

In this activity we're exploring ways that you can plan your personal statement and make it look impressive. We'll be using the UCAS guidance: www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/when-apply/writing-personal-statement and course selection criteria, e.g. www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/selection-criteria

How do I plan it?

The [UCAS website](http://www.ucas.com) has lots of advice on what you need to include, so is the best place to start. It is, by definition, your *personal* statement, so you're free to write it as you wish, but there are a few ways of thinking through your ideas to get started. The first thing to do is to look up the [selection criteria for your courses](#), and then write down things about you that meet the points. It's also a good idea to show you know what's in the [courses you're applying for](#). Obviously that doesn't mean list the modules, but if you're applying for slightly different courses at different universities, say with just one joint course: you don't have to give each equal space, but make sure you definitely talk about both subjects.

Meeting selection criteria *Fill in the boxes below and then link together points which match*

Course selection criteria

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My achievements, experiences, and skills

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Showing you know what you're applying for

What are my courses about? What kind of topics do they include?

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You can find out more about course content here: www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses-listing

Adding depth

Rather than listing all the things you've done, or telling us how brilliant a student you are, you can show you've thought about your experiences and learnt things from them, and in turn demonstrate the qualities we're looking for without actually have to state that you have them. *For each section on the next page, jot down a few ideas, then think of things that could expand on them and add depth. This could be in the form of an explanation, critical evaluation/opinion, what you learnt, how it links with something else you've done, or evidence/examples.*

Personal Statements

Things that interest me about the course

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Adding depth... e.g. why is it interesting? What's my motivation for studying it?

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Things that show my interest. E.g. reading or work experience

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Adding depth... e.g. what did you learn? What did you think about it?

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Extracurricular activities I do

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Adding depth... e.g. how have these helped you develop skills that will make you a good student?

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Time to write... Once you've got some ideas down, try sorting them by what they're about and which are most important. You can treat it just like an essay, with an introduction and conclusion. Then edit it down to 4000 characters/47 lines (this is probably the trickiest bit!) and make sure you've checked your spelling, punctuation and grammar (write it in MS Word, not on UCAS!).

FAQs

Why do I have to write a personal statement?

This is your chance to show your interest, passion and commitment to study your subject – one part of a range of information used to judge your application. It's also a really good way of checking you actually do want to study a particular subject – if you can't think of anything to say about it, you might need to rethink your choice. It's sometimes used as a starting point for discussion at interviews, e.g. talking about a book you've mentioned in it, so it's an opportunity for you to highlight your interests within the subject.

How do I show my interest and ability?

You should discuss 'supercurricular' activities – subject-related things you've done to explore more widely and deeply (have a look at the Supercurricular worksheet for some inspiration). You don't need to include your grades, but actually if you get good AS UMS scores this is the place to shout about it! This isn't being arrogant; this is providing evidence of your ability and hard work.

How do I make it impressive?

Adding depth, as you did on the last sheet, will show that you're a reflective student with your own ideas. For example: instead of saying *"I find Biology fascinating and I am a really hardworking student. I have read 'Almost like a Whale by Steve Jones and have done a Futurelearn course on Evolution"*, you could demonstrate and discuss this by saying *"Reading Steve Jones' 'Almost like a Whale' sparked my interest in evolutionary Biology, particularly how our understanding of it has changed since Darwin, and how we can actually observe evolution happening in viruses, however I disagree that humans have transcended evolution. This led me to take part in a Futurelearn course on evolution, and I was intrigued by how evolutionary theories are still at the frontier of science and respond to new evidence, for example epigenetic inheritance."*

Don't I need a quote/anecdote/a thesaurus?

No. Only use a quote if there is something that's genuinely meaningful to you. You don't need to start with a dazzling anecdote, or stating that you've **always** loved your subject. The honest story is likely to be far more compelling, if less dramatic. Try to avoid too much repetition of words, (e.g. 'fascinated') but avoid using a thesaurus to sort this out. Telling us that you were mesmerised, enthralled, and fell off your chair with excitement doesn't tell us anything – you should demonstrate your fascination rather than state it.

How much should I say about extracurricular activities?

This bit isn't important for Oxford, but it is for the other universities, so do take it seriously! You should use about 20-25% of the space for this. Rather than just listing your hobbies, you can use this to demonstrate transferable skills and other qualities universities might be looking for, e.g. problem solving, team work and managing your time. It is also fine to use activities that are relevant to your subject, e.g. volunteering in a caring environment (for medicine), or interest in your local area (for history/geography).

What if I'm applying for several slightly different courses?

These are a bit trickier to write, but not impossible. Try to make some reference to all aspects of each course you're applying for. It's fine not to give equal weighting to each, as the universities will understand you might be in this situation. So for example if you were applying for PPE at Oxford and Politics everywhere else, you could focus on Politics, but make sure you also talk about Philosophy and Economics too, otherwise it looks like you don't understand what's in PPE. You could talk about the crossovers between the subjects.