

Writing your Personal Statement

June 2021

What is the aim of the Personal Statement?

To convince the Admissions Tutor that you are worthy of a place on the course that you have applied for!

They are 'passionate' about their subject and they want to see that in you

Useful sources of information

UCAS

Book: “Personal Statements” Paul Telfer

University websites

BGS UCAS Booklet

Sixth Form Staff

Countless other print and online guides !

In all honesty there is probably too much out there! These slides should summarise what we, at BGS, believe is an effective personal statement.

University place offer criteria

- Your grades – actual (GCSE) and predicted grades
- Your reference- (written by a member of staff)
- Your **personal statement**

What is a personal statement?

- The personal statement is your opportunity to tell institutions about your suitability for the course that you hope to study.
- You need to demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment, and ensure that you stand out from the crowd.
- Some course tutors find personal statements crucial when making decisions, and almost all will use them at some point in the decision-making process (including when students have just missed their offer grade in August!)
- You have 4,000 characters and 47 lines ONLY! You will have to choose your words wisely.
- You only write one personal statement, even if you apply to slightly different courses so you will need to make sure it is relevant to all your courses.

The DOs- 'Academic' 70%

- Make very clear your reasons for wanting to study the subject and course- base this on ACADEMIC interest
- Talk about your studies to the present day and why, specifically, they have led you to this decision.
- Refer to **extra-learning experiences**, giving details and being really specific about how it helped you/ developed your thinking.

The DOs 'personal' 30%

- Discuss **relevant** work experience, volunteering, super / extra-curricular activities: whatever it is, analyse, reflect on it and **relate it to course**
- Be open about learning difficulties.
- Get your drafts checked and discuss with your referee.
- Do it on Google Docs and then you won't have to worry about the computer crashing and it not saving!!

DO NOT- at all, ever...

- Use clichés eg. ‘I can go the extra mile’, ‘I give 150%’
- Use quotes from others unless it is REALLY relevant- this is your *personal* statement
- Use jokes and puns as these can misfire!
- Randomly list everything you have done since you were five- make it relevant.
- Use vague, gushy, aspirational statements: “I genuinely am passionately motivated...’
- Even think about using anyone else’s statement even as a template- there are similarity tests and it will get flagged!!
- Dwell on the difficulties of the past year!

A further word of warning from UCAS!!

- “Along with other verification checks for identity and academic qualifications, we carry out checks to verify that personal statements are the applicant's own work. If we have cause to question an application, we will contact the applicant and at the same time inform all the universities and colleges to which the applicant has applied, who will then take any action they consider appropriate.”

What to include?

- The principal aim is to convey your enthusiasm for studying your chosen subject; hence most of your personal statement will reflect your academic and intellectual interests.
- Approx. 70% on the course applied for and relevant experiences and 30% on extra curricular activities.
- Can be split into roughly four paragraphs, as a *suggested* structure.

First Paragraph

- Keep this paragraph short
- Engage the interest of your reader...
- This paragraph should outline the reasons for selecting your course. Why do you love your subject?

Second Paragraph

- Give more detail about what you are currently studying that has made you want to study the subject at university e.g. a particular novel you have read in English if you are wanting to study English literature, or a particular theory you have studied in Business.
- In this same paragraph sell your Extended Essay. This is a process that only IB students complete and is a fantastic example of your ability to research and work independently. Hopefully your EE subject will be closely connected to the subject you are interested in studying.
- When applying to do a joint honours degree (2 subjects) you should do this for both subjects but it will be a lot briefer as you don't get more words!

Third Paragraph

- What else have you done outside of the IB course to show you're interested in the subject e.g. attended an online lecture, followed a podcast, watched additional foreign language films. Importantly, what have you gained from doing these additional activities?
- Mention prizes and participation in areas of school life that contribute to your academic profile.
- When talking about subject-related experiences explain how you benefited and what you learnt.

Fourth Paragraph

- Anything extra-curricular that strongly links to your subject choice or presents you as a student who is ready for the demands of university life e.g. Mark Evison Foundation, NCS, Duke of Edinburgh. It must be worthwhile evidence. Playing in the school football team is not relevant for most courses!
- This is where you should advertise your individual strengths and qualities.
- You should include leadership skills, teamwork, enterprise, contributions to community, determination etc. Make it relevant to your course e.g. Public speaking for Law etc.
- Remember the aim is to establish that you are an interesting individual who will benefit from the course and university life. This should be encapsulated in a short concluding sentence!

To Summarise

- One statement for all choices
- Plagiarism: all statements are checked
- Structure: link each section to help statement to flow
- Evidence: be specific about what you have done- necessary to support your claims
- Drafts: plenty of these will help – but you may only submit one draft to your reference writer
- Proofread: Again and again.
- Check: Meet and discuss your statement with your reference writer
- **Don't forget be original and truthful**

Advice from past pupils

Make sure you write it yourself because you may be interviewed.

Look at example statements to get template ideas

Make it specific to the subject you want to study.

Before you begin, make a bullet point list of the reasons why you want to do the degree you're applying for.

Get the first draft in as early as possible so you can get some advice on how to improve it.

In groups of 4...

- Read the four statements
- What first impression do they give?
- Have they researched the course?
- Have they proved their interest in their studies?
- Have they proved their interest in their extra-curricular activities/work experience?

- Bottom line: would you want them on your course?

So what did the universities think?

- A. Unsuccessful application for Law. The spelling and grammar were criticised as was the use of quotations. The student seemed to enjoy politics and sociology too much (applied for several courses?) and there was little link between the experiences listed and what was gained from them. The last sentence was criticised and the general view was that the statement did not link to the course being applied for.
- B. Successful application for medicine, just*. Criticised for listing work experience and not reflecting adequately on what was learnt / achieved. When it did show reflection and understanding of what healthcare entailed it impressed. A greater discussion of how current subjects had prepared the student for future challenges would help. There was a view that the statement talked of 'passion' but didn't convey it. *It was hinted the candidate had very good GCSE/Predicted grades and a strong BMAT score.
- C. A very strong, successful History of the Ancient World application. A well-written statement with strong links between the skills learnt already and what will be required at degree level. Clear evidence of intellectual curiosity from the opening paragraph to the conclusion. The Tutor stated that it conveyed a sense of warmth and passion (!) for the subject.
- D. Unsuccessful application for Economics. The choice of vocabulary was poor at times and there should be at least 70% or so emphasis upon the subject itself. There was evidence of name-dropping as opposed to genuine interest e.g. The Economist and the general view was that the statement was style over substance. Lastly, if he/she has insight into "a unique economic theory" why is he/she applying for an undergraduate course?!

What now?

- Get writing your ideas down! You will write several drafts so it's always best to get working on something asap.
- You will need to have completed your personal statement by October halfterm.
- You will be given time during academic monitorings to work on your statement but the best advice would be to get it written over the summer!