

# Essential Sheets for Students

## Writing an Effective Personal Statement for University and / or Job Applications



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# Tips on how to write a personal statement

## Your chance to shine

Your personal statement is your chance to add personality to your application. It's your chance to convince admission tutors or employers that they should offer **you** a place.

*BUT* writing your personal statement can be challenging. You might find it hard to 'show off' about yourself. We hope that this guide will help you to write the persuasive and compelling statement you need to stand out from the crowd.

## How much to write

You can enter up to **4000 characters** (including spaces) or 47 lines of text (including blank lines), whichever comes first. You don't have to use all this space.

## Important tips

- Don't leave it until the last minute – allow yourself several weeks to write several drafts.
- Be positive - show that you are a strong candidate.
- Show your enthusiasm and individuality.
- Be honest – you may be asked questions based on the statement at interview.
- Make your skills and qualities stand out. Follow the simple rule that whenever you say you have a skill or quality that you demonstrate how, where and when you acquired it.
- Make sure that you cover the course entry criteria – are they asking for any specific skills or qualities?
- Don't write about only one of your five UCAS choices – it must apply to all.
- Use an academic style of writing.
- Keep sentences succinct and avoid word repetition.
- Use plain English. Sentences should be no more than 25-30 words - long sentences can be difficult to read.
- Make sure you don't contradict yourself

- Don't try to be funny or controversial – others might not share your humour.
- Be selective - before including anything ask yourself '**SO WHAT?** Does it tell something extra about you?
- Read your statement out loud to make sure that it flows.

## Demonstrating your skills

Here are some skills that Universities value and examples you could use to back them up.

SKILL	WHEN HAVE YOU USED THIS SKILL?
Planning and organisation skills	Social event, holiday, event at school / college?
Speaking or communication	Presentations, drama, part-time job, customer service, prefect, peer mentoring, anti-bullying?
Listening	Part-time job, school and college, care roles, prefect, peer mentoring, anti-bullying?
Working independently	Part-time job, independent research, Duke of Edinburgh or similar, voluntary work?
Working to deadlines	Coursework, part-time job, other extra-curricular activities?
Team working	Sports teams, group work at school / college, Duke of Edinburgh, clubs?
Using initiative / problem solving	Extra-curricular activities, school or college life?
IT skills	School / college work, using computers at home?

Other important skills include specialised subject knowledge, managing pressure and leadership.

### What are your skills?

1. Make a list of your studies, interests and work experience.
2. Write down the skills you've developed doing each of them.
3. What qualities, skills and experience do you need for your course / job?

## Structure

Be organised – structure is important. Begin with the strongest and most relevant information.

Most universities suggest the following structure:

1. Your reasons for choosing the course(s).
2. Your college experience - relevant educational experience.
3. Work experience - roles and responsibilities.
4. Your interests - use these to substantiate your key skills and qualities.
5. If applicable, your plans for a year out travelling or working - point out the relevant skills, experience and knowledge you intend to acquire.
6. Conclusion - be persuasive. Clearly identify all of the reasons why you think you are an ideal candidate. Keep it short and to the point.

## Language and vocabulary

Use confident and direct language.

Here are some examples of positive terms you can use to connect your sentences and paragraphs and vary the language.

- **IN ADDITION** to my work experience I have gained valuable skills throughout voluntary work.
- **AS WELL AS** my involvement in team games I am keen on individually competitive sport.
- **REINFORCE** – My involvement in the school voluntary programme has **reinforced** my decision to study a degree in Nursing.
- **STRENGTHEN** – My decision to study a degree in Economics has been **strengthened** by my enjoyment and success in my A level course.

- **FURTHERMORE**, I am particularly suited to a degree in Chemistry because of my love of the subject and my keen interest to further my knowledge of the subject.
- **APART FROM** my involvement with sports I am also involved in amateur dramatics.
- **NOT TO MENTION** – Being involved in the voluntary work programme, **not to mention** my work experience, has provided an opportunity to work with a diverse range of people.
- **MORE RECENTLY** – Although I have taken part in classical music concerts, **more recently** I have decided to learn to play the piano.
- **ENABLED ME** – The opportunity to play in the school football team **enabled me** to work as part of a team.
- **PROVIDED ME** – My part-time job has **provided me** with an opportunity to work with a range of people.
- **OPPORTUNITY TO** – The **opportunity to** work with people was provided by my work experience.

## Advice about using 'I'

Avoid starting lots of sentences with "I". Try a range of alternative starting points.

EXAMPLES

DO NOT WRITE	INSTEAD WRITE
I am captain of the Hockey Team	Being a captain of the Hockey Team
I enjoy playing sport	Having enjoyed playing football/netball
I am studying A levels in	My A level subjects have
I enjoy socialising	Socialising is important to me because
I have gained a number of skills	The skills I have gained from
I have taken part in	Taking part in

**For more advice and videos on how to write your personal statement, go to:**  
[www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/undergraduate/filling-your-application/your-personal-statement](http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/undergraduate/filling-your-application/your-personal-statement)

**GET STARTED** A blank space has been left after each section for you to make notes. It can be difficult to get going with your personal statement – *don't panic!* Start with your **strengths**, focus on your **enthusiasm** for the course and talk **positively** about yourself.

**Section 1**

**Explain your reasons for choosing that course or job**

Communicate your reasons for choosing the course or job **clearly** and **enthusiastically**. If it's because you enjoy the subject make sure you say this. For example:

*"Having thoroughly enjoyed the academic study of A level Maths and Economics, I have chosen a degree that will enable me to pursue my interest in Financial Economics in even greater depth."*

If you're applying for a joint or combined honours programme, talk about **both** subjects and why this is a good combination for you.

For further information on subject-specific criteria to include in a personal statement ask for the 'Top Tips' leaflet in Careers.

Provide evidence that you fit the bill. For instance:

- Give examples of activities that confirm your interest in the subject, e.g. participation in conferences or debates.
- If you possess suitable skills for the course ➡ identify what they are and how you have acquired them.
- If you enjoy particular aspects of the subject ➡ state which aspects
- If you have a particular career in mind ➡ which career and why?
- Demonstrate that you have researched the course / profession and understand what is involved.

*For now, if you are not sure what course/job you want to consider, choose something you might like to do and write about that.*



**Examples of things to think about.....**

*.What motivates you to study this course?.....*  
*.....How has your interest developed?.....*  
*.....How have you pursued your interest in the subject?.....*  
*.....How can you show that you've researched the course and are prepared for it?.....*  
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Section 2

# Comment on your present course of study and relevant college experience

What are your academic skills and qualities? Outline the experiences you have gained in college including any responsibilities you have had to show that you will cope with Higher Education or employment. So include areas that present you as self-motivated, sociable, independent, analytical thinker etc.

- Do not analyse each of your current subjects one by one.
- Be selective - say what particular aspects of your current course you enjoy.
- Link in the skills you are learning in your subject areas – how do they relate to your chosen subject or career?
- Link how your subjects can be used to your benefit at Uni or in employment, ie your transferable skills. For example; developing an argument, problem solving,

working independently, analysing, presentation skills, debating and discussion, negotiation, working in a team, time management, meeting deadlines etc.

- You must provide evidence!

If you're taking the EPQ, talk about it here – it's the kind of studying you'll be doing at Uni.

Examples:

Drama / Musical productions  
Charity work  
Debating society  
NUS organisation

What have you gained?  
e.g. trust,  
communication skills,  
independence,  
responsibilities.



### Examples of things to think about.....

- .....Have you drawn inspiration from your studies?.....
- .....Have your studies developed your ability to think critically?.....
- .....What extra reading or research have you done around the subject?.....
- .....What specific topics do you enjoy and why?.....
- .....Have there been challenges that you've striven to overcome whilst at college?...

### Section 3

## Work experience – state the skills you’ve gained

- It’s excellent if your work experience is course related, but even if it isn’t you will have acquired transferable skills.
- Include anything that shows how you’ve developed an interest in the subject. It could be work experience, volunteering, a university taster session, summer school, visits to museums, galleries or the theatre, visits to local courts, travel, competitions or a maths challenge.
- Remember, the simple fact that you have undertaken work experience demonstrates your enthusiasm, organisational skills and initiative.
- Include part time work only if it contributes to your chosen course.
- If you’re applying for a vocational course or job relate your experiences to your chosen career – what skills does that career need and how can you show that you’ve already developing them?

Use your work experience to evidence your key skills. For example:

*“My work experience at....has increased my confidence and developed my ability to work effectively as part of a team...”*

*“Volunteering at a local care home for the elderly provided me with the opportunity to care for others in a responsible and attentive manner. I developed my communication skills by listening and speaking to residents and other team members.”*

### For job applications:

- include all your part time work
- include the skills that you have learned or have trained in that can contribute to your application, e.g. customer service, good communication, listening skills
- state how you acquired your skills



### Examples of things to think about.....

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*How have your experiences increased your understanding of the subject/career?*

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*What skills does your chosen career need and how are you developing them?*

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*Were there stand-out moments during your experiences and why did they surprise you?*

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*Has your experience changed you or your perceptions in any way?*

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**Section 4**

**Interests / hobbies / sport**

Admission Tutors or Employers will be looking for interests other than your studies. For example an interest in theatre, films, music, walking, sport, reading or computing.

Be prepared to give examples and to put this into the context of your application – a list is not enough. However, **be brief**. This should not be a long section in your statement.



***Demonstrate that you are a rounded person.***

- Identify what each of your extra-curricular pursuits involves and highlight the relevant skills that you have developed as a result.
- Give examples of activities that you are involved in outside of your studies, both in and out of college, eg. drama group, Sunday school teacher, student union officer, etc.
- Give examples of qualifications that that you have gained outside of your studies, both in and out of college, e.g. piano grade 8, Duke of Edinburgh, Young Enterprise.
- If you have achieved well in these activities, say so. But remember to include what you have gained from it.
- ***Don't cite watching television or socialising as an activity.***



*Examples of things to think about.....*

*Have you experienced any challenges in any of these activities and how did ..... you overcome them?.....*

*What extra responsibilities have you taken on?.....*

*What roles have you taken on? Did they involve team work or leadership?.....*

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# Year out

If you intend to take a year out working or travelling, show that you will be spending your time out constructively.

What do you hope to gain from the experience? Think about the **skills** you will be developing that are directly relevant to your course.

Highlight the **benefits**. For example, you will be earning money to support yourself through higher education while gaining important experience and employability skills.

For example:

*“During my year out I will be broadening my experience and knowledge of conservation and environmental issues by working with conservation groups both here in Britain and abroad. I will be working at Trees for Life in Scotland on a project to regenerate the indigenous trees into the highlands and restore the native Caledonian Forest.”*



### Examples of things to think about .....

*.....What benefits do you hope to gain from your year out?.....*

*.....How could your year out help you develop relevant skills?.....*

*.....Have you planned experiences related to your subject or future career?.....*

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## Section 5

### Conclusion

*End your statement strongly and positively.*

- Write a clear, persuasive and succinct conclusion.
- State what you would like to gain from higher education.
- You have lots to offer, so ensure that you tease out the right points and make them count!
- If you have not already mentioned your career aspirations you could do so here in a creative and imaginative way.
- If you have not already said how much you want to do the job, do so here.

The conclusion is where you put anything that makes you special - but *only* if it is relevant, e.g. member of the Youth Parliament, involvement in the community, attending a special conference. Not everyone will have something like this to add in, so *don't panic*.

For employment, remember that employers are very busy. They may only concentrate on the first and last paragraph, skim-reading the middle.

To summarise, you could include:

- career aspirations
- inspiration from reading
- personal reasons for doing the course/job
- independent living/university life
- suitability for higher education/employment

#### Anyone in a competitive situation

E.g. Medics, Oxbridge, competitive subjects like Maths, Law, English, Teaching and Physiotherapy etc.

You may well be interviewed on the basis of your personal statement and CV. Your Personal Statement should show intellectual interest beyond your academic subjects, i.e. wider reading.



#### *Examples of things to think about....*

*..Do you have longer term goals related to the course?.....*

*.....Don't just repeat things you've already said.....*

*.....Save something special from your notes to provide a strong ending.....*

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# PERSONAL STATEMENT – notes for first draft

You must show how your experiences have contributed to the development of your personality and skills in a way that would support success on a higher education course or in a job application.

*Be selective about what you include - before including anything ask yourself 'SO WHAT?'*

Why have you chosen this particular subject or area of work?.....  
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Comment on your present course of study.....  
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Relevant Work Experience.....  
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Interests/hobbies/sport/achievements.....  
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Conclusion.....  
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