

# Personal Statements

TIPS ON WRITING THE UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT

## Outline for a Personal Statement



When planning your UCAS personal statement it is sometimes helpful to do an outline to make sure that each paragraph has a specific purpose. This helps you to get an overview of the whole statement. It also makes the job of linking paragraphs together easier.

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Remember that statements are usually read quickly and the **first impressions** given by your words really do count.

Although each statement is individual, we know that admissions tutors are looking for certain things when they read a personal statement. In particular they are looking for a clear **motivation statement** in the opening paragraphs. The question 'Why do you want to read this subject?' should get a clear answer. They are also looking for specific **evidence** to back up the motivation statement. And they are looking for legible, interesting and **well-written** statements.

### ABOUT US....

Rob Oliver and Helen Martin are teachers of English specialising in written communication. They both have over twenty years' experience as workshop leaders in secondary and primary education, professional training and international organisations. Rob is based in the Netherlands, Helen is based in the UK.

You do not need to come across as an expert in your chosen subject! Universities are looking for enquiring and capable students with good all-round skills who will benefit from the opportunity to study at an advanced level. They are looking for people who will enjoy independent research and who enjoy learning.

Here is a suggested outline for a personal statement which you might like to use and adapt to your own situation.

### UNITED KINGDOM



UK UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE  
LINKS

## Paragraph One: Motivation for Course Choice

\* Answer clearly the question 'Why do you want to read this subject?'

\* Use a direct motivation statement ('I would like to study x because...') or a biographical statement ('My interest in x began...' or 'I have had a strong interest in x since...'). If you choose the latter, keep it brief! Don't tell your life story!

## UCAS

Education UK: Information for  
International Students on  
Higher Education in the UK  
QAA Reviews of UK  
Universities

Studento: University Guide By  
Students

UK University Open Days

The Guardian University Guide  
Guardian Article (2006) on  
Going to University

Guardian Article (2007) on  
UCAS applications

Cambridge Admissions:  
Guardian article (2011)

UK LNAT: National Law  
Admissions Test

BMAT (BioMedical  
Admissions Test)

UK CAT (Clinical Medicine  
Test)

\* Give a clear sense of your current interests and how you would like to develop them. If you have career plans, mention them, but this is not essential. You should, however, present yourself as a person looking to the future. You need to be on an 'upward learning curve'.

\* Avoid writing things which defer to the school's opinion of you - 'My teachers tell me I am good at physics' or 'My high grades in maths have spurred me to continue study in this area'. Your application will show your predicted grades and (hopefully) a good teacher's reference. The PS is to show **your** specific interests, aims and achievements.

\* If you are applying to do joint honours (eg History and Psychology) you need to say something about each subject **and** show how they can be linked (eg knowledge of individual psychology can help us in the study of history).

\* If you do not know why you want to read a particular subject, you need to do some serious thinking now. Research courses in the careers library and on the internet, ask friends and family to interview you about your interests, write a personal memo to yourself with a list of things you like/dislike.

## Paragraph Two: Academic Interests and Achievements

\* Answer the questions that admissions officers are likely to ask about your academic suitability: 'What have you done so far that is relevant to your course choice?' and 'What specific academic accomplishments or skills or interests do you have?'

\* Use your extended essay or other school projects to show what you have done in terms of research. Give some idea of work you have done which you would like to pursue further. The IB extended essay is excellent preparation for university-type work - show that you have taken the opportunity (even if you are still working on it at the moment).

\* Mention any wider reading outside the syllabus that you have done or specific areas of your chosen subject that interest you.

\* Mention any achievements or courses or trips that are relevant to your course choice.

\* If you are applying to read medicine or veterinary science, mention any work experience you have done.

\* If you are applying to read computer science, give some idea of your practical skills and knowledge and mention the platforms you are familiar with.

## UNITED STATES



## US COLLEGE ESSAY LINKS

Common Application Site

College Board: Types of  
College Essay Questions

About.com: Guidance and Tips  
on the Common App

## THE NETHERLANDS

UNIVERSITIES IN THE  
NETHERLANDS LINKS

## Personal Statement Guidance from Erasmus Rotterdam



[DOWNLOAD POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS HERE](#)

[Personal Statements/College Essay \(IB Students\)](#)  
[Writing the UCAS Personal Statement \(UK students\)](#)



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### Personal Statements: Outline for a Personal Statement

\* Do you have any particular IT skills - web design? blogging? digital photography?

\* If you speak two or more languages, mention them, and any advantages you feel you have gained from living in a multicultural/international background. If you can, relate this to your course choice. This aspect could also go in the following paragraph.

\* Note: you do not need to list your IB subjects or describe the IB curriculum.

### Paragraph Three: Important Background Experiences

\* Choose two or three experiences which are not directly related to your academic work but which have contributed to your personality and, if possible, relate them to your course choice.

\* Reflect on these experiences by describing what you have learned from them. *Do not just give a list!* It is better to describe one or two formative experiences with some interesting details rather than give a comprehensive list. Concentrate on experiences which have taught you something - eg. about leadership and responsibility, communication, or social problems.

\* Use experiences of participation or organisation such as: MUN and debating; charity work and fundraising; CAS and volunteer work; foreign trips (eg Tanzania?); work experience; music and drama; community work; environmental work; school council; active group membership; language learning; designing a website or blog; sport.

### Paragraph Four: Extra-curricular

\* Include here things which you did not mention in the previous paragraph. Music, sports, positions held are good examples. Add anything which is not central to your application but which adds to the overall impression and makes you sound like an active and well-rounded person. Any individual details ('I am currently reading political biographies in my spare time') works well. Again, don't give a long list but try to group related things together in sentences.

### Paragraph Five: Restate Motivation, Looking Forward

\* A short final paragraph - two sentences is enough - should return the reader to the motivation statement at the beginning. Instead of just repeating it, try to add some idea of your future ambitions and what challenges at university you are looking forward to. As with the whole statement, try to be specific to your own situation rather than use cliches. Avoid saying things that everyone would say ('I am looking forward to the social life at university'). Communicate your

Personal Statements: Outline for a Personal Statement  
passion for your chosen subject.

\* If you are taking a gap year, explain what you are planning to do and if possible how it relates to your course choice. If you have no specific plans, think of something to justify the year. It could be travel, work experience, learning a language.

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