

Careers and Employability Service

How to write a Personal Statement

Introduction

The purpose of a personal statement is to help an organisation find out about you and your suitability for the job or course they have to offer. It is an opportunity for you to present your goals, experiences and qualifications in the best possible light as well as to demonstrate your writing ability. A personal statement provides scope for you to distinguish yourself from the other applicants

Questions to ask when writing a personal statement

Your answers to these questions may help you to decide what to include in your personal statement:

- What in your life story makes you special, unique or impressive?
- What interests you about the field of work/study for which you are applying and how did you learn about it?
- Do you have relevant work experience?
- What are your career goals?
- What skills do you have e.g. problem solving; willingness to learn; leadership; communication skills and can you provide evidence to back up your claims?
- What personal characteristics do you possess e.g. integrity; compassion; persistence and again, can you provide evidence to back up your claims?
- What responsibilities have you undertaken?
- What difficulties have you overcome?
- Why should you be chosen above the other applicants?
- How does your academic record support your application?
- Why is this course (and institution) the right one for you?

When you have thought about enough examples and have the appropriate evidence to back them up you can then write your personal statement.

Writing out your personal statement

- *Opening section*
Start with a strong opening paragraph that will grab the reader's attention
- *Middle section*
This should be used to provide details of your interests, knowledge and experience of your particular field. You may also include information about your qualifications and previous relevant work experience. Give recent and relevant examples. What you select to include in your personal statement and the choices you make will help the reader form a judgement about you so it would be wise to give considerable thought to this
- *End section*
Finish by tying together the various issues you have already raised and reiterate your interest in the job or course

Referees

You may be asked to supply the names of referees in support of your application:

- Your principal referee would normally be your **academic/personal tutor**
- Make sure that you have your **referees' permission** prior to giving their names
- Provide your referees with **information about yourself** and what you are applying for. You may wish them to mention, for example, your academic achievements, predicted grades if appropriate, jobs, travel experience etc
- Providing a **copy of your CV and/or your application form** to your referees may also be useful

Remember: If your referees are well informed about your background and aspirations it will help them to write a more focused and personal reference.

Top tips

Preparing to write your personal statement:

- Take the personal statement very seriously - it could be the deciding factor in making your application successful
- Give yourself plenty of time
- Read and follow any instructions - it may be stated that it should be hand-written or typed

Writing your personal statement:

- Write a positive and interesting personal statement to hold the attention of the reader
- Make sure that you address any specific questions that are asked - do not ignore them or think you can get away without answering them
- Be specific and provide appropriate evidence, e.g. if you are applying for a teacher training course, don't just say that you would make a good teacher; give examples of previous experience working in a classroom and activities where you have been involved with children
- Try to make your personal statement unique or distinctive in some way. One way to make it individual is to give a detailed example of something specific to your own experience, such as an event that influenced your decision to pursue a particular course or career
- Be succinct and avoid using long and ambiguous words or overly long sentences
- Adhere to the stated word limits - personal statements are often limited to 250-500 words, or one typed page, so write concisely while still providing enough detail
- Tailor your personal statement to the job or course you are applying for - do not use exactly the same one for different opportunities
- Try to show how you will add value to course – for competitive places your position will be strengthened if the tutor can see how you would interact with other students to enhance their experience and the reputation of the course

Before sending your personal statement

- Spell and grammar check your personal statement to avoid careless and easily correctable errors.
- Ask a friend to read it for you to do a final proof before you send it
- Keep a copy of what you have written as it will probably be referred to during an interview

Resources

Additional information relating to writing personal statements is available on the UoS Career Hub (Academic Personal Statement <https://southampton.careercentre.me/u/8prra9iw>) and Job Role Personal Statement <https://southampton.careercentre.me/u/511ny2v1>) and in our e-books (www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/ebooks). We also run an Explore...Personal Statements workshop which is available to book via mycareer.soton.ac.uk.