University of Southampton

Founding member of the RUSSELL GROUP

Personal statements: *let's talk format*



Your UCAS personal statement is split into three distinct questions:

1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?
2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

This guide will help you understand what admissions officers expect to see from your personal statement, what to include and how to write with purpose and make your experiences count. You do not need the biggest list of achievements or the most impressive story, it's about how you reflect on your experiences that makes your application stand out.

DID YOU KNOW?

Depending on your course, your application journey can vary. For some, you will be called for an interview, but for lots of courses this is not required.

Here at Southampton, we interview for medicine and disciplines in the health sciences such as nursing and physiotherapy. For these courses, your personal statement helps shape the interview conversation.

For most other courses, we make our decision using your predicted grades and personal statement, so it is such an important part of your application and needs to show us the real you.

Your chance *to shine*

What are admissions officers are looking for?

The good news is that universities welcome, and expect to see a variety of experiences in the personal statements applicants apply with. While some may have been fortunate enough to go travelling or secure work experience, admissions teams know that others might be living in care, undertaking a part-time job to help the family, or looking after someone who is unwell.

Each of these experiences can show what has shaped you, what you value and what drives you. This variety of experiences is also what makes universities so diverse and interesting, and reflective of the communities around them and that they contribute to.

You might have plenty to talk about, from the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and sport to part-time work. Don't try and fit it all in. Choose the examples that say the most about you. Look back at what you have done and choose the most appropriate examples that demonstrate you are ready for the academic demands of undertaking a degree course, as well as the challenge of settling into life at university.

Go beyond describing what happened. Explain what you learnt, how you changed and why that matters. A few well chosen examples with thoughtful reflection are more powerful than a long list.

Remember

- All experiences are **valid examples** for your statement
- Choose **quality** over quantity
- Think about how you can **demonstrate you are ready** for the academic demands of university
- Explain what your experiences **taught you** and why it matters

Top tips from an admissions tutor

Dr Aude Campma, Director of Undergraduate Recruitment and Admissions, says:

Be *sincere*

Write in your own voice. Admissions tutors value authenticity over perfection.

Be *enthusiastic*

Show genuine passion for your subject: explain what excites or motivates you about it.

Be *specific*

The most important one. Use precise examples from your experiences (courses, projects, books, volunteering, work etc.) to demonstrate your interest and skills.

At each university, an admissions tutor for your chosen subject will read your personal statement and use it to help decide whether to offer you a place.



You already have hobbies, interests and experiences *worth reflecting on.*

If you have not had the chance to take part in extracurricular activities, don't worry.

Universities are not working through a checklist. Even for the most competitive courses, your application is not a contest to see who has travelled the furthest, read the most books or won the most awards.

What matters is what you make of the experiences you have. Whether it is scaling Kilimanjaro during a gap year, or caring for a loved one who needs support, attending a lecture by a prestigious scholar, or listening to their thoughts on a podcast, what matters is articulating how this has influenced you and will aid you in your studies going forward.

It's as easy as A, B, C...

Use this easy-to-remember structure as a way of relating your hobbies, interests and experiences to skills relevant to your course of study.

- **Activity**
  What have you done?
- **Benefit**
  Skills it has given you
- **Course**
  How it relates to the course

Deep dive into topics using sites like bellingcat.com

Study an EPQ

Visit **university websites** such as MIT's OpenCourseWare

Different ways to *engage with your subject*

Build a playlist of **podcasts hosted by experts** in the field you are interested in studying. Use them to gain insights and build knowledge and opinions

Documentaries / films / TV series

Is there an **affiliated organisation** aligned to your subject such as the Institute of Mechanical Engineers?

Search for journals using Google Scholar or core.ac.uk

Ensure you **keep up with current affairs** by regularly reading quality press, making sure you take time to form your own opinions on the matters discussed

Follow academics on social media and discover their background specialities

Try an **online course** or **learn a new skill** at futurelearn.com or youtube

Top tips for a medicine application

> At the University of Southampton, we review personal statements to identify non-academic qualities before the medicine panel interview. To help us understand your experiences, values and motivation for studying medicine, be authentic and reflective, highlighting what you've learned and how your skills or values align with those essential for a medical career.

Dr Shmma Quraishe
Principal Teaching Fellow







What's *next?*

Developing your subject knowledge does not stop once you send off your UCAS application.

By undertaking further and more advanced studying and thinking beyond your current studies, you can put yourself in a really strong position to secure offers from universities.

For more information on the structure of your personal statement, check out our Quick 5 video.