

Personal Statements

What to include and what to avoid

What Are Universities Looking For?

1. A commitment to the subject area/profession
2. An indication that you know what you expect to gain from your time at university
3. Personal experiences related to your application
4. The ability to express information and ideas clearly

What to include...

This is your opportunity to 'sell' yourself and tell universities why you would be a good student 😊

1. Why you have chosen the course?
2. What are your key skills e.g. transferable skills from education, hobbies, work etc?
3. Evidence of your interest in the course e.g. relevant work experience, work shadowing, reading around the subject, visiting appropriate sites etc
4. Future aspirations?
5. Evidence of transferable skills and roles of responsibility
6. Extracurriculars –if relevant
7. Positivity and enthusiasm!

What to Include...



About The Course

- Why does it interest you? What do you want to learn? What skills or experience do you have that will help you succeed on this course; e.g. work experience, voluntary work, placements? Is there a common theme across all the courses you are applying to? Any relevant reading around subject?

Extra Curricular

- What extracurricular clubs are you in/have participated in? Achievements? Positions of responsibility? Hobbies? Additional qualifications? (e.g. sports teams, drama clubs, orchestras, charitable events, DoE, prefect, overseas trips)
- What relevant transferable skills have you gained from these? (e.g. commitment, engagement, responsibility,

What to avoid..

- Stilted vocabulary
- Overuse of !!!, poor grammar, incorrect spelling
- Quotes from other people
- Over-use of clichés and the word “passionate”
- Negative comments or excuses
- Repeated material
- List of activities or traits with no relevance
- Trying to be funny
- Irrelevant personal facts – apply the ‘so what?’ rule
- Plagiarism, lies or exaggeration
- Commitment to one subject or institution (e.g. “ I want to apply to heriot Watt...”)
- Ignoring one subject if joint application or applying for different courses

PS examples

‘Where would one be without maths? There would be no shops as they use Maths and of course humankind would be in a state of disarray.’

- a little too ‘passionate’?!

‘I also intend to take up windsurfing. My father’s friend has windsurfed for years and has told us he is prepared to sell me one of his older boards so that I might learn.’

- use the ‘so what’ rule

‘...I have a strong grib of the English language.’

- always check your spelling

PS examples

1. 'Interests and Achievements in School: Participated in television programme made for schools; Gold Certificate in UK Maths Challenge; completed Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award; represented school in athletics and hockey; participated in Sports Days; regular member of Debating Society and Languages Club; ongoing community service.'

Versus...

2. 'I started DJing when I was 14 and continued it for three years. It was a great responsibility and I really enjoyed the music. I also did three sessions of casual stage crew work which involved setting up and monitoring sound systems for concerts and festivals. Again this was a position of responsibility and we had to work under pressure and to a deadline.'

PS tips



1. Its never too early to start making notes
2. 47 line/ 4000 character limit
3. Use A-B-C (Action-Benefit-Course relevance) to turn your experiences into examples for your personal statement
4. Try to avoid starting all of your sentences with 'I'
5. Proof read – don't rely on spellcheck!