

Supporting Students with Personal Statements



Coming up

**Reflection &
Best Practice**

The Basics

**The Three
Sections**

Reflection Activity



Rock, Paper, Scissors!

- 1. Tell your partner about a hobby or pastime you had as a teenager. How did you spend your time outside of school?**
- 2. Now, explain to them how it demonstrated your suitability for your current job and ambitions for the future.**

Your Experience

In your Rock, Paper, Scissor pairs, think about your experience supporting students with personal statements.

1. **Share** your biggest **frustration** working with your students.
2. **List** three things your students find hard in writing their statements.
3. **Pick** one from your list and write it down on the post-it. Swap it with another pair.
4. **Discuss** ways you could help a student overcome that difficulty.



The Basics



The basics – 2026 entry & beyond

The personal statement should:

- Be 4,000 characters or 47 lines of text (including spaces) – whichever comes first
- Portray the applicant's character, knowledge, experience and ambition for the course they're applying to



What's changing?

Instead of one longer piece of text, the new structure is split into three sections

Section 1:

Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Section 2:

How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Section 3:

What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

What's staying the same?

The overall character count will remain at 4,000 across all answers, the amount students may write for each question can vary

The new structure still enables students to showcase their passions, interests, knowledge and experiences of their chosen subject area and allows them to demonstrate why it's a good fit for them and their future ambitions



“It is our responsibility - where we can - to remove barriers, both real and perceived, which might prevent those who want to pursue a university education from doing so.” – Dr Jo Saxton, Chief Executive, UCAS

Why the change?

To ensure the highest quality, UCAS partnered with an external research agency to rigorously test the new template, guidance, and wording. Findings below...

Over half the students UCAS spoke to found completing the three questions "very easy" or "easy".

Admissions teams said it made it easier for them to assess applications and more confident that they will receive the information they need to make decisions.

Most advisers preferred the new format and said it would enable students to provide more complete and detailed statements, with the majority of advisers surveyed as part of the research stating they were "very confident" or "extremely confident" that the questions clearly convey what is needed for each answer.

The Three Sections



Section 1



Section 1

Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Encourage students to write **in their own voice**. Admissions tutors want to hear **their** story, not what they think universities *want* to hear.

Students should consider:



Their passion and interest for the course



Their knowledge and skills of the subject area



How the course links to their future

This section isn't about proving they're the best; it's about showing why they're genuinely excited to study this subject!

Section 1 Activity - Discuss



ADVANCING
ACCESS

From the
**RUSSELL
GROUP**

What would you suggest a student does to make this a stronger section?

During lockdown, I got interested in aerospace engineering because I joined a local model aircraft club. I learned how to make and change my own planes there. For example, I built a model plane out of some foamboard and put in some electrical parts I found. I also updated some other planes by adding flaps and bomb drops for ping pong balls so I could join in with activities and compete with the others. I liked the club because it helped me learn about different plane components and fly without it costing too much.

Section 1 Activity - Discuss



What would you suggest a student does to make this a stronger section?

During lockdown, I got interested in aerospace engineering because I joined a local model aircraft club. I learned how to make and change my own planes there. For example, I built a model plane out of some foamboard and put in some electrical parts I found. I also updated some other planes by adding flaps and bomb drops for ping pong balls so I could join in with activities and compete with the others. I liked the club because it helped me learn about different plane components and fly without it costing too much.

During lockdown I ignited my passion for aerospace engineering through a local model aircraft club. Through the club I developed skills such as creating and modifying my own aircraft like a Cessna 150 I built from manipulating foamboard and adding electrical components that I sourced and soldered together. In addition, I have modified some of my other aircraft, adding flaps and bomb drops for ping pong balls which enabled me to take part in activities and competitions with the other members. I particularly loved joining the club as I was able to learn the different components of an aircraft and experience flight without as much of a financial barrier.

Section 2



Section 2

How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Students should consider:



How their studies have prepared them for their course/subject



The skills and knowledge they've developed



Any independent learning or academic achievements

This section is about highlighting evidence to show they are prepared for the challenges of university-level study

Academic examples...

Students can up-skill or advance their knowledge in their chosen subject area

- MOOCs
- Articles e.g. JSTOR, ScienceDirect, PubMed
- University-led free online courses
- UCAS Springpod tool
- Subject tasters
- Virtual work-experience



Examples for section 2



How would you support this student to improve their answer?

Studying History at A-Level has helped me prepare for a degree in History because I've learned a lot about different periods, like the World Wars and Medieval history. I have written essays on various topics and discussed events like the causes of World War I. I also study English, which has helped me with reading and writing, and I feel this will help me with my university work. These subjects have given me a good understanding of how to approach historical topics.

Examples for section 2



How would you support this student to improve their answer?

Studying History at A-Level has helped me prepare for a degree in History because I've learned a lot about different periods, like the World Wars and Medieval history. I have written essays on various topics and discussed events like the causes of World War I. I also study English, which has helped me with reading and writing, and I feel this will help me with my university work. These subjects have given me a good understanding of how to approach historical topics.

My A-Level History course has enhanced my ability to analyse primary and secondary sources, particularly when studying the causes and consequences of the World Wars. In my coursework, I critically examined how different historians interpret the impact of the Treaty of Versailles. Writing essays has helped me develop my argumentation skills, as I learned to structure complex ideas and support them with evidence. Additionally, studying English has improved my ability to read critically, enabling me to engage more deeply with historical texts and debates, which will be crucial for university-level history.

Section 3



Section 3

What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

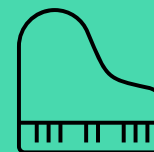
Students should consider:



Work experience,
employment or
volunteering



Personal life
experiences,
responsibilities and
achievements



Hobbies and any
extracurricular or
outreach activities

This section is not just about listing experiences – students should explain why these experiences are useful and how they link to their chosen degree

Section 3 Activity - Discuss



What would you suggest a student does to make this a stronger section?

Through my work experience and some research, I found that I really like programming best in Computer Science. For my Year 12 work experience, I went to Slimming World Headquarters and was with the cyber security and UX design teams. During the week, I went to some interesting workshops, like on phishing and web development. I liked the web development part the most. I had already looked into HTML, CSS, and JavaScript before this because I was curious. My dad told me to read "Build your own web site the right way using HTML & CSS" by Ian Lloyd from 2008. Even though it was old, it taught me the basics well and helped me learn more and practice coding.

Section 3 Activity - Discuss



What would you suggest a student does to make this a stronger section?

My experiences in Computer Science have affirmed my profound passion for programming, an area where I find genuine intellectual excitement. My Year 12 work experience at Slimming World Headquarters provided invaluable exposure to diverse tech functions. While attending workshops on cybersecurity aspects like phishing and vulnerability management, it was the web development section that truly resonated with me. This practical insight built upon my existing self-directed exploration of HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. Prior to the placement, my dad's recommendation of Ian Lloyd's "Build your own web site the right way using HTML & CSS," though published in 2008, proved foundational; its clear exposition of core principles allowed me to significantly expand my knowledge and hone my coding practice. This blend of formal exposure and independent learning has solidified my desire to delve deeper into software development.

Top tips



Top tips

- Ensure that the personal statement gives an insight into the student's motivations and interests
- Check spelling and grammar
- Ensure that everything in the personal statement is relevant to the application
- Encourage your students to express themselves, avoiding clichés and quotes from other people
- Make sure that all the information your students include is supported by evidence.



“We want every student with the qualifications, potential and determination to succeed at a Russell Group university to have the opportunity to do so whatever their background.” Dr Piatt, Director General of Russell Group

Using AI for Personal Statements

- **Cheating?**

- Personal statements written by Generative AI will be untruthful and low-quality.
- UCAS will detect when students have used AI, such as ChatGPT, to write “all or a large part” of their personal statement – this is considered cheating by universities and can affect student’s chances of an offer.

- **How to use AI ethically**

- Generating **prompts** to support with writing e.g.,
“What should I include in a UCAS Personal Statement for studying Law at University?”
- Suggesting **areas for improvement** when the student has written a draft personal statement.



You can read more on this topic on the Advancing Access blog – [“Should you be helping your students to use Chat GPT for their UCAS Personal Statements?”](#)

What not to include

- Over-exaggeration
- Repetition and waffling
- Lists of skills and work experiences
- Starting every sentence with 'I'
- Specific universities - apart from when referring to outreach activities/ summer schools
- A definition of the subject
- Long quotes
- Generalisations and clichés
- Passive comments
- Jokes, puns or wordplay

Questions?



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