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Writing a Personal Statement

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Personal Statement Basics



What is a Personal Statement?

The personal statement section of your university application is your opportunity to showcase the interests, character traits, goals, and life experiences that make you unique and how the combination of these attributes makes you a fantastic fit for the programme to which you're applying.

Note:

In 2025 (students seeking 2026 entry), the UCAS will replace traditional undergraduate personal statements with a new three-question structure.

Purpose of a Personal Statement



Personal statements play a critical role in university admissions, helping you stand out from the thousands of other applicants and allowing you to showcase your communication and writing skills. And that's not all! Effective personal statements can fill a range of additional purposes. For instance, personal statements can help you:

- ✓ Stand out from the crowd when applying for competitive programmes.
- ✓ Secure an in-person interview (for schools where this applies)
- ✓ Convince admissions officers/tutors that you're the best fit for the culture of their programme and university.
- ✓ Explain the catalysts for a season of poor grades on your transcripts and how you got back on track.
- ✓ Tell the story of your unique journey to selecting your course in your authentic voice, allowing the universities you're applying to truly grasp your enthusiasm and personality outside of your resume and application.

Length of Personal Statement

Your statement can be a maximum of 4,000 characters. While there may not be an exact word limit, this character limit (including spaces) generally translates to no more than 500-1,000 words. As you begin thinking about what you want to include - or leave out - of your statement, keeping these length constraints in mind is essential.

Tip: Instead of writing your personal statement in the application, which does not offer a means of tracking how many words you use, draft your statement in Google Docs or Microsoft Word and use their respective word count tools. You can copy and paste your statement into UCAS Apply once you finalise it.

Understanding the Audience

Admissions tutors, officials, or committees review personal statements, evaluate applications, make admissions decisions, and set course entry requirements. Depending on the university, the individual(s) reading your personal statement work full-time either in admissions or as a professor within the programme you're applying to. Most UK admissions reviewers hold graduate degrees in education or counselling.

When assessing your personal statement, admissions officers and tutors look for proof that you have the right interests, skills, and intellectual potential to commit to your chosen field of study - sometimes for 6 years or more! - and can positively impact the programme and the institution.

Additionally, admissions tutors want to feel confident that you have a basic understanding of the field you hope to pursue. They're not interested in students who pretend to be experts. Instead, they want to know you've devoted enough time and research to understanding what your potential programme involves on a fundamental level and that you know what you're getting into. Even if you have not studied the subject in secondary school, books you've read, field trips you've taken, or other experiences you've had outside of school are just as valuable.

The Importance of Personalisation

Earning excellent grades and top-notch entrance exam scores is no easy task, but since many other applicants achieve comparable statistics, your statement must convey your genuine personality and values in order to help you stand out.

To accomplish this, **focus your statement on how your life's events, values, and goals have formed you into who you are now.** Provide a summary of interests and experiences that influenced your choice of major and anything exciting that you do in your free time related to the subject you want to study or the type of university student you want to be., such as extracurricular commitments.

We'll discuss more about how to do this and provide examples in the "Content," "Subject-Specific Tips," and "Standing Out" sections of this book.

Assuming you've decided on which programme you want to enrol in, you can start brainstorming what you'd like to include in your personal statement using the following strategies, either working through one by one or choosing the one that works best for you. If you still need to decide which major to pursue, try using these techniques to identify your interests and narrow your options.



Brainstorming/Identifying Key Themes



When drafting a document as significant as a personal statement that will ultimately affect your future, preparation is essential. The first step in preparation is brainstorming. Before starting your brainstorming session, make sure you have a clear goal in mind, such as “I want to brainstorm about...” something like “events and activities that made me interested in architecture”, or “transferable skills and personal qualities that are useful in business.”

While everyone is different and no two essays will be exactly the same, all personal statements need to include facts about your academic, extracurricular, and work backgrounds in addition to your more unique character traits, ambitions, and interests. It’s your job, in your statement, to connect the experiences and attributes you brainstorm to its goal of earning a degree in a particular field, along with any other motivations behind doing so. Assuming you have an idea of the programme you want to enrol in, you can start brainstorming using the following strategies.

STEP 1: Thought-Provoking Prompts

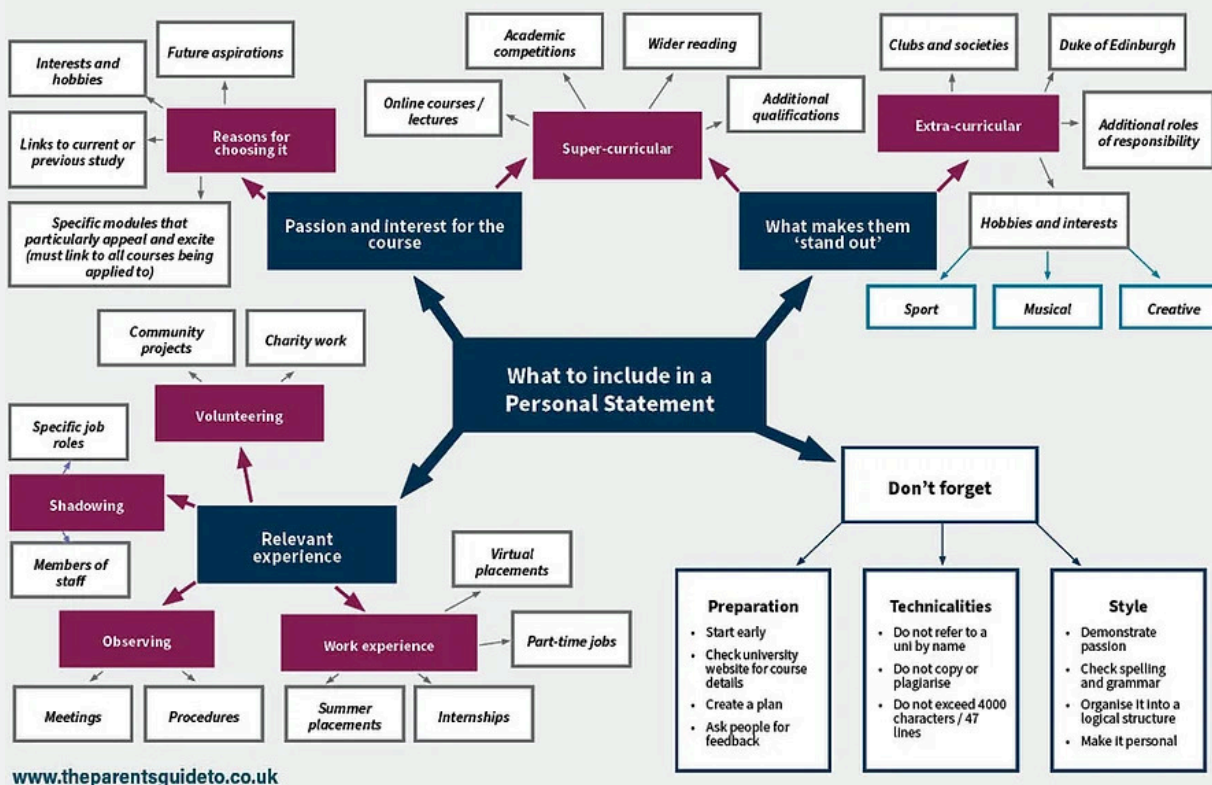


Think over the following prompts and jot down a few answers for each. Your responses can help you narrow your course selection and/or identify the “why” behind it.

- What do I know about the course and its modules?
- Why do I want to study the subject?
- What do I already know?
- What have I read, watched or attended that is relevant to my course?
- What excites me about my subject?
- What are my academic strengths?
- What makes me a good fit for this course?

STEP 2: Make Mind Maps

Personal Statement Mind-Map (2022-2023)



Mind mapping is a powerful brainstorming tool for students crafting personal statements. It can help you discover your strengths, interests, motivations for your course, and more. They're beneficial for visual learners.

You may thrive using the UCAS-recommended mind map (example), which assists you with organising each step and part of your essay. The four main branches are titled preparation, what to include, how to write it, and technical details, with helpful questions you can answer under each one.

You might also use a mind map to help you identify and connect details to what makes you passionate/interested in your programme. Mind-map all of your experiences in school or college, work, volunteering, and extracurricular activities and the key skills those experiences have taught you.

STEP 3: Seek Input From Family And Friends

Chat with your friends and family to help remind you of stories about your talents and interests that you may have forgotten. By doing so, you can identify the life experiences that sparked your interest in the chosen field of study.

To keep track of people's input, consider carrying a small notebook around to record people's input or dedicating a space in your smartphone for the same purpose.

STEP 4: List It

Make lists of details about what makes you unique that you want universities to know. Then, arrange those details from most to least important and determine how you can incorporate the most important ones into your personal statement.

Remember that you may need more than one session depending on how well you know yourself and your academic goals.

STEP 5: Pull it all together

Having a plan for what to do with all of the ideas generated by your brainstorming sessions is just as vital as brainstorming itself. What happens once you've produced some ideas? If you want to transform a brainstorm into actionable ideas, here's how to start.

- **Cluster similar ideas together (types of interest, skills, etc.)**
For instance, when you notice interests or hobbies that are similar to each other, you might group them together as passions. Grab them a coffee.
- **Rank, prioritize, and organize ideas**
After you've decided which interests/passions you believe fit together, you can group, rank, and organize these similar interests.
- **In-depth exploration of ideas**
Now that you have a strong grasp on the ideas you want to pursue, you can use these trends to form paragraph themes.

Crafting a Memorable Introduction



On average, prospective students' personal statements receive two minutes of attention from each school they apply to, so catching the admission tutors' attention is critical. Admissions officers are often overworked, tired, and used to seeing similar statements over and over.

“University College London last year [2022] received more than **76,000** applications for undergraduate places. Two minutes a statement would require **2,500** hours, or more than **63** work weeks, to read them all.” As such, creating an introduction is vital to a successful personal statement. To write an introduction that will impress admissions officers, put the following expert advice to work.

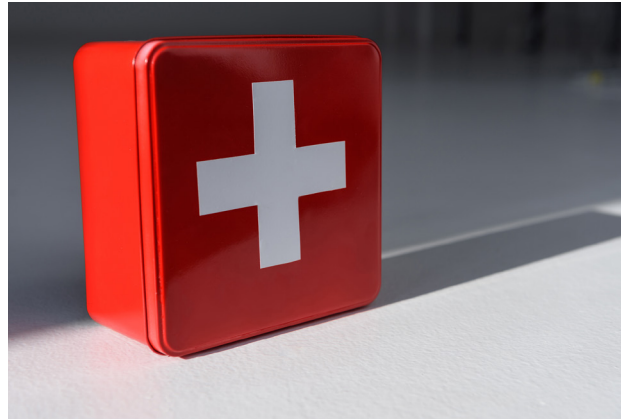
● Leave it for Last

Introductions are challenging. No worries if you struggle with them! Many people do. In light of this common problem, experts recommend focusing on the body section of your personal statement before you worry about your intro or conclusion. After you nail down your key focus for each body paragraph, you'll better understand how your introduction can grab your reader's attention and still fit into the rest of your writing.

● Skip the Cliches and Overused Phrases

Ensure you make an impression from the first line by removing cliches and overused openers. Here are a few examples of introductory phrases to avoid:

- For as long as I can remember...
- I am applying for this course because...
- Reflecting on my educational experiences
- From a young age...
- I have always been interested in...



● Cut to the Chase

Making every character count is crucial - so forget the flowery language and kick off your personal statement with one or two sentences about why you chose your course. While you'll go into more detail about this in the main body of your essay, a brief summary of why you're enthusiastic about your future area of study is a great way to grab your reader's attention. What was the fact or area that first fascinated you in this field? Taking a summer course in your chosen field is a great way to expose yourself to topics beyond the curriculum - one of which might become a specialist area that will truly impress admissions officers.

● Be Specific

Instead of vague details, express clear reasons for why you want to pursue your course. Claims like "I've wanted to become a nurse since I was in primary school" or "I aspire to be an accountant because I enjoy mathematics" aren't encouraged. Instead, admissions experts encourage you to go further into detail to include your academic achievements as well. You may find the following examples helpful:

- You witnessed your school nurse revive a student after an accident on campus and were so inspired you took a weekend first aid course, volunteered at a hospital and spent the summer learning more about the field of medicine.
- Already excellent with numbers, you watched a film about an accountant who uncovered financial fraud and saved many people their life savings. You decided on accounting after a Business Management summer school taught you about the many ways accountants can support the success of a commercial body.

Need more help with your introduction? No problem! Use the infographic directly below your guide. If you have additional questions, try reading our in-depth guide, "[How To Start A Personal Statement: Tips & Examples.](#)"

Setting the Tone: Voice and Authenticity

When you're reviewing hundreds of essays per day, encountering one relatable and enjoyable is memorable, which could very well mean the difference between an admissions offer and a "thank you for applying letter." That's why it's so critical you convey a positive attitude and enthusiasm for your prospective course of study while using your authentic writing style. While it's important to maintain some formality in your statement, you also want to engage your readers with a conversational tone. This means that your essay should feel natural and reflect your genuine voice. Striking this balance can be challenging but is crucial for creating a compelling essay.

Here are some practical steps you can take to ensure your writing is professional while still sounding relatable and like you!

- Don't try to "wow" the admissions committee by using big words or complex grammatical structures that you would not ordinarily use. So loosen your grip on that thesaurus. Admission officers would rather see that you can communicate effectively at your own level.
- Use personal pronouns (i.e. I, we), but avoid beginning every sentence with "I."
- It is a great idea to mention literature you have read and how it has shaped your perspective on the field to which you are applying. However, stay away from famous quotes, as they are overused, don't convey your unique thoughts, and can easily damage your credibility with the admissions team.
- Keep it concise! Eliminate fluff, which refers to any text that sounds pleasant but doesn't give the reader any useful information.
- Stay positive! If you must discuss a challenging circumstance you overcame in your personal statement, do so in a positive light, highlighting your resilience and what you learned from the experience rather than dwelling on the negative. Do a quick search for a list of positive and negative words online. Once you have these, review your statement and replace any negative words with positive ones. Additionally, have a parent or friend read over your statement for anything that might come across negatively.
- Don't exaggerate or minimise. Simply be honest and forthright about your personal qualities. Besides, if your prospective school requires in-person interviews, you'll be expected to answer questions about your written statement.
- Admissions officers review an abundance of personal statements each year, so they have no trouble distinguishing between genuine and inauthentic content. As a result, embellishing or making up information in your personal statement tends to have more negative consequences than positive.

Structure: Writing the Main Body

STEP 1: Start with an Outline

In a well-organized personal statement, you will present your interests, credentials, and reasons for pursuing your selected programme in an interesting and compelling manner, following the common structure of an attention-grabbing introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. You'll want to follow a more specific structure within the body section of your personal statement, such as the ABC Method.

In just three or four paragraphs, you will have laid the groundwork for your entire statement. When writing your personal statement, it is critical to organise your thoughts logically. Begin by organising your essay and dividing it into sections that handle specific subjects or ideas. This can help your essay flow smoothly from one point to the next, making it easier for admission readers to understand.

If you're looking for inspiration on what exactly to talk about... we've got you covered in Steps 2-5.

STEP 2: Highlight Intellectual Curiosity

Admissions personnel will already have your predicted grades and recommendation letters, so there's no need to take up valuable space in your statement by referencing them. Instead, draw attention to any academic achievements or skills you've gained from your studies that directly relate to your intended course.

You may also want to mention any course-related summer schools, educational honours or achievements you've earned outside of school.

STEP 3: Add Evidence of Achievement/Make Claims Credible

Universities want to see evidence that you have pursued your interest in your chosen course during secondary school or a gap year. While you can communicate what you did during extracurriculars volunteering, part-time work, and other activities along with course-relevant experiences you had and skills you learned, you can also prove your enthusiasm for your subject area via media such as books, podcasts, or articles then sharing what you learned with your admission reader.

Asking yourself the following questions about your interests and relevant experience can significantly help you decide what to include in your essay and how to back up your interests with evidence.

- Where did my initial interest originate?
- How did my casual interest in my course subject develop into a serious academic pursuit?
- What have I enjoyed most about my course-relevant secondary classes?

STEP 4: Presenting Work Experience

Work experience is an essential component of your personal statement. While only some courses require specific work experience, incorporating shows that you are passionate and knowledgeable about your chosen course.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to writing your work experience in your personal statement is figuring out what activities qualify as “work experience.” Here are examples of common activities that could be considered work experience: networking opportunities, site visits, workplace projects, formal work placements, volunteer work, part-time jobs, and leadership positions. Immerse’s Career Insights courses are designed to provide meaningful industry exposure, useful for bulking out this section of your statement.

After stating the facts about your work experience, it’s time to get to the heart of the matter -- why you’re serious about your course. That’s why discussing what you learned is essential. Beyond your role, share what insights you’ve gained that helped shape your character. If you’re not sure how to start, let these questions unknot your ideas:

- How did this position impact you?
- What are the primary skills you’ve gained that are relevant to your course?
- How does this experience influence your decisions in pursuing your study goals?
- What are the major lessons you’ve learned that are helping you grow as a person?
- What is your biggest takeaway from this position?

After answering these questions, craft a powerful paragraph that demonstrates how deep your understanding is. The more interesting facts you share about yourself, the better. Bring your work experience personal statement to life with vivid details that convey essential ideas about who you are.

STEP 5: Show a Well-Rounded Personality

Including information about your participation in extracurricular activities is crucial for enhancing your personal statement. It can help you stand out and appear more well-rounded. Extracurriculars can also show universities the soft skills they value in students.

However, listing your activities like a shopping list without connecting them to your course choice won't have much meaning. It's all about showing, not just telling. If you can't explain how captaining your basketball school team relates to your interest in a physics programme, admissions officers will be unimpressed.

STEP 6: Structure Your Paragraphs -- The ABC Method

As mentioned briefly in "Common Structures for a Personal Statement," the ABC method provides a simple and effective means of conveying personal background relevant to the programme you want to pursue. Here's how it works.

With "A" standing for action, "B" for benefit, and "C" for cause, the ABC approach is one of the most common frameworks for the body section of a personal statement.

Let's break it down:

- Activity (A) – What have you done?
- Benefit (B) – What skills it has given you?
- Course (C) – How do these skills relate to your course?

Activity - I volunteer at our local wildlife refuge.

Benefit - While in this role, I've had the opportunity to gain hands-on experience working with a variety of animals, learn about animal behaviour and habitats, assist in community education programs, and develop teamwork, leadership, and communication skills.

Course - This is relevant to a zoology course as it demonstrates my eagerness to learn more about animals, a knack for working with them, and a dedication to enhancing their quality of life. Additionally, I've discovered I have a gift for wildlife education and sharing knowledge about many species with people of all ages.

Example 2: Academic Achievements

Action	In A-level Psychology, I studied core topics related to mental health, including Beck's negative triad as an approach to treating mental health. I spent a lot of time researching this and completed wider reading as it affirmed my passion for mental health nursing.
Benefit	The wider reading allowed me to develop my knowledge of mental health conditions and treatments.
Course	This knowledge will improve my patient care whilst on placement and in my career. Completing wider reading has also prepared me for university assignments and inspired me to learn more through research.

Example 3: Work Experience

Action	I take part in Global Games Jams, working with others to create online games in a short time frame. I recently collaborated with a team of five people to create an online snooker game.
Benefit	As a result, I have developed my teamwork and communication skills.
Course	On the Computer Games Technology course, I'll be confident when collaborating with others to complete group projects, using our individual strengths and knowledge to create the best game possible.

Example 4: Extracurricular Activity

Action	I'm a member of the debating society at college and participate in discussions on controversial topics and current affairs. I led an argument for the legalisation of euthanasia in the UK.
Benefit	I improved my research skills and used these to gather information that helped me form a coherent argument to use in the debate.
Course	<p>Research skills are key to a law degree and career, they will help me complete university assignments, participate in moot courts and advocate for clients in a court of law.</p> <p>As you can see from the examples above, these students have very different experiences, but they still find a way to link this back to their course.</p> <p>Take a look at the examples above and think about how you can talk about your experiences from school, work experience or extra-curricular activities in the same way. Before you know it, you'll have lots of ABCs that you can turn into well-structured paragraphs.</p>

STEP 7: Get Friendly With Transitions

Of course, a successful personal statement consists of more than a handful of loosely related paragraphs. Joining your paragraphs together is crucial. In fact, your ability to organise and connect these paragraphs and sections is a testament to your critical thinking and writing skills.

Transitions are the secret sauce for smooth writing. They show your reader how different paragraphs or sections of your personal statement are related. Since each paragraph of your personal statement should focus on a single idea, you should plan on including a transition sentence for each new paragraph, ensuring there are no abrupt jumps or breaks between ideas.

Below is a list of common transition words and phrases that can assist you in showing the connections between your ideas.

Effective Transitions for Personal Statements		
Words		Phrases
Accordingly Additionally Again Alternatively Although Consequently Initially Similarly Therefore	Instead However Finally Furthermore Moreover Otherwise Nevertheless Regarding	For example, In contrast, In addition, Of course For instance After all, In short, As a result, To illustrate, On the other hand,

The Conclusion: Short and Punchy



Concluding

Your conclusion is your last chance to sell yourself to admissions officers. With this in mind, use these two to four sentences to sum up how your interests, talents, and experiences have made you an exceptional prospect for their university and the programme you've chosen. There are several excellent techniques for wrapping up your statement - below are a few tips for making your conclusion more impactful.

- **Talk About Your Main Strengths and Ambitions**

After paging through countless personal statements, the admissions committee will appreciate a concise and clever summary of your key points to wrap things up. Summarise your personal statement's key points and tie them all together to create your conclusion. How will your experiences, coupled with this degree course, help you achieve your goals?

- **Avoid Phrases Like "In Conclusion"**

Phrases like "in conclusion" and "in summary". They are unnecessary and may occasionally be understood as implying incompetence of the reader, not something you admissions tutors to think. If you're on your last paragraph and follow a common closing structure, it will be obvious to admission officers that it's your conclusion.


- **Stay Away From Famous Quotes**

When concluding their personal statements, many students have an affinity for including famous quotations. Steer clear of this tactic to keep the spotlight on you, the applicant. However, this strategy should be avoided at all costs because it takes attention away from YOU as an applicant.

- **Use The Bookends Strategy**

Bookends are sturdy objects placed at either end of upright books to keep them standing. In writing, the bookend strategy is like a literary sandwich, where the introduction and conclusion hold the body together. For instance, you might begin with a sorrowful story of how you witnessed a favourite pet's premature death largely due to a misdiagnosis. Then, for your conclusion, you can recall this turning point in your life and explain how this event fuels you to pursue quality veterinary practice. An inspiring story like this that led you to take action is an effective and memorable way to conclude your personal statement.

Dos and Don'ts

 DO's	
Start Early	Avoid starting your personal statement at the last minute. Time is needed to write, modify, revise and edit your essay. Missing the deadline and waiting a year is super disappointing, not to mention embarrassing.
Demonstrate Knowledge In Your Chosen Course	When writing a personal statement, it is important to express your enthusiasm for the course you have chosen. You should show that you understand the course requirements and expectations. To get started, you can answer some of these questions to help you find inspiration: What interests you about the course? How do you think the course will help you achieve your goals? How do you plan to use your chosen course to contribute to society? What challenges do you anticipate, and how do you plan to overcome them?
Stay Relevant	To make your personal statement relevant, research your course and link your skills and experience to the course description. Writing about why you want to study the subject, what interests you, and what you can add to the profession after college can make your personal statement relevant to the course. You can't squeeze your entire life in, so decide what's important. You may be proud of your first dog-showing trophy, but you don't need to include it in your university application unless it is in some way relevant to the programme you're pursuing. If you don't have a lot of traditional trophies or achievements, it doesn't mean your application is toast. In fact, transferable skills, which can be relevant to a wide range of careers can be found in everything from sports to farming or helping to raise children.
Use Active Voice	Use the active voice whenever possible; passive voice can make your words hard to understand and diminish the significance of your achievements. In active voice, the sentence's subject performs the verb's action. For instance: "I wrote the personal statement". In contrast, in passive voice, the original subject moves to the position of the direct object, causing the verb to no longer be connected to the actual subject of the sentence. For example: "The personal statement was written by me." To identify any passive voice in your essay, look for "to be" forms of verbs such as "am, is, was, were, are, been" or "to have" forms, such as "have, has, or had". Passive sentences often have "by" phrases, as seen in the example given above.

 DONT's	
Be Too Modest	Emphasise your skills and make it clear why you should be accepted into their course. Don't be embarrassed to share about achievements and unique skills you have that set you apart from other applicants.
Plagiarise	When you're stressed, it might be tempting to buy or copy a personal statement. Don't do it! Plagiarism detection software is ultra-sophisticated and if you're caught cheating, not being offered a place at your top school may only be one of the consequences.
Make Claims With No Evidence	Listing your strengths without evidence is a fatal mistake. If you say you have good leadership skills, why not write down the awards you received to back up your claim? Mentioning prominent positions you've had in your organisations is also an excellent way to prove your skills.
Mention Specific Universities	If you intend to apply to multiple universities, avoid indicating your top choice by name. Remember, your personal statement goes to all the institutions you apply to. If the other choices think they are not your first choice, they might not send you an offer even if they are interested.
Name-Drop	It is recommended that you refrain from discussing personal connections in your personal statement. Doing so occupies space that can be better used for covering something more crucial. You should also not assume that the person reviewing your personal statement will be familiar with any names you provide, regardless of how well-known they are. Lastly, it's important to note that just because an admissions officer knows someone doesn't guarantee they have a positive relationship with or view of them. In fact, it can potentially have a negative impact on your admission status.

Revision Strategies: Checklist (600 words)



Tips for Reviewing and Revising Your Personal Statement

After you've completed draft one, it's important to take a step back and reflect critically on your writing in order to identify any changes that need to be made to increase the clarity, sentence structure, and general effectiveness of a piece. Try the revision strategies below on your personal statement.

- Schedule time to review.
Giving yourself ample time to review and revise your work is one of the wisest choices you can make as a student and university applicant. Rushing or skipping the revision phase can conceal your true comprehension level and potentially hurt your admission status.
- Work from a hard copy.
They offer fewer distractions and don't cause the same eye strain and mental fatigue screens do.
- Set your work aside.
If you started your statement early enough, you should be able to set it aside for a while, ideally three to four weeks. Fresh eyes are a powerful tool!
- Read your work aloud.
To hear if your writing sounds the way you want it to and to help you catch small errors your eye may otherwise overlook.
- Use our checklist.
Finally, checkout our 'Clarity and Conciseness' checklist below for peace of mind!

Editing for Clarity and Conciseness

Tips for Improving Clarity/Conciseness in Your Personal Statement

- Cut out unnecessary words and phrases
- Make sure that each sentence has a clear purpose
- Make sure your writing is in active voice
- TIP: Never post your personal statement on a forum or discussion board online. UCAS software may flag it as plagiarism if it's published online before your official application.**

Seeking Feedback: Utilising Tutors, Peers, and Advisers

- Ask for feedback from 2+ peers
- Ask for feedback from 2+ adults who understand the application process and the role of personal statements (e.g. teachers, advisers, etc.)

Proofreading: A Checklist for Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation

- Use tools like spellcheck or Grammarly, but don't stop there. AIs are not perfect, nor are they human, and they may miss errors a living, breathing individual will catch.
- General misspellings (always consider context)
- Incorrect homophones (i.e. their, there, they're)
- All acronyms are introduced
- Font type and size is consistent
- All writing is in active voice

Proofreading: A Checklist for Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation

- Subject/verb agreement
- Identify and correct any sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma splices
- Look for the most common grammatical errors in writing, including run-on sentences, fragments, redundancies, slang, spelling mistakes and overused words.
- Delete extra spaces
- Capitalisation - only for proper nouns!
- Remove extra spaces
- Double-check articles, prepositions, and conjunctions
- Ensure pronoun consistency
- Avoid ending sentences with prepositions
- Vary your sentence types (i.e. simple, complex, compound, compound-complex)

Creating a personal statement that you're proud of can be an empowering experience. Transforming years of passion and ambition into a few thousand punchy words can help you refine your goals and get even more excited for the experience that's ahead of you. We hope that this guide streamlines the writing process for you!



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