

C/W

09 December 2020



Personal statements



Learning objectives:

1. To assess what makes a good and a bad personal statement.

C4 B4 ME



Brain Book Board Buddy



Personal statements

Who are they for, and **what** are they for?



Personal statements

Who are they for, and **what** are they for?

For admissions tutors – these are the university lecturers whose job it is to choose who is offered a place on their course.

To persuade the admissions tutor that:

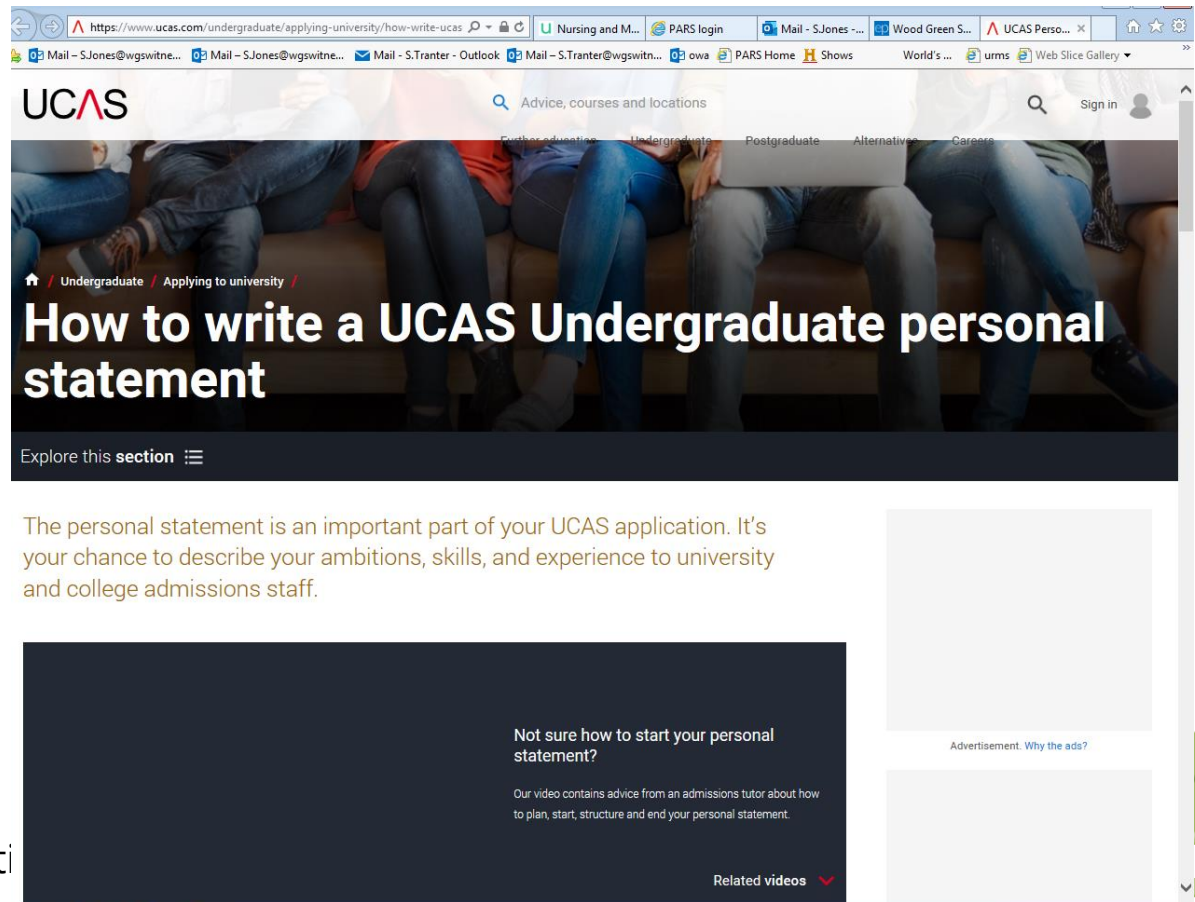
- You really really want to study their subject.
- You're a suitable candidate who will add to their course and to the university
- You are a good student

And therefore...

- They should give you a place on their course

Advice on the UCAS website: watch this video

- <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/how-write-ucas-undergraduate-personal-statement>



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the UCAS website. The URL in the address bar is <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/how-write-ucas>. The page features a navigation menu with options like 'Further education', 'Undergraduate', 'Postgraduate', 'Alternatives', and 'Careers'. The main heading is 'How to write a UCAS Undergraduate personal statement'. Below the heading, there is a sub-section titled 'Explore this section' and a paragraph of text: 'The personal statement is an important part of your UCAS application. It's your chance to describe your ambitions, skills, and experience to university and college admissions staff.' A video player is visible, with a title 'Not sure how to start your personal statement?' and a description: 'Our video contains advice from an admissions tutor about how to plan, start, structure and end your personal statement.' The page also includes an advertisement placeholder and a 'Related videos' link.

Structure (ish)

Paragraph 1:

Introduction to why you like the subject and want to study it.

Paragraph 2:

Your academic achievements



Paragraph 3:

Your extra curricular achievements, which might include work experience

Paragraph 1: 'the introduction'

This should introduce who you are and why you enjoy the subject you're applying for, and therefore why they should choose you! It has to focus on why you would like to **study the subject**.

NOT...I want to be a lawyer 

INSTEAD... I want to study the law

Why do you want to study this course at uni and what has inspired you (or, even better, what's currently inspiring you)?

Paragraph 1: 'the introduction'

What do you think of the following openings? Engaging or not?

- I was born to dance
- I have always been interested in history
- So why am I applying for this degree?
- Coco Chanel said “Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only”.
- My love for English began when my mum gave me a Beatrix Potter book when I was six (*English at UCL*)
- On my first day at Burger King a customer got very angry with me because the drinks machine didn't work (*Police Studies*)

What do you think of the following opening paragraphs?

My first ever business lesson was a memorable day, when the teacher spoke it just made sense and ever since it just has, I love business and I'm passionate about it. Business is a major part of the world and it's the part of the world that I love, the complexity and all the different avenues that make up a subject that every single one of us on the planet depend upon. I believe that I am punctual, hardworking and efficient in all that I do whether that's in work or in general life.

Then read the opening paragraphs of the statements on p3 and p5 of the PDF.

The final edit of the Business one...

I was looking forward to my first business lesson, due to being brought up in a family centred around business, and I wasn't disappointed. When the teacher spoke I was instantly interested and passionate about the subject and have been ever since. Business is a major part of the world and it's the part of the world that I love. The best part is the complexity: the way so many decisions can create other knock on effects and methods that are used to solve these problems. All these different avenues make up a subject that every single one of us on the planet depend upon.

Or this one?

The youth leader who helped me to become a young leader inspired me to work with people and to have an impact on lives like she had on mine. Her support and encouragement helped in challenging and pushing myself. During my Year 10 work experience I realised my desire to be a Primary School Teacher. Helping with the Year 3 and 4 class, taking children out for reading sessions, I developed my communication skills significantly, being able to give them positive feedback on spoken word with a constructive approach. This was immensely fulfilling to see; giving me confidence in my teaching ability.

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What about this one?

The tales of everyday people's personal struggles and dynamic quests for change have shaped modern history. This is what fuels my interest in pursuing a history degree. When visiting the V&A exhibition 'Records and Rebels', I was drawn to the social movements during the Vietnam War, with anti-war and civil rights movements being linked. This triggered my curiosity in how people shape history, leading me to read Simon Hall's 'Peace and Freedom'. I was consequently able to consider the government's reactions to these movements; how their overwhelming negativity surely fuelled the protest movements. I decided to study this as part of my EPQ, namely looking into the role of media censorship, and the parallels with government control. This project was vital in expanding my skills in history as it required me to select my own sources, critically assessing their relevance. I learned to read with a far more analytical eye, which led me to conclude that although it angered many citizens, a certain level of media censorship to restrict public information was necessary.

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Paragraph 2 (ish)

What do you enjoy most about your current courses?

Explain how they have equipped you with relevant knowledge, skills or enthusiasm for your degree.



What have you read or learned outside the classroom?

What do you think of these?

Whilst studying History I realised Law has shaped social expectations and significantly transformed lives. By comparing and evaluating historians' interpretations I have learnt to criticise bias. In Psychology we learn interviewing procedures which affect the legal process and why high anxiety causes memory loss. Interpreting misleading information is vital; this has taught me eyewitness testimony is not always accurate and adapting interview methods improves accuracy to support everyone. For EPQ I researched whether reintroduction of death penalty would reduce crime rate, focusing on impacts, factors and sentences which extended my knowledge of the penal system. I contacted MPs and organisations to question contrasting views. I became aware of extraneous social factors such as drugs; an American article promotes prevention in addition to punishment, as criminals calculate situations not outcomes.

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See also paragraph 2 on p3, and on p5 - what do you



Criminology

Arguably the most rewarding aspect of my A Level subjects, and something I find so enticing about the prospect of studying Criminology, is the unquestionable relevance of the real-life issues we cover. I am fascinated by the workings of the human mind, in particular in how this shapes our behaviour. In Psychology, for example, we have studied the Social Learning Theory, which we linked to Bandura's Bobo Doll Experiment (1961) to help us understand causes of violent behaviour. Sociology also links heavily to criminology, enabling me to build a useful understanding of aspects related to the course. We have studied Wilkins' 'Deviancy Amplification Theory' (1964) and its development by Cohen (1972) in relation to 'moral panics'. Moreover, I have analysed content analysis of the framing of Amanda Knox. This encouraged me to embark in my own research on Meredith Kercher and read the thought-provoking 'The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox' by Nina Burleigh, which unearthed the background of the case in great depth. I also enjoyed 'Crime in Literature: Sociology of Deviance and Fiction' by Vincenzo Ruggiero, which provided me with wider knowledge on themes such as drug use and organised crime. In addition, my A Level History course has given me the skills to use evidence to reach an informed conclusion. Completing my Extended Project on photojournalism allowed me to accumulate a range of skills that better prepare me for University. I engaged in independent study and gained an ability to undertake extensive research, manage my time effectively and produce coherent arguments.

Learning Effort Aspirations Respect Character Wellbeing



What they have studied, and how it relates to the course

y

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Learning Effort Aspirations Respect Character Wellbeing



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Extra curricular reading

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What they have studied, and how it relates to the course

Extra curricular reading

Skills from other subjects and EPQ

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Engineering paragraph 2

I am interested by the breadth and complexity of robotic engineering, especially the challenges in mimicking skills that animals find instinctive. A **MOOC** on robots taught me about the importance of spatial relationships and dynamics necessary for mobile robots as well as the kinematics inherent in manipulating robotic arms. This research inspired me to **undertake my EPQ** on this subject. I am using Solidworks and 3D printing to design and prototype a robotic hand based on the Arduino platform controlled by glove mounted potentiometers. The analogue input is converted into a PWM signal in the CPU to control the eleven servo motors. Having rejected wires in place of human tendons because of the problems they would cause with wrist articulation and control precision, I had to overcome the engineering challenges of miniaturising the design to the size of a human hand while still accommodating the servos in the fingers. I have enjoyed the challenges the project has raised, ranging from designing mechanical linkages to programming the control system. I hope to extend it further, implementing EMG sensors for prosthetic use and piezoelectric pressure sensors to simulate touch. Using technology and engineering in this way with the potential to improve quality of life is something that I find profoundly satisfying.

Paragraph 3 (ish)

Explain how your **extra curricular activities** make you an excellent candidate for your specific course as well as the university.

How have your extra-curricular activities, **work experience**, part-time job or other experiences given you the opportunity to gain or demonstrate relevant insights or abilities?

Or how do they show that you will be a well-rounded student or that you manage your time well?

DON'T... List what you've done

INSTEAD, EXPLAIN... how your experiences make you such a good candidate

...SHOW, DON'T TELL!

So, instead of unsubstantiated claims (like *"I genuinely believe I am a highly-motivated person"*) ...

... demonstrate it with evidence, such as:

- **How** has playing basketball improved your teamwork skills?
- **How** did you get the elderly man with dementia in the nursing home where you volunteer to tell you about his past life?
- **How** did your field trip or your cycling holiday change your opinions about sustainability?
- **How** has your job on the fish counter at Sainsburys made you a better communicator?

EXTRA-CURRICULAR CONTENT AND THE “SO WHAT? FACTOR”

1. If you play **badminton** or do the **Duke of Edinburgh Award**, how important is it to write about it in your statement?

2. Answer: **Apply the SO WHAT? Factor**

Compared with all the other things you could use your 47 lines for, will it give them some important evidence that will make them more likely to want you on their course?

What about this one for Nursing?

In my free time I enjoy hobbies such as swimming and jogging. Alongside this, I enjoy attending social events where I have the opportunity to **meet new people** and **apply my skills such as communication** and generally enjoy myself and take some time off from studying. I also take part in the school community, contributing to our **charity** raising events. Recently I took part in a charity game of rounders where I was able to understand the rewards of hard work paying off. As well as this, I am involved in a paired reading scheme at my college where I **assist younger pupils** in improving their own reading skills and ensure they are adapting to school life. Through this, I have further enhanced my **communication skills** and learnt what it takes to be a **role model** for others. During my time at school, I have also completed the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Programme, developing attributes such as **resilience and perseverance**. These I believe are paramount in completing any degree at University as there are constant challenges being thrown our way; by acquiring these skills I know I will be able to cope with the encounters I am due to face at university.

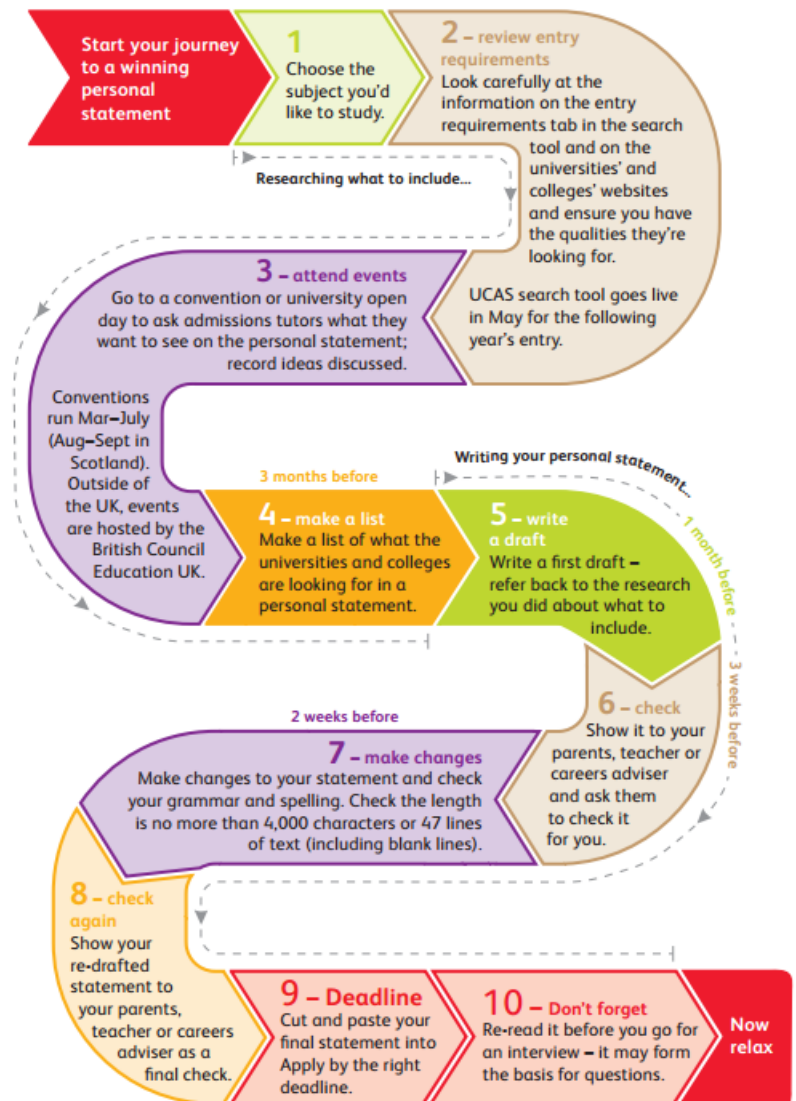
Learn it | Effort | Aspirations | Resilience | Wellbeing
See also p3 and p5 for their final paragraphs



Other help available

- UCAS website
- www.ucas.tv/ucas/video/WXSch
- www.university.which.co.uk/getadvice
- www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/apply/the-personal-statement.aspx

My personal statement timeline



You should write your personal statement on Unifrog

unifrog

HOME

SHORTLISTS

LOCKER

APPLY

HELP



TEACHER >

1 Why this subject

2 Your suitability

3 Other interests

This is your opportunity to shine

The Personal Statement is your opportunity to demonstrate that you would be an excellent student for the courses you are applying to. It is primarily an academic statement and you must target it towards the subject in which you are interested.

Latest version of your statement for studying: [ADD SUBJECT](#)

Write

Add, edit and delete text



Preview

How it'll look to universities



Section 1

Why do you want to study this subject?

0 of 1200 characters

Start >



Section 2

What have you done in the past that makes you particularly suitable to study the subject?

0 of 2400 characters


Start >

Admin

You can only write up to 4000 characters or 47 lines of text. This includes spaces and blank lines.

UCAS and universities  have plagiarism software, which detects similarities. This could jeopardise your application.

CREATING THE WRONG IMPRESSION...

- **DON'T** exaggerate, waffle or repeat yourself
- **DON'T** plagiarise
- **DON'T** use quotations for effect
 - *“I’m fed up of Muhammad Ali quotes”* – Sport at Bournemouth
 - *“We ignore quotes, so those lines are wasted”* – Portsmouth
- **DON'T** make spelling/grammar, punctuation errors 
 - *“One mistake can lead to rejection”* – Law at Aston
 - *“I have a Saturday job at Raymond Blanc’s Brassiere”*
- **DON'T** use vocabulary that’s pretentious, stilted or archaic...
 - *“It was in Year 10 that my love for German came fourth”*
- **DON'T** shower them with praise
 - *“It would be such an honour to attend your esteemed university”*

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CREATING THE RIGHT IMPRESSION



- Focus on **why** you want to do the course
- **Reflect** on the skills, interests, experiences, ideas, qualities or aspirations you will bring to it (both academic and personal)
- Convey your **enthusiasm** for learning and a **passion** for the course...
...but preferably without using the word “passion”
- ‘Pitch’ it right, but also write **naturally** as if you’re **speaking** to them
- Search **course websites** for tips and advice (e.g. **Bristol** has an ‘admissions statement’ for every degree discipline)

“BE YOURSELF and make sure your ENTHUSIASM FOR THE COURSE shines through” - Nottingham

“WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOICE” - Southampton

ADVICE FROM UNIVERSITIES

- Show that you're **interested** as well as interesting
- If you're applying for a **joint or combined** course, we want to know about **BOTH** subjects
- If you're applying for **deferred entry**, what are your gap year plans (in brief)?
- But beware, what you say in your statement may come up in an **interview** or **applicants' open day**
- And tell us something that makes you **stand out....**

ADVICE FROM UNIS ON STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

- “We’re busy, grab our attention, what makes you **different?**”
but....
- “We like you to be different, but **not TOO different**”
- “**Off-the-wall** won’t work”
- “Don’t be **outrageous** - you’ll stand out, but not in a good way”
- “**Weird** is not a selling point”

So, a better way to stand out is to....

- Convey **genuine enthusiasm and motivation** ...
- ... starting with a **strong opening sentence** ...
- ... that engages because it’s **interesting & personal**, not gimmicky

“This isn’t *The Apprentice*”

BALANCING ACADEMIC & EXTRA-CURRICULAR CONTENT

Courses in **'academic'** subjects want more emphasis on your academic and super-curricular interests (75%ish)

Examples: History, Physics, Philosophy, Maths, Languages

'Professional' courses will want much more emphasis on your "experience"

Examples: Medicine, Nursing, Veterinary Science, Midwifery, Physiotherapy

Courses in other **'vocational'** subjects may not need as much "experience" as you expect – it depends on what is motivating YOU to study the subject

Examples: Law, Politics, Engineering, Architecture

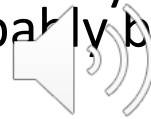
IT'S EASIER IF YOUR 5 CHOICES ARE ALL FOR THE SAME COURSE....

....because you can only write one statement for all 5 choices

BUT WHAT IF YOUR 5 CHOICES AREN'T ALL THE SAME?

If there are slight differences, or you've chosen joint or combined degrees with slightly different subject combinations:

- **No problem**, just try to make everything as relevant as possible to all 5 choices – besides, they'll probably be impressed by your wider interests



If there are big differences it might be fatal, **SO GET ADVICE**, but you could:

- **Blend** it, so all of it is relevant to all 5 choices OR
- Be **honest** in it and explain why you've chosen different courses

If one of your choices is completely different, **ASK THEM**

- They might consider a **separate** statement sent directly to them....
- or they might tell you just to include a subtle hint

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS:

QUICK TIPS ON NHS-FUNDED COURSES

Selection for NHS-funded courses now focuses around **NHS core values**, so do research this and attend open days

- If you mention **Call the Midwife or One Born Every Minute ... you won't even get an interview** (*Midwifery*)
- Lots of applicants say they were inspired by **Florence Nightingale**...but she's been dead for 100 years (*Nursing*)
- Show you're aware of what the profession involves - it's not all **flashing blue lights** (*Paramedic Science*)
- You must be **100% committed to Physiotherapy**, not "I want to be in a caring profession" (*Physiotherapy*)

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS:

MEDICINE (& DENTISTRY)

- Give us a rationale for why you want to study Medicine
- Whatever environment you've had experience in, what have you observed about the qualities exhibited by professional staff there?
- It's not the techniques you saw, but what you saw about the realities of medicine
- Evidence relevant qualities you have demonstrated (like how you took the lead in your D of E expedition)
- Don't give us any flannel and don't use humour inappropriately
- Don't over-elaborate about Grade 8 flute – what we want is more subtle than that
- Don't give a list of every procedure you saw - we would much rather hear what you learned from observing one filling (*Dentistry*)
- Keep your conclusion punchy, maybe 3 lines, and use it to add something
- The interview will test whether what you wrote in your statement can be justified
- **We tell you what we want on our webpage, but most applicants don't look**

Learning | Effort | Aspiration | Respect | Nurture | Wellbeing



Listen to the audio

1. Start a draft on Unifrog
2. Get the draft checked
3. Good luck!

