

PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR POSTGRADUATE APPLICATIONS



Applying for postgraduate courses can be as competitive as applying for a job. Your personal statement needs to be well written, relevant and give clear reasons for wanting to apply to the course.

Basic rules

- The statement 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
- Write in paragraphs – avoid solid text
- The font size should be a minimum of 11
- If you are applying to several postgraduate courses, then you will need to have different versions of your statement for each one. You may not need to change it too much, but each application must be relevant for every individual course.
- Don't worry about the word length initially, just write a draft and then edit it down.

Remember that there are no “right” answers! The word “personal” in the term “Personal Statement” means that whatever you write, it should be personal to you. Below are examples of the kinds of things you might want to include in an application statement.

Your motivations

This is a short and 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. 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 course (and not another)?

Here you need to describe your motivations for wanting to do *this specific* 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 very 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?

What can you offer?

Can you cope with the academic rigours of the course? Will you successfully complete it? For part of your application you need to discuss previous academic results such as 'A' levels and your undergraduate degree. Go into detail about how you achieved your qualifications, and what skills you used such as being focused, meeting deadlines, time management, communication, and giving presentations. What makes you a good student and effective learner?

Work experience (e.g. internships, placements, work shadowing, part time work, study or work abroad, gap year 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.

Voluntary and extra-curricular experience (e.g. RED Award, Star Mentor, Students in Schools...)

Include any extra-curricular experience, such as being member of a club or society, having a position of responsibility, any achievements or taking part in voluntary work. For example, if you are applying for a teaching PGCE then explaining what you learnt from shadowing a teacher in a primary or secondary school, or being a mentor would be very important.

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 a number of 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.

Finally

People sometimes find it difficult to talk positively about themselves. Remember that the person reading your statement has probably never met you before and is unable to read your mind! Therefore it is important to tell them what you have done and what you can offer so they can make a decision based on the best and most relevant information available to them.

Good luck with your applications! You can also get help with career planning, CVs, applications, interviews and getting internships or work experience from Careers and see our online resources here:

http://student.reading.ac.uk/essentials/careers_and_professional_development