

Information Sheet: Personal Statements

Your personal statement is your chance to tell the university why you are applying and why they should want you as a student. It could help to persuade an admissions tutor to make you an offer and gives Admissions Tutors an idea of your all round abilities and skills other than just your academic achievements.

WHAT UNIVERSITIES ARE LOOKING FOR...

Typically, admissions staff will be looking for the following areas to be addressed (in no particular order):

Reasons for choice of subjects at A level/IB

Some subjects require applicants to have suitable A levels. For instance, if an applicant were to apply for medicine, it is very important that they should have at least two sciences, depending on the University. In the same way, many Arts & Humanities courses require applicants to have an A level in that subject.

Why have you applied for this course?

Admissions Tutors are normally staff who will have worked within a certain field (e.g. History) for some years and are always keen to see that applicants have a relevant interest in the subject. Indeed, it would well be worth mentioning any particular areas of the subject you are interested in.

Qualification:

More than just having the appropriate grades, you may need the right subjects, appropriate grades, experience and an appreciation of what studying subject involves.

Personal qualities

Universities will be looking for people with personal qualities like those on the list below:

Motivated

Committed / Enthusiasm

Technical Skills

Inter-personal skills

Academic potential/
intelligence

Dedication /Tenacity
Research/ Analytical skills

Skills and experiences

Your skills and experiences provide strong evidence to support your personal qualities, and also show your interests and involvement.

Any work experience and relevance to degree

Details of this are useful again for motivation but also as a method of indicating how focussed you are on both the course and your future.

Career goals

It is helpful for us if this information is included in the statement so that we can get the larger picture of an applicant as a person and what motivates them. In many ways this is a good indicator of how well they might perform at university.

Super – curricular activities

Activities that enhance subject knowledge such as attending taster and masterclasses, public lectures, keep up with current affairs and professional journals, completing online MOOCs (Massive Online Open Access Courses run by www.futurelearn.co.uk) and so on. It is important to say what you have learned from completing these activities.

Information on extra-curricular activities

Any applicants who wish to go to a University will need to have broader interests than just their chosen subject. These extra-curricular activities can be as diverse as Duke of Edinburgh Award, community volunteering or being a member of a sports team. Again, it provides more information which could be useful when considering an offer. It is important to avoid giving lists of what you do, or the qualities you have.

Personal achievements

If a candidate feels that they have done something which was a personal achievement, then they should make us aware of it.

Any other qualifications

Many applicants have additional qualifications outside of their academic ones (e.g. Junior Yachting Association, diving and teaching qualifications etc).

Any sponsorship/placements you have applied for

If you are taking a year out, your reasons why

If an applicant intends to take a year out in between their studies, it is essential that they have some productive plans in mind. Many students will travel or work overseas, while many will work at home to earn some money before university. Those are all valid and productive and will be looked upon positively.

Positions of responsibility/achievements

Your social, sports, leisure interests

Again, these add to the larger picture of an applicant (and human being!) and so are important.

Admissions Tutors will be interested in details on the academic side which would mainly focus on:

Enthusiasm and motivation:

Why are you interested in the subject? What is it that you are looking forward to studying about? Can you show that you do have an inquiring mind and that you really want to study the subject to the depth, and breadth that you'll get at university?

Interest in the field:

What research have you done into the subject? What specific knowledge about the subject do you have? Are you aware of current issues/debates in your area of interest? What are your thoughts about them? Can you show any evidence of activity outside school/college to show that it is not just something you have to do, but something you want to do?!

Key Points

1. Aim to get your application in early. It is well known good applicants apply early
2. Make sure you have done your research and start thinking about your personal statement early. It will need several drafts.
3. Get a teacher/friend/parent to read through it to spot mistakes and to make sure you have highlighted your best qualities and skills.
4. Make sure the personal statement is well written, concise and well structured.
5. Think about the content is the information relevant and show you in a positive light.
6. Be honest. You may be asked questions about your personal statement at interview or if you have copied someone else's work UCAS has software to detect plagiarism.
7. Be specific about your achievements and what you have learned from them.
8. Make your personal statement as interesting as possible to make your application stand out.
9. Make sure the personal statement is written by you.
10. **Remember!** Your teachers and careers advisers are experts and are there to help you.

Whilst it is really important to ensure that your application form sets you apart from the others, it should not be for the wrong reasons

Good Luck!