

UCAS Applications

Personal Statements

Assessing your Application

Your UCAS application will go to each of your University choices. Each University may assess your application in different ways, but potentially all of the following information on your application could be used in their decisions:

- Predicted grades
- Achieved grades including GCSEs and AS levels
- Reference
- Personal statement

Some universities and some courses will put more reliance on your personal statement than others, but you should always assume that it is important. For courses that are very competitive the universities are not able to make offers to everyone whose predictions meet the typical offer and they use the personal statement to aid their decisions. So do not assume that just meeting the minimum entry grades is sufficient.

Personal statement content

There is no single correct way to write your personal statement. The key is that it really should be personal. Course selectors and admissions staff want to see an insight into your personality and your motivation for having applied to university to study a certain subject. As a guide you may want to include some or all of the following:

- Why you want to study the subject you've applied for – universities are looking for genuine motivation and real enthusiasm for the subject, grounded in a real understanding of what it may involve.
- Why you think you would be a good student of this subject and what would you bring to the course and your fellow students.
- How your A level (or other) study has prepared you well to go on to University, or has motivated you to go in a particular direction.
- Relevant reading – but they don't want a book list, rather some reflections or comments on things you have read. Universities are especially interested if you have read outside the school curriculum.
- Any relevant work experience you have undertaken.
- Any career aspirations, but note that it is not mandatory at this point to know what career direction you are heading in – this is quite normal!
- Your gap year plans if you are applying for deferred entry. (You can only defer for 1 year)
- Your extra-curricular or outside activities, but note:
 - They don't just want a list of the committees you are on, or the sports or musical instruments you play. They are interested in how your activities have helped

you develop skills or qualities that will make you a good student and member of that university.

- It is unadvisable to focus on extra-curricular activities at the expense of the course you wish to study; you may want to think in terms of a 75:25 split between discussing your course and discussing wider activities, although there is no one “correct” formula.

Style and general tips

Again, there is no right or wrong way to write a personal statement, but the reader will want to see a glimpse of the ‘real you’. Therefore you might want to bear the following in mind:

- Make sure you sound interesting – and interested. Course selectors and admissions staff will soon pick it up if your enthusiasm for the subject is not genuine or only skin-deep. Don’t rely on flowery language to communicate your enthusiasm: they want examples (e.g. of reading, learning, discussions, visits, work, ideas...) which will demonstrate your eagerness to study the course.
- Use full sentences and paragraphs. This should be a ‘mini-essay’, and the reader will be looking for evidence of whether you can construct an argument/case in a piece of continuous writing. Make sure it flows, and that you have arranged your points in logical order.
- Avoid repetition. Don’t list your exam subjects and grades, as they are listed elsewhere, and don’t repeat points you have made earlier in the statement.
- Avoid lists: whether of books read, musical instruments played, subjects studied... they don’t tell them very much. They want to know what you have taken from these and how they might be relevant to your application.
- Don’t make mistakes in spelling, grammar and sentence construction. Proof-read carefully and don’t just rely on your computer’s spellchecker.
- Don’t make things up. If you are applying for a course where you may be interviewed, you can expect your interviewer to ask you about anything you mention in your personal statement.
- Don’t try to be funny. Humour is a risk, which can often backfire. Remember: you don’t know anything about the people who will be reading your personal statement. They might misconstrue your humorous anecdote to be making fun of the subject.

Above all: Remember to focus on the course you have applied for and your reasons for wanting to study it. In a large pool of well-qualified applicants, this may be your one chance to stand out from the crowd. Convince them that YOU deserve a place on that course.

FAQs

I am applying for different subjects at different universities. How can I write one personal statement that reflects this? Can I submit more than one?

Not usually. The UCAS system allows for only one personal statement which will go to all your choices. If the courses you are applying to are quite similar (e.g. History at one university and History and Politics elsewhere), then it is quite possible to write a good personal statement that would suit both courses. For example, a discussion of politics and how it links to history could be considered very relevant and interesting in a personal statement for single honours History.

If you are applying for two very different subjects you will have a difficult job to write your personal statement. You might want to start to reflect on why you are considering two such different courses and whether they are both what you really want: remember that at the end of the day, you will only end up on one of them.

My study has been disrupted by illness / family difficulties / problems with the teaching at my school. Should I mention this in my personal statement?

Universities like to know about circumstances beyond your control that have disrupted your studies. However, it is advised that you use the limited word-count of the personal statement to focus on the course applied for. It is recommended that you ask your referee to mention the challenging circumstances in your reference.

Do my extra-curricular activities really have a bearing on whether I'm going to get a University place?

Possibly. This will vary between courses and universities, they will look at this information differently. For some courses, extra-curricular activities may be directly relevant to your subject (e.g. music, theatre). Some other courses, such as medicine, may look closely at your extra-curricular activities for evidence of personality traits that will help you succeed in a very demanding profession, such as stamina, leadership and commitment.

That said, the most important thing to focus your personal statement on is the course you have applied for. When mentioning extra-curricular activities focus on the skills or qualities they have given you.

I haven't done any work experience / my work experience was not relevant to the course I'm applying for. Does this matter?

Some vocational courses (e.g. social work, veterinary science, primary teaching) have very specific experience requirements, so check their websites carefully before applying. In general terms, if you haven't done any work experience then there will be plenty of other things to mention in your personal statement – there is no 'one size fits all', and a discussion of work experience is not an essential requirement of every personal statement. If you feel your work experience isn't relevant, think carefully about how you discuss it. You may wish to leave it out

altogether to allow you to focus on discussions that are more relevant to the course applied for; or you may feel that your work experience helped you to develop skills or ideas that are in fact relevant to your course or future career – in which case, you could focus on these rather than the details of the actual workplace.

Top tips about University

- Think about employability
- Make sure it's the right match for you
- Find a balance between studies and social life
- Embrace opportunities to try new things
- Have fun but don't give in to peer pressure about socials
- Develop as an independent learner
- Ask for help when you need it