

4. Writing a Supporting / Personal Statement



The following guidance offers advice on writing a personal statement but it is equally applicable to supporting statements for apprenticeship and job applications. Each apprenticeship application will be individual dependent on the employer but by preparing a statement you will have a solid foundation on which to build. To this end, every student at the Marches Sixth Form prepares a personal statement.

1. Explain your reasons for wanting to study the course

What *motivates* you to take this course at a university-level? Mention how your interest developed, what you have done to pursue it or how you've drawn inspiration from your current studies. Or, just demonstrate your enthusiasm for it.

"Be specific from line one" (*English admissions tutor*)

Try to stand out from the crowd.

Showing your genuine enthusiasm and engagement with your chosen subject - the book you found in the library that changed your views, the relevant experiences you've had, the project you did, the podcast you just heard or the summer school or public lecture you went to - will help you get the tutor's attention.



You won't achieve this by being bizarre, or with meaningless clichés like 'I was born to dance', 'biology is my life' or 'it has always been my dream to be a vet'.

2. Explain how you're right for the course

Provide evidence that you fit the bill – not only that you meet the selection criteria but also that you've researched the course or profession and understand what studying the subject at university level will imply, and that you are prepared for this.

3. Say what you've done outside the classroom

If possible, outline how you've pursued your interest in your chosen subject beyond your current syllabus. For example, talk about any further reading you've done around the subject and give your critical views or reflective opinions about it. This could be from books, quality newspapers, websites, periodicals or scientific journals or from films, documentaries, blogs, radio programmes, podcasts, attending public lectures and so on.

But try to avoid mentioning the wider reading that everyone else is doing.

4. Why it's relevant to your course...

Reflect on your experiences, explaining what you've learned from them or how they've helped develop your interest in the subject – it could be work experience, volunteering, a university taster session or outreach programme, summer schools, museum, gallery or theatre visits, archaeological digs, visits to the local courts, travel, competitions or a maths challenge.

"It doesn't have to be anything fancy!" (*Archaeology admissions tutor*)

5. ...and relevant to your chosen career

If you're applying for a vocational course that leads directly to a specific profession, it's really important to reflect on what you've gained from your experience and how it relates to your chosen career path.

For example, what skills did you observe or pick up during your work experience and what did you learn from this? How has it increased your understanding of the profession or your enthusiasm for going into it?

"Reflect on your experience, don't just describe it. Talk about the skills the profession needs, how you've noticed this and how you've developed those skills yourself."
(*Occupational Therapy admissions tutor*)

6. Can you demonstrate transferable skills?

Yes you can – and admissions tutors will want to hear about them. It could be your ability for working independently, teamwork, good time management, problem-solving, leadership, listening or organisational skills.



7. Expand on the most relevant ones

But don't simply list off the skills you think you have – think about which ones relate most readily to the course you're applying to, then demonstrate how you've developed, used and improved these. Again, admissions tutors want to hear about specific examples:

- projects and assignments (what role did you play, what went well, what did you learn?)
- positions of responsibility (what did it entail, what did you organise?)
- sport, music or drama (what did you learn from your role, how did you work as a team?)
- Young Enterprise, Duke of Edinburgh award (what were the biggest challenges and why, how did you overcome them?)
- Volunteering or your Saturday job (what do you do, what have you observed, what extra responsibilities have you taken on?)

8. Show that you're a critical thinker

University is all about being able to think independently and analytically so being able to demonstrate that you're working like this already is a big plus point. Briefly explaining how one of your A-level subjects, a BTEC assignment or placement, or additional studies such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) has made you think more critically could be a way of doing this.

"If you're taking the EPQ, do talk about it, as it's the kind of studying you'll be doing at uni" (*Modern languages admissions tutor*).

9. What's the long term plan?

Mention what your longer term goals are if you can do it in an interesting way and you've got a specific path in mind but, if you do, then try and show a spark of individuality or imagination.

"Just saying you want to be a journalist isn't exactly going to stand you out from the crowd." (*History admissions tutor*).



If you're not sure yet, just talk about what you're looking forward to at uni and what you want to gain from it. If you're applying for deferred entry, do mention your gap year plans if you've made a firm decision to take a year out. Most universities are happy for you to take a gap year – but will want to know how you plan to spend it.

10. Keep it positive

It can be difficult to get going with your personal statement, but don't panic. Start with your strengths, focus on your enthusiasm for the course and talk positively about yourself. Most of all Universities want people who are enthusiastic about the course. Be sure to end your statement on a positive note. Make the conclusion short and sharp, choosing your key messages carefully and conveying them concisely. Don't simply regurgitate what you've already said.



Do's and Don'ts - helpful hints to set you on the right path

- **Keep the information unique**

Use the space on the form to explain what you want to do, why you think that you are a good candidate and how you think that the experience will help you in the future. Give evidence to support what you say. Try to give the reader an impression of you as an individual and show how you differ from, and are better than, the other applicants.

- **Be Honest**

Remember that if you are called for interview, this section of the form will be used as an agenda for discussion. Make the most of your skills, qualities and achievements, but don't lie.

- **Make every word count**

Convert facts into selling points. Use active words and sentences to keep things short, positive and interesting. Make minimal use of the word "I" and start your sentences with phrases that allow you to add illustrative detail. For example:

Instead of this.....

I'm in a band.

I gained a Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award.

I have a part time job

Write this.....

Being a member of a band have increased my self confidence and.....

Achieving the Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award has made me more independent and enhanced my.....

I have a part time job has stregthned my determined to.....

- **Be Prepared to draft your personal statement several times**

Give a draft to ONE person in the first instance – **your tutor**. Wait for an amended draft to come back to you, discuss changes and if you feel it will assist talk it through with another member of staff. Clinics and workshops will be held in September and October if you need help and advice so DO NOT panic.

Make sure you have researched your choices

If your statement is all about your passion for media production, but their course is all about media theory and analysis, a tutor won't be impressed. Likewise, raving about Ancient Rome won't impress if their history course starts in 1500. So do research the courses thoroughly and ensure that the *content* of your statement shows you know what you're applying for.

A growing number of university websites include sections on what their admissions tutors typically look for in personal statements - some even do it for individual courses. You could be at a big disadvantage if you haven't checked these out.

Things NOT to put in your personal statement

- **Quotes from other people**

It's your voice they want to hear - not Shakespeare, Einstein, Paul Britton, Martin Luther King, David Attenborough, Descartes or Napoleon's. So don't put a quote in unless it's really necessary to make a

critical point. It's a waste of your word count. As a sport admissions tutor said: 'I'm totally fed up of Muhammad Ali quotes!'



- **Random lists**

Avoid giving a list of all the books you've read, countries you've visited, work experience placements you've done, positions you've held. For starters, it's boring to read. It's not what you've done, it's what you think about it or learned from it that matters. See our guide to writing about experience in your personal statement to make it really count.

A dentistry admissions tutor sums it up: 'I would much rather read about what you learned from observing one filling than a list of all the procedures you observed.'

- **Irrelevant personal facts**

Before you write about playing badminton or a school trip you went on in year nine, apply the 'so what?' rule. Does it make a useful contribution and help explain why you should be given a place on the course? If not, scrap it.

- **Incorrect spelling and bad grammar**

Don't forget poor punctuation, either. These are obvious and easily-avoided issues, so check and double check before you submit. Grammar and spelling crimes can result in rejection, especially if you're applying to a very competitive course.

- **Repeating irrelevant academic details**

Your qualifications, subjects, grades and other personal details are listed elsewhere on your Ucas application, so you don't need to list them in your statement or start by saying "I am currently studying...". It's a waste of those precious 4,000 characters you've got to play with.

- **Over-used clichés**

Avoid 'from a young age', 'since I was a child', 'I've always been fascinated by', 'I have a thirst for knowledge', 'the world we live in today'... You get the idea. They constantly recur in hundreds of personal statements and don't really say an awful lot.

- **Avoid sweeping statements or unproven claims.**

More phrases to avoid: 'I genuinely believe I'm a highly motivated person' or 'My achievements are vast'. Instead give specific examples that provide concrete evidence. Show, don't tell!

- **Limit your use of the word 'passion'**

'The word 'passion' (or 'passionate') is incredibly over-used.'

'Show it, don't say it.'

- **Trying to be funny**

Humour, informality or quirkiness can be effective in the right setting but it's a big risk, so be careful.

