

Getting started on your personal statement

Key points:

Your personal statement should be personal to you. Don't start by using past statements as a template for you to create yours from. Try to start writing things which come from you. So use the points below to help you think, but don't treat them as a step by step way to create your statement.

Do not worry too much about the length of what you write to begin with (do not aim to write 4000 characters and just stop there). It is much better to write more and then let us help you reduce it down, once you and we can see the best bits.

Students often say the intro is the hardest thing to do. If you are finding that, do the intro once you have written the rest. Don't let it hold you up.

Section 1: Material for your personal statement

The most important thing you can do is thoughtfully write your statement and carefully research your subject and course so that your statement stands out from others (because it is well considered and shows dedication, rather than because it is overly-dramatic!)

The subject and course you want to study

About 70% of what you write should be demonstrating your interest, experience and ideas in the course subject you want to study. This includes your own studies in it (or in similar subjects). Being the most important, this information should be early on in the statement rather than later on.

1. Introduction

What was your personal trigger for choosing this course/subject? It might be a trip, work experience, a particular topic. Never say 'I have always wanted to study...' or 'I have always loved English' Convincing reasons why you have a passion for this subject.	
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<p>Which aspects of the course or subject are you looking forward to studying in more detail? Research this by looking on university websites – and find modules which look interesting. Find out what they are about. <i>(Try to find topics which all the universities you are applying to will be studying – not just one or two of them, so find a common topic, not a very specialist one)</i></p>	
<p>What is the relevance of your subject to society or current affairs or vice-versa?</p>	

2. Your studies in this subject in Year 12

Topic you have found interesting	What was it which captured your imagination?	What would you like to investigate further about it?
<p>What has really made you think hard? Have you seen some links between one part of a subject and another part or another subject?</p>		

3. Skills

<p>From your studies</p>	<p>Skills you have developed – structured writing; analysis; planning and carrying out practical work; observation; teamwork; presentation; time management. Include evidence of how you have developed and improved these skills</p>	<p>How the skill could be relevant to your course</p>
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Examples of skills/qualities		
Communication		
Commitment		
Time management		
Teamwork		
Initiative		
Public speaking		
Sense of responsibility		
Adaptability		
Organisation		
Leadership		
Research and analysis		

One powerful way of creating a personal statement is to set out some of the skills which you think are required for the course you are applying for. This can especially be true for vocational courses – eg. physiotherapy, occupational therapy, journalism, dentistry etc. Set out each main skill which you think is needed and create a paragraph about what you have done to show you have that skill or potential. For example in physiotherapy – the need to be able to work as part of a multi-disciplinary team. Set out how you have worked with different people and shown the ability to listen and support.

4. Additional reading/research

Reading – book/journal (eg. New Scientist/newspaper)	What you learned from it. What you found interesting. Has it caused you to think in more depth
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	– what else would you be interested in investigating as a result?

5. EPQ (if you are taking it)

Your EPQ title – and why you decided on it	
How you researched your topic. What you have found out which surprised you	
How you analysed your research	
What was difficult about the research – what did you need to change in your project and why?	
Other reflections on your EPQ	

6. Additional personal information

Wherever possible, you should be explaining what you learned or how you developed from the experience and why it would make you more suitable for your course at university.

	What you learned/how you developed/why it makes you more suitable
Work	
Work experience	
Helping in school	
School clubs	
Clubs outside school	
Voluntary work	
Community activities	
Competitions/Awards	

Summer Courses	
Events	
Museum trips	
Historical sites	
Exhibitions	
Career aspirations	
Other	
Other	

General sentence starters (please put things into your own words, but these might help get you going)

My interest in began with.....

The things which interest me most when I am studying... are.....

Reading about has helped me to understand/think about/be inspired by... because.....

I find the concept of ... particularly interesting because..... An alternative way of looking at this would be...

I would like to study this further, perhaps by looking into... and [things which you know they might study on the university courses]

My EPQ on has helped me to...

One of the most interesting parts of my A Level course has been.... I looked into this further by....

What topics have engaged you at A Level. Why are they interesting. Are there some links between your subjects (either obvious or not obvious?)

Look at the courses you are applying for.. what kinds of things do they publicise about the subject. What do you find interesting about those subjects? Can you read something about them? Look for research on ...

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Work experience/Jobs

Working as a has helped me to develop my ability to...

At work I have watched how people need to...

This is primarily aimed at students applying for vocational (ie 'career') courses like: nursing; medicine, physiotherapy, teaching, veterinary nursing, journalism etc.

Having spent time with ... [work experience]... I saw that the following qualities were really important. [The physio/lawyer/doctor/nurse...] needed to I therefore realised that it is important to...

In terms of teamwork I have had to [explain how you went]

I enjoy working under pressure..... For example, when I was This helped me understand....

Show your insight and good observations of what you saw during your experience.
Short stories about what you saw can be powerful, as long as you analyse what you learned from them.

What skills have you picked up from a subject – eg. organisation – because you have needed to do... you found something was a problem and therefore you did...

What have you learned from the voluntary work you have done

Creating a thoughtful and reflective personal statement

One useful way of turning a personal statement into something more thoughtful is to ask 'what qualities do you think a student will need in the degree course you are choosing'. As an example, a student going for journalism might think that the qualities she has listed below would be good ones to have. The fact that you are structuring part of your statement around these qualities shows that you have thought about the course in a careful manner. Once you have thought through what qualities are needed, you then need to show some evidence about these things.

Journalism...

Qualities needed....	So how have you shown these things??
Confidence to speak to people and investigate	
Interest in seeing the world through the eyes of different people	On my Spanish exchange, when I was talking with... I could see that ... was much less important to them than to us. They were much more interested in....
Using language to bring out things which other people might not have seen	
Being concise with words	
Having an interest in the work of other journalists	
Having empathy	
Being an organiser	

Changing how you write in order to open up ideas

OK	...Better
Statements which give a limited impression	Statements which can open up the experience and give a more interesting reflection from the student
I developed my skills of producing and using questionnaires as part of my sociology course	When I was using a sociology questionnaire I found that ...
My love for Maths was further developed when I went on a summer course on Maths in Durham	On a summer course on Maths in Durham I realised for the first time how [] could be used to... and made me want to investigate further how...

I helped younger students as part of the Read or Write Away course in school.	When I was working with a young student on our Read and Write Away course I found that it was easier for the Year 6 student if I
I have visited France many times and have been intoxicated by its culture.	In a small Brittany village I saw how the sense of community in village life, often based outdoors in the square, was very different to our own...
Opting to participate in the Young Enterprise programme taught me many things about working in the world of business in terms of working effectively as a team and making decisions.	As a member of a Young Enterprise team, I realised the importance of structuring our work and being clear about where you are going if ideas are going to succeed.
I have studied Biology, Chemistry and Physics for the last two years... [note – this is very obvious from the form and a waste of words]	When I was studying genetics in my Biology A Level, I saw that.... which I was able to apply to ...

Encourage reflection:

I think I enjoyed because I am/I understood/I have an ability to....

I think the challenges of this subject are... which I have dealt with by.....

Demonstrate emotional intelligence where relevant:

I empathised with an older resident who I could see was not able to manage the writing....

I tried to encourage...

Watch out for too narrow and unrealistic a career focus:

After my Criminology Degree I want to become a crime scene investigator. Most university departments will not be particularly interested in your career ambitions. (Unless you are applying for a vocational subject – eg. Physiotherapy, Speech Therapy, Medicine, Dentistry, Teaching etc.).

Note: there are many other ways of creating a good personal statement – you do not need to follow the ideas above!

Sources of inspiration to help you with your personal statement

These sources might help you to be able to write about why the topic you love inspires you

University Department websites – find out what they are researching at universities you are interested in applying to.. Look at their website and try to find ‘our staff’ or ‘current research’ or ‘publications’ etc. Alternatively search in Google for ‘University of [] research [topic/department you are interested in]’ eg. ‘University of Manchester research electrical engineering’. Then see what else you can find on that topic.

Magazines in the library – eg. New Scientist/Nature (for the Sciences); The Economist (good for geography as well as Economics and Business); Psychology Review; Geography Review; Media and many more.

TED Talks: go to the following link:

<http://www.ted.com/talks?lang=en&event=2003&duration=&sort=mostviewed&tag=>

You can search exactly for the topic you want – by putting the term into the Search option near the top left – or you can look for all talks on ‘science’ or ‘business’ etc.

Radio 4 website – there are often programmes which talk in an academic way about various topics

The following link will help you to search through Radio 4 programmes – many of them have high quality <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/programmes/a-z/by/a/current>

Sociology/criminology: Thinking Allowed

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b02qd1vy>

Science: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qy05>

Science and Nature:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/programmes/genres/factual/scienceandnature>

Science and Technology:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/programmes/genres/factual/scienceandnature/scienceandtechnology>

Science, Material World:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/programmes/genres/factual/scienceandnature/scienceandtechnology/current>

Medical Matters: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/medmatters>

History: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxrc>

Business, Economics: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006s609>

Design: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00jv9n0>

If you put into Google: 'Radio 4 [and then the subject that you want – either a broad subject, like Marketing, or something specific, like 'Stalin's Russia']' then you are likely to come up with something interesting to listen to.

Museum Websites: eg. Natural History Museum – biology, geography, geology, Science Museum – all sciences British Museum – history, arts; Victoria and Albert – fashion etc.