

PERSONAL STATEMENTS: LET'S TALK FORMAT

There are **three distinct questions** which you will need to complete as part of your personal statement for your UCAS application:

- 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 document will help guide you in what is expected, how to stand out and how it's not all about having the best or most experiences – it's about how you reflect that makes your application stronger.

DID YOU KNOW?

Dependant 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. In these instances, the personal statement is used as part of the interview process.

For most other courses a decision will be made based on your predicted grades and your personal statement.

WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE?

What are admissions officers are looking for?

The good news is that universities welcome, and expect to see a variety of experiences across 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.

All these experiences shape you into the student you are, the values you hold and the interests and desires you have. These variety of experiences are also what makes universities so diverse and interesting, and reflective of the wider societies they serve.

It is great if you have been undertaking lots of extra activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh award, playing a sport, or working part time, and many applicants have lots of great things they want to tell us about. However, the purpose and structure of the personal statement means that you will need to be selective. Looking back at what you have done and choosing 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. Thoughtful reflection on how a small selection of experiences has influenced you is more valuable than a long list of examples.

PERSONAL STATEMENT



- + All experiences are **valid examples** for your statement
- + Be **selective**
- + Think about how you can **demonstrate you are ready** for the academic demands of university
- + **Thoughtful selection** is more valuable than a long list of experiences

TOP TIPS FROM AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR

At each university, an **Admissions Tutor** for your chosen subject will read your personal statement and decide whether to offer you a place.

“

DR AUDE CAMPAS 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.

Director of UG Recruitment & Admissions

”

WORRIED YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT EXPERIENCES TO TALK ABOUT?

If you are feeling anxious about what to include in your personal statement because you have not had the opportunity to explore extracurricular activities, do not worry.

There is no tick list of endeavours universities will be looking for. Applications — even to the most competitive courses — are not contests of who has visited the most places, read the most books, or won the most awards.

It is more about your ability to reflect upon those experiences you have had. 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 how you articulate how this has influenced you and will aid you in your studies going forward.



- + There is **no tick list** of experiences you have to meet
- + This is **not a contest** for the best, or most experiences
- + All you need to do is **reflect**
- + Making sure your personal statement **represents you**



DIFFERENT WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR SUBJECT

Deep dive into **topics** using sites like bellingcat.com

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

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

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

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

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

Follow academics on social media and discover their background specialities

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

Documentaries / films / TV series

Study an EPQ

WHAT'S NEXT?

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

By undertaking the type of 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.



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/values align with those essential for a medical career. ”

DR SHMMA QURAI SHE
Principal Teaching Fellow



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