

PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDY

PREPARATION

- Applying for postgraduate courses, whether masters, PhD or professional courses such as those required for teacher training, journalism, law and psychology conversion can be competitive. Your personal statement needs to be well written, relevant and give clear reasons for wanting to apply to the course, in addition to what you can bring to it and how you plan to use it in the future.
- Ensure you research your course options thoroughly, websites such findamasters.com, findaphd.com, jobs.ac.uk/phd and ucas.com can help, with sites like lawcareers.net, British Psychological Society (bps.org.uk) and National Council for the Training of Journalists (nctj.com) providing details of programmes. In addition to full time options, some courses may be available on a part time or distance learning basis.
- Try to visit an open day if possible to meet staff and students and explore facilities. Applications are usually made directly to institutions for masters and PhD programmes and many advertised programmes include the contact details of the Programme Leader or Supervisor, so making contact can demonstrate interest and you can refer to any contact you made in your personal statement.
- Check the course start date, some programmes may have a January/ February start date in addition to an autumn one. Carefully check the application closing date and the entry requirements, so that you can demonstrate how you meet these and link any relevant transferable skills, work experience, research, projects and modules. A CV can sometimes be requested.

Presenting your personal statement

- Always complete the personal statement section, it should be factual in style rather than descriptive.
- It should be around one side of A4 in length, unless otherwise specified – always check if there is a word count limit and if so, stick to it. Don't worry about the word length initially, just write a draft and then edit it down.
- Write in paragraphs with a minimum font size of 11 – avoid solid text.
- If you are applying to several postgraduate courses, then you will need to tailor your statement for each one. You may not need to change it too much, but each application must be relevant for every individual course and institution

What to include

- **Your motivations:** this is a short paragraph describing the reasons why you want to do the course. When explaining your motivations try not to describe your life story! All too often people start by saying “From an early age I’ve always...” - but you need to get straight to the point. Clearly show why the subject is of interest to **you**.
 - What are your motivations for wanting to do postgraduate study?
 - Do you need to learn a new skill or subject for your career?
 - Have you decided to go into an area where further study is necessary?
 - Do you want to study aspects of what you have been learning at undergraduate level in more depth because you enjoy the subject?
- **Why this subject, course and institution:** here you need to describe your motivations for wanting to do this specific subject and course. You can talk about the course topics/modules that you are particularly keen to study. Are there any aspects of this course which are unique, and not offered elsewhere? Perhaps you’d like the challenge of learning a new subject or studying something related directly to a future career path? Acknowledge any specialisms or awards the university or department may have and relevant reading and research you have completed.
- **What you can bring to the course:** can you cope with the academic rigours of the course? Will you successfully complete it? Highlight your academic achievements, knowledge, research and projects. Go into detail about how you achieved your qualifications and how you meet or exceed the entry requirements. Include the skills you developed, such as being focused, meeting deadlines, critical analysis and discussions, sharing and receiving feedback, time management, communication, and giving presentations. What makes you a good student and effective learner? Include the academic skills you have developed through individual projects and group work, where you might have worked in diverse and international teams, conducted research using different sources, referencing skills, creating posters, attending conferences and any software, databases and IT skills.
- **Career aspirations:** what career plans do you have and how will this course help you to achieve them? Don’t worry if they are not firm ideas, if you just have one or two that you are considering then this is fine. You may be considering several possibilities and the course will help you to clarify which route is best for you. It’s important to give some indication that you have considered what you will do once you’ve completed the course. Whatever it is, explain this as clearly as possible.
- **Work experience:** through paid or unpaid work experience you may have gained some useful experience which is directly related to the course you are applying for, if so, make sure to highlight this. If your experience isn’t relevant, you can still highlight the transferable skills you have developed, which will help in planning and organising your academic work. The Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (reading.ac.uk/careers/urop) is a great way to develop research skills and stand out.
- **Voluntary work/ extra-curricular activities/ positions of responsibility:** include any extra-curricular experience, such as being member of a club or society, having a position of responsibility such as a course representative, ambassador or mentor, any achievements or taking part in voluntary work and how you plan to get involved at a new institution.

A personal statement may be read before the rest of your form, so don't assume the reader has prior knowledge of your qualifications, skills and experience, therefore, ensure the information you provide compliments what you have written elsewhere on the form.