

# How to write a winning Personal Statement

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# What creates a good personal statement?




- **Research**
- **Reading around your subject**
- **Relevant critical ideas**
- **Attention to detail**
- **Re-writing and editing**

## 2 Key Points to consider ...

A good personal statement must explain your commitment to, interest in and enthusiasm for the subject.

Approximately 75-80% of allocated space must be dedicated to academic content (dependent on subject/university – higher in some cases)



A photograph of a grand, historic library. The room features tall, dark wood bookshelves filled with books, ornate carvings, and several white marble busts of figures. The floor is a black and white checkered tile. In the background, there is a large stained glass window and a statue on a pedestal. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**75%- 80% Academic**

*This means detailed, articulate and well researched information on why you want to study for a degree*



**Academic: 75-80%**

**Justify your choice of course:**

- A-levels / BTEC / IFP
- Reading beyond syllabus
- Refer to the Entry Profile
- Achievements
- Extension activities
- Career aspirations

# Find out about the degree course



- Read the prospectus
- Read any departmental literature
- Visit the university's website
- Read the entry profiles
- Go on an open day

# Check Entry Requirements



Check Maths qualifications are adequate – esp. for science and economics degrees

Check that your English language qualifications are suitable (GCSE)

All International students must do IELTS

# Read the Entry Profiles on university websites

## Two Examples

We are seeking to recruit highly motivated applicants who can demonstrate a genuine interest in - and enthusiasm for - their chosen subject of study. Evidence for such motivation might include at least some of the following: reading current relevant literature; awareness of contentious issues; attendance at summer schools and public science lectures; gaining experience via voluntary or paid work with conservation organisations, hospitals, veterinary practices or biology-related companies; self-motivated acquisition of skills and pursuit of interests.


We are looking for undergraduates who are determined to make best use of the available opportunities for study in the School of Biological Sciences, who will interact with fellow students and staff and be prepared to contribute actively to the collective learning experience in tutorials, practical classes and seminars.

Communication skills are important in science in general and in biological sciences in particular, where current areas of research are often controversial and have important social and economic implications.





## Subject-Specific Requirements

- **Law**
    - Analytical skills
    - Articulacy
    - Work experience
  - **Medicine**
    - Communication skills
    - Tolerance of uncertainty
    - Work experience
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Remaining  
20%  
of the  
personal  
statement

## Exhibit skills suited to university life:

- *Time-management*
  - *Motivation*
  - *Independence*
  - *Commitment*
  - *Sociability*
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Self Reflection: Be  
yourself



# Getting started: Who can help?

- University Admissions Tutors (UAT)
- Subject teachers
- Head of Universities
- Websites – advice on how to choose courses
- Please ensure you attend appointments with your UAT



**It's all  
about  
structure ...**

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# Opening paragraph

As a scientist Newton saw himself as a boy standing on the shore, looking for a special pebble or shell while the 'great ocean of truth' lay all around him. Since that time scientific knowledge of the physical world has increased enormously but we have only fathomed a fraction of the mysteries and wonders of Newton's ocean. Learning more about the universe means learning more about what we don't know. For me this is what makes Physics so enthralling. When I watched Brian Cox's TV series as a child my own private universe expanded hugely. I learnt that Andromeda, our nearest neighbouring galaxy, is 2.5 million light years away. I learnt that what we see as 'normal' matter makes up around 5% of matter and energy in the universe. Such mind-boggling facts made other subjects seem tame by comparison.



## Paragraph 2: evidence

As my studies progressed my capacity to wonder grew. Reading about Einstein's Special and General Relativity, my intuitive ideas and experiences of the world around me underwent a radical shift. When I was younger the idea that Time is absolute, no matter where you are and how fast you are travelling, seemed self-evident. Reading about Einstein's work made me aware of how time is in fact a subjective quantity for individuals travelling at different speeds or who experience a difference in gravity. This compelled me to question other aspects of 'reality' I had up until then believed to be true. Penrose's *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* helped me to build a better understanding of the complexities of both theories.

## More evidence/wider reading

“I enjoyed reading Roy Porter’s *Madness: A Brief History* and Nicky Hayes’, *Principles of Social Psychology*. This was an enriching experience as I had not come across this material before in class. I went on then to read a number of articles in *Psychology Review* in order to deepen my understanding of abnormality, material which I used subsequently for the basis of a prize-winning essay on the history of abnormality.”

“The interaction between human behaviour and science is what excites me about Economics. The human factor introduces an element of unpredictability... I read Paul Ormerod’s *Butterfly Economics*, which introduced me to the realm of behavioural economics...”

“The practical work in Organic Chemistry has really interested me. I was intrigued to find, in a book by Royston Roberts, how many reactions in the manufacture of organic substances were discovered through serendipity – such as the first low-density polymerisation of polythene by ICI in 1933.”

# Other Forms of Evidence

Lectures: <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/>

Courses: Harvard, Oxford

Work experience/internships/volunteering

Academic societies/CCAs

EPQ/Extension activities



## Link back to your subject choice

One of the reasons I want to read English at university is to fully appreciate how written texts can have such a profound impact. This was brought home to me when volunteering to help local primary school children with their reading. When I was their age, I loved the work of Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton, particularly the *Magic Faraway Tree*, which transported me to a new world beyond the realm of possibility. It was very moving to observe how the author's work captured the children's imaginations just as it did mine when I was their age.

The background of the slide features a low-angle, silhouette photograph of several graduates. They are seen from the chest up, with their arms raised high, throwing their black graduation caps into the air. The scene is set against a bright, clear sky, which creates a strong contrast with the dark figures of the graduates. The overall mood is one of celebration and achievement.

## Paragraph 3: Your other A-Levels/BTECs

What have you learned?

Skills

Areas of interest/expertise

Link them to your chosen subject

# Use active verbs

Enrich  
Broaden  
Deepen  
Enhance  
Augument  
Evaluate  
Analyse  
Synthesise  
Research





## Paragraph 4: Personal experiences/interests

Travel – culture, society, languages



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graph TD; A[Travel – culture, society, languages] --> B[Work experience]; B --> C[Social experiences]; C --> D[Hobbies/interests]; D --> E[Keep it relevant!];
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Work experience

Social experiences

Hobbies/interests

Keep it relevant!

# What else do you have to offer?

Use CCAs and Sport to highlight your motivation, and to suggest what you could contribute to the university:

Enthusiasm

Energy

Time management

Stamina

Challenge

Independence

Teamwork

Leadership

# Make it relevant

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*'I am captain of the hockey team'*

*'As captain of the hockey team, I have had to show leadership and tact...'*

*I am on the School Council*

*I mentor younger students*

*I organise social events at my college*

## **Paragraph 5:**

**Life after  
University?**

**What are  
your career  
options?**



# End with a bang, not a whimper

How will your degree choice help you in your future career?

What areas are you particularly looking forward to studying?

What skills/areas of expertise are you particularly wanting to develop or acquire?