Tips from an Admissions Tutor


- If you are applying for a **Joint Honours Degree (two subjects)**, ensure that you **refer to both** in your Personal Statement.
- Universities want to see an **active, well-rounded individual**, not just a good academic.
- Universities use the Personal Statement to get a sense of an **applicant's personality, their interests and how motivated they are**.
- The Personal Statement is **one of the first things universities look at** when they receive a UCAS Application, along with predicted grades and the reference.
- If you are fighting for a place with others and you all have the same predicted grades, often **the Personal Statement is the tool that's used to make a final decision on whether to offer a place or not**.

# Questions to ask yourself **before** writing a first draft of your Personal Statement:

- What **work / reading** have I been doing **outside of school** that I can talk about?
- How do I **demonstrate my engagement** with my **chosen subject**, both **inside** and **outside** the classroom?
- How do I **approach wider reading with purpose**?
- How do I **critically engage with the subject**?
- What do I want to **showcase** about myself that I can **expand on at interview**?  
*(Normally the Personal Statement acts as the springboard for what you will be asked about in interview).*
- What, in particular **fascinates and excites me** about my subject? *(E.g. a specific time period, topic, idea / concept etc.)*

# Dos and Don'ts

<b>Do</b>	<b>Don't</b>
Be reflective	Avoid 'inspirational' quotes
Mention authors, writers, artists, thinkers, inventors who have been particularly influential	Mention a specific university you want to go to
Spell check!	Talk about the content of your A Level courses in detail
Be clear – Admissions Tutors don't have time to 'read between the lines'	Plagiarise – UCAS will know
Read through your drafts with teachers	Lie / exaggerate
Focus on quality over quantity	Get someone to write it for you
Explain what you've learnt and what you find interesting	Stress over opening and closing sentences



# Suggested Personal Statement Structures

Use the guidance on the next **nine slides** to help you with the structure, layout and focus of each part of your Personal Statement.



# Structure 1

Introduction – *Why that course / subject?*

**Paragraph 1**

- Write these first!
- Each paragraph should have a different theme or focus in relation to your subject.
- Consider: what have you done; how has it benefitted you; how is it relevant to the course you want to study?

**Paragraph 2/3**

Extra-curricular Interests paragraph

Conclusion – *What will make you stand out from others?*



# Questions to ask yourself for each section:

SECTION	WHAT TO INCLUDE
INTRODUCTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Why do you want to study the course? What is your personal trigger? I.e. what got you interested in the subject. What motivates you personally to study this course?</li><li>○ Which aspect are you really looking forward to studying in more detail? Why?</li></ul>
INTEREST IN SUBJECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Why does this subject interest you? Include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course.</li><li>○ Why do you think you're suitable for the course? Do you have any particular skills and experience that will help you to succeed on the course(s)?</li><li>○ Do your current or previous studies relate to the course that you have chosen, if so how?</li><li>○ Which aspects of the degree particularly interest you?</li><li>○ What activities have you taken part in that demonstrate your interest in the course?</li></ul>
WIDER SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ What skills do you have that will help you on the course?</li><li>○ What have you achieved that you are proud of? Have you had any positions of responsibility?</li><li>○ What attributes do you have that make you interesting, special or unique?</li><li>○ Have you had any work experience, a part-time job or done any voluntary work?</li></ul>
SUMMARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ What do you hope to gain from your studies?</li><li>○ What would you like to achieve after completing the course? Explain how you want to use the knowledge and experience that you gain. How does the course relate to what you want to do in the future?</li></ul>

Focus on  
what you're  
good at:

## SKILLS & STRENGTHS

Communication Teamwork Motivation Dedication  
Public speaking  
Presentation skills Initiative Time management  
Multitasking Independence Organisation  
Initiative Logical thinking Leadership Problem solving  
Research skills Analytical skills  
Achievement Planning Evidence Innovative  
Transferable skills Self-motivation  
Listening Understanding Critical thinking

1. Why do you want to study your chosen course?

Green writing area with horizontal lines.

2. Is there a specific topic that you can discuss in detail?

Green writing area with horizontal lines.

3. What have you learnt from taking part in course-related activities?

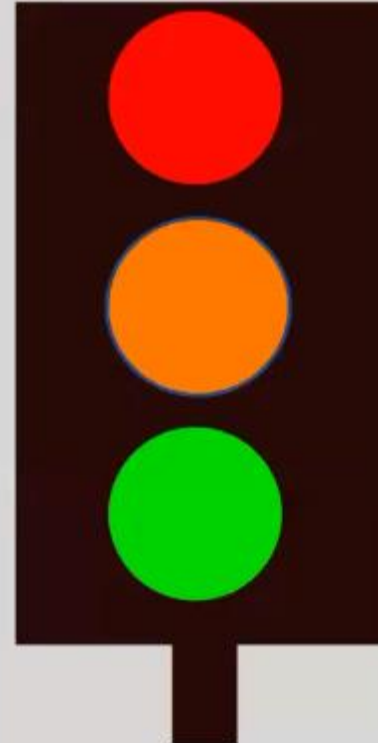
Orange writing area with horizontal lines.

4. What are your extra-curricular activities?

Red writing area with horizontal lines.



## Structure 2



**Only 1 detail needed for each activity**

**Can you go into just a bit more detail?**

**Can you go into more detail and give specific examples?**

# Stage 1 – Reasons for studying the subject

- Students explore the various academic skills associated with different subject areas and reflect on what they have demonstrated and when.
- Students should showcase their suitability for the course by providing evidence of their competency and an awareness of what studying the subject area entails.
- A paragraph for this section can provide an academically focused opening to a personal statement that appeals to admissions staff.

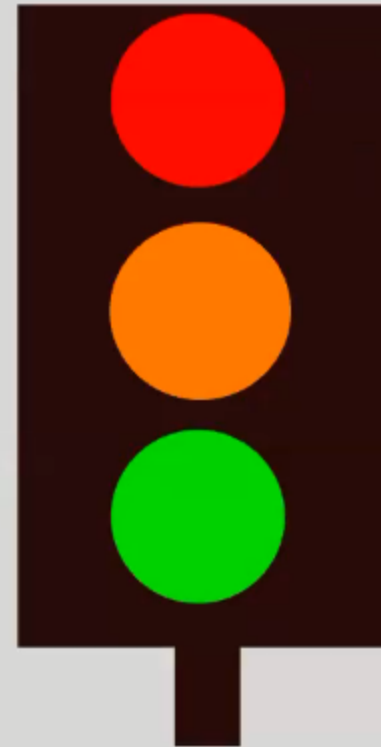
2. Is there a specific topic that you can discuss in detail?

A green rectangular box with five horizontal white lines, intended for writing a response to the question above.

**FOCUS** – identify a topic

**SELECT AND CRITIQUE** – comment on what you've enjoyed/learnt/are interested in about this topic

**REFLECT** – what did you do after identifying your interest in this topic? Reading and further research.



Only 1 detail needed for each activity

Can you go into just a bit more detail?

Can you go into more detail and give specific examples?



## Stage 3 – Course-related activities

- This is the opportunity for the students to provide specific examples of relevant skills/insights gained from key experiences.
- It is important that students focus on what *they* did or learned, rather than simply providing an overview of a group activity, for instance.
- They should be looking to demonstrate their pursuit of activities which support the skills needed for the course they are applying for.

LOWEST PRIORITY PARAGRAPH!!!

## Stage 4 – Extra-curricular activities

- This section is of lowest priority.
- Students often want to talk about their extracurricular activities, but it's important to be concise to avoid diluting the strength of their personal statement i.e. so that they can provide more detail for the academic examples that will have more influence on their offers.
- It's an opportunity to demonstrate their wider skills by mentioning a few key activities that they haven't discussed elsewhere.

You could talk about any of the following:

MOOC

Subject  
Champion

Bake Sale

Debate Club

Reading  
Challenge

Fundraising

Instagram  
Influencer

First Aider

Built or  
Created  
Something

Blog/Vlog

Art/Film Work

Duke of  
Edinburgh

Science or  
Business  
Competition

Work  
experience

Mentoring



# Written Expression is key:

## BETTER EXAMPLES

“Discovery. To me that is what Chemistry is about. You never know when something ground-breaking could be at your fingertips.”

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“Both educationally and socially, university life will help me to grow as a person. I hope to develop skills that will carry me through life and lead to a successful career.”

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“Within school, being a prefect and peer mentoring younger students has helped me to gain leadership qualities and also build good communication skills with people of different ages.”

**Remember this is your opportunity to present the best version of yourself.**

**Unless you are invited to interview (fewer universities do this), then this is the only chance you will have to make an impression on them.**

- **Spell check** – avoid Americanisations (‘z’s often replace ‘s’s in Word (*E.g. realisation may change to realization*) – always use the ‘s’ version).
- **Proof read after every paragraph.**
- **Read your writing aloud** to check it is **coherent** and **reads well**.
- **Use formal, academic expression** and **avoid abbreviations/slang/ colloquialisms**.

## BAD EXAMPLES

“I also have a part-time job at my local Sainsbury’s store. At times this can be very demanding as I work on the delicatessen and some customers can be very picky about how thickly you cut their ham or how well you wrap it.”

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“I am currently working to address problems I have had meeting deadlines.”

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“I have few interests outside my studies, as I tend to believe that most such activities are ultimately futile.”

# Top Tips:

- Ensure you think carefully about what you want to write before starting your Personal Statement – **create a plan before you write your first draft.**
- **Follow this model** as you're writing each paragraph: **what have you done; how has it benefitted you; how is it relevant to the course you want to study?**
- **Check spelling and grammar carefully.**
- **Start work on this early** so that you have enough time for feedback and re-drafting – your Tutors will want to see a first draft of this in September.

## ■ Key points for an outstanding personal statement

- **Proportions** - avoid excessive emphasis on extra-curricular activities
- **Breadth vs. depth** - developing examples
- **Register** - show, don't tell
- **"A sense of the individual"** – in an academic sense

# Exemplars

The final set of slides gives you lots of subject-specific examples for how you could frame / what the content of each paragraph of your Personal Statement could look like.

# Politics – Opening Paragraph

Politics and International Relations underpin every element of life and society and in a time of increasing global political tension, there is no subject I would rather study. I am convinced that diplomacy is crucial in balancing global politics and relations and I want to acquire the skills, knowledge and experience to take my place at the heart of these complex discussions.

# Geography – Opening Paragraph

My particular interest is in Human Geography; I believe a greater understanding of how individuals, cultures and economies interact with each other and the environment, both historically and in the present day, is key to the development and perhaps even the survival of our globalised world. My interest in travelling and experiencing different cultures has fuelled my fascination with Human Geography; the understanding, experience and acceptance of different cultures is vital in creating a truly globalised and inclusive international society which I look forward to being a part of in the future.

# Pharmacy – Opening Paragraph

As we have been forced to recognise during the current global pandemic, helping one another in a time of crisis is the most valuable gift a person can offer and this has reinforced my desire to find a career in which I can combine a natural desire to contribute to others well-being whilst indulging my passion for biology, anatomy and human physiology. After extensive research and some highly interesting work experience placements I believe that Pharmacy would fulfil these requirements.

# Medicine – Opening Paragraph

I have always felt driven to understand the complex world of the sciences and how the application of such knowledge can have a direct impact on individuals and society. However, it wasn't until my sisters' diagnosis of Hodgkin lymphoma when I witnessed the way a team of specialist professionals worked together to help my immediate family come to terms with and learn to manage this traumatic event that I was gripped by the desire to work in the medical profession. I quickly realised that Medicine would be a career in which I could combine my curiosity and enjoyment of academic study with the knowledge that it also has a practical, people-focused application.



# English – Opening Paragraph

Perhaps it was the fact that I learnt to read and write before I entered kindergarten in Sweden or that I quickly learned to speak English fluently when I came to England and was fascinated to add French and Spanish into the mix, or perhaps that I now thoroughly enjoy the joys of being multilingual - whatever it was, for a long time I have known that studying the language and culture of other countries would become an essential aspect of my future. Allied to this I have always had an interest in creative writing, music, art and drama, built on a passion for reading widely and creating my own stories. Both allow my imagination to run free, whether in the form of visualising worlds created by authors or using my own creativity to develop my own characters and worlds. That's why I strongly believe that an English and linguistics course is ideally suited to me, as something I feel passionate about and satisfies my drive to learn and commit to two of the greatest interests of my life.

# Physics – Writing about Academic Interests

Learning about electron-positron annihilation in High School and its use of mass energy equivalence was fascinating and the fact that such strange ideas have real world consequences and applications inspires me along with so many other concepts learned. As part of my sixth form bridging work I completed a project on semiconductor diodes combining application and theory (N-P) and along with my later EPQ on Maths education this project work has greatly enhanced my research skills and my ability to communicate information effectively and enthusiastically.

# Veterinary Science/Medicine – Writing about Academic Interests

Studying A level Biology and Chemistry has enabled me to understand what the vets at my work experience clinic are doing and conversely watching the vets at work has provided a practical demonstration of concepts studied in the classroom; learning about optical isomers in Chemistry helped me understand the head vet's explanation about the relative expense and effectiveness of different drugs due to whether the isomers have been separated or not...'

In Chemistry the aspects of the course that have particularly sparked my enthusiasm and interest are the organic and molecular aspects. Similarly, in Biology it is the human/animal transport and exchange topic area as well as Biological Molecules that I find fascinating. Through my love of sport and the specific content of A Level Physical Education I have been able to link key aspects to how the human body can be helped to function most efficiently and what, conversely, happens to prevent this.

# Law – Writing about Academic Interests

My EPQ on Islamophobia enabled me to delve into a topic I am passionate about exploring - the issue of how a society decides what is morally acceptable and how we defend ourselves against those who act against that majority view. My English A Level coursework has involved a further exploration of notions of truth and equality and how language is used in both fiction and non-fiction texts to uphold gender stereotypes and inherent sexism allowing me to focus on the power of language, how it can be manipulated, as well as the importance of precision and lack of ambiguity.

# English Literature – Writing about Academic Interests

English Literature has taught me how to analyse text in depth, enhancing my knowledge of authorial methods, why they are used and to what effect. It has also introduced me to a wide variety of texts and authors including Khaled Hosseini, Arthur Miller, John Steinbeck and J.D. Salinger, who have quickly become some of my favourite authors. I have also been able to fully recognise and explore the impact of historical, sociological and cultural contexts relevant to the texts such as the critical impact of Steinbeck's first hand experience of the poverty and destitution suffered by the dust bowl migrants in California and their subsequent exploitation by a ruthless system of agricultural economics.

# Physics – Super-Curricular Development

Brian Cox's Science of Doctor Who series provided further inspiration in its description of space-time, seemingly inconceivable and yet the only viable solution to explain relativity. Reading some of the lecture transcriptions of Feynmann (another idol of mine) I find the interconnectedness of physics immensely satisfying. Jim Al-Khalili's Quantum- A Guide for the Perplexed both aided my knowledge of the subject and revealed the depths of the field, such as the emergence of alternatives to the Copenhagen Interpretation - many-worlds being my favourite.

# Human Geography – Super-Curricular Development

At sixth form, I have seized many opportunities to further explore the field of Human Geography. These have included attending the Norwich Model UN event, held by the UEA and entering the Corpus Christi Essay Competition run by Cambridge University, completing a piece of extended writing on the role of democracy in economic development. I also participated in a project organised by Vattenfall, a windfarm company, to design off-shore wind farms. Many aspects of Human Geography had to be considered, including the impact that the wind farm would have on local people and the economic impact of both setting up and running the farm. I found this experience highly valuable, helping me to develop both my team-working and problem-solving skills, as well as opening my eyes to many of the considerations which go into creating this type of programme, both environmentally, socially, and economically.

# Pharmacy – Relevant Work Experience

I was delighted to have the opportunity to experience the various roles of a pharmacist and dispenser within a community-based environment and that of a Medical Centre. Here, I was given the responsibility to pick out the correct medicines and dosages for patient's prescriptions and sat in with various healthcare professionals, viewing how the pharmacist's occupation is critically linked in with theirs. I gained valuable knowledge, not just on the way the various healthcare professionals overlap but also regarding different classes of drugs, and how certain combinations of drugs work well whilst others do not. One interesting case presented itself when I helped a dispenser put together a Monitored Dosage System in the form of a blister pack for an elderly patient. The patient suffered from osteoporosis, so was taking Adcal D3 calcium carbonate tablets daily as a supplement. However, because these weren't making enough of an improvement, alendronic acid was also prescribed once weekly. Due to the various interactions of alendronic acid with other drugs, this had to be taken separately in a different blister pack, 30 minutes apart from any other drugs. On the day alendronic acid was taken the patient could not take any calcium carbonate, as this would reduce the effectiveness of alendronic acid by interfering with its absorption in the gut. This gave a fascinating insight into the complexity of medications and how knowledge and understanding are vital to the patient's well-being.



# Medicine – Relevant Work Experience

During my work experience on a paediatric cancer ward I saw children scream in response to their treatment but despite this being a struggle for those in the medical profession, it again highlighted the emotional resilience displayed by the doctors and nurses who manage these situations daily. During further work experience on the Cardiology ward of a local hospital, I saw the importance of maintaining patients' dignity when I witnessed the consultant speaking to his patients about sensitive matters while the nurses ensured that patients felt secure and comfortable. Shadowing an anaesthetist, I witnessed him carefully explaining the potential consequences of an operation to an elderly patient, followed by the consultant giving their own opinion taking into account the patient's circumstances showing how essential the skill of empathy was in maintain the patient-doctor relationship of trust and confidence. This situation also highlighted the importance of respecting the patient's autonomy and the importance of informed consent.

# Non-Subject Related Activities

Alongside my academic subjects my job as a lifeguard and activity leader at the local leisure centre has given me valuable people skills as well as experience of working with the public, dealing with responsibility and handling my time effectively. I am a keen swimmer, having swum competitively for almost 10 years, and my dedication to the sport has been proven by my appointment as Captain of the club for the last year. These two positions have honed my skills regarding teamwork and leadership which I know to be essential in working in any team based work environment such as a busy hospital, medical centre or pharmacist.

# Non-Subject Related Activities

Outside of college, I practice Karate and have played the violin for 9 years now. My regular practice of these since childhood have helped me develop self-control and concentration, skills which I know will ensure I have the resilience to get me through the course.

Refereeing for a youth football team has also helped teamwork, leadership and communication skills while away from work I enjoy playing squash, cricket and football a means of both relaxing and also further developing my teamwork skills.

# Non-Subject Related Activities

Outside college, I have a qualification in sports leadership, allowing me to take on authoritative roles and demonstrate confidence amongst a range of people. I salsa and modern jive, enabling me to interact with a range of ages and types of people. I have worked as a waitress in a local café, developing my confidence and a calming nature within a stress inducing environment and I also carried out work experience at a dental practice allowing me to take on responsibility and establish a reassuring manner to comfort clients.

# Closing Statements

I am confident that these skills will enable me to not only meet but to thoroughly enjoy the challenges of an undergraduate course and I look forward to both gaining knowledge and insight in the field of economics and developing further as an individual at your university.

My interest in the myriad range of topics in Geography, added to my appreciation of worldwide and local issues, encourages me to strongly believe that I will thrive both intellectually and as an individual if given the opportunity to study at your university.

As a result I feel well equipped to cope with the intensive demands of university having learnt to manage these responsibilities alongside my academic studies and understanding the benefits of cooperation and communication alongside individual ambition.

# Closing Statements

The ubiquity of Law as a subject drives me to understand more about it. Although my current aim is a career in legal reform, I know that wherever my future studies take me, having an education supplemented by a firm grounding in law will never cease to provide life changing opportunities.

I believe my experiences to date in life have given me an excellent grounding for a future in medicine as I understand the essential role of compassion and communication. I am excited to join a constantly evolving medical profession where I can contribute my skills in order to make a difference to people's lives with indiscriminate high quality care.