



Personal Statement Writing

MAKE
—
HAPPEN



University of
East London

| Session aims



Understand the structure of a personal statement



Reflect on what makes a good personal statement



Practice writing your own examples



Reflect on what you need to do next

| True or False?

1. An important part of a personal statement is a paragraph reflecting on a topic relevant to the subject.

TRUE

2. Universities have too many applications to read all personal statements

FALSE

3. The personal statement is about showing my personality so it should be mostly focused on my hobbies and interests.

FALSE



| What is a personal statement?



- A short reflective statement, broken down into **3 sections**, demonstrating why you're the perfect candidate for the course.
- A key part of your UCAS application – alongside your predicted or achieved grades.
- Read by **admissions tutors** who will decide whether to offer you a place at your chosen university.
- You only write **one personal statement**, which is seen by all the universities you apply to.



| Personal statement for 2026 entry

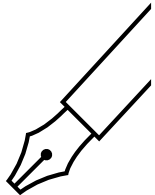
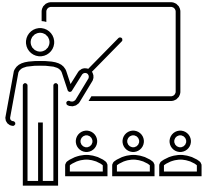
UCAS

**WRITING
YOUR PERSONAL
STATEMENT**

2026 ENTRY

A white line-art icon of a clipboard with a checklist and a pencil, set against a pink-to-purple gradient background.

How is your personal statement used by universities?



- Shows your motivation for studying the course
- Shows you have the relevant knowledge/skills/experience, you understand the demands of the course and will succeed in a university environment
- Helps you stand out from other students with similar grades
- Admissions interviews
- If you are slightly short of meeting the grades on results day, your personal statement could help you keep your place

| What are universities looking for?

Evidence that you're
passionate and
knowledgeable about
the subject area you're
looking to study

Relevant transferable
skills and experiences

Potential to be a great
university student!

Structure



- **4000 characters** (not words), including spaces.
- **350 characters** minimum per section.
- **3 sections of text**, answering each of the questions below:



Why do you want to study this course or subject?



How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?



What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

Examples of evidence

In person work experience	Blogs & vlogs	Positions of responsibility	Projects or essays	Mentoring
Virtual work experience	Documentaries	Awards	Wider reading	Tutoring
Work shadowing	Podcasts	Challenges	Influencers	Online subject courses
Paid employment	TED Talks	Personal life experiences	Hobbies	Trips or visits
Volunteering	Articles	Work based learning / training	Clubs	Competitions

Question 1) Why do you want to study this course or subject?

You need to show **evidence** of passion, curiosity and interest.

Motivations for studying the course(s):

- Have you been inspired by a key role model or moment in their life?
- Is it a subject you love and want to pursue further?
- How has your path led you to this course or subject area?

Knowledge of the subject area and interests:

- Is there a particular subject area you've researched?
- Something you can't wait to learn more about?
- What about a book or subject expert doing great things that's sparked your interest?

Future plans; demonstrate why this course/subject is a good fit:

- How might you use your studies to launch your career?
- What's important to you and your future, and how might the knowledge gained from your chosen course(s) help you to achieve this?

Example 1

Activity

During my A Levels and through attending University summer schools, I have discovered many new areas of Biology that have inspired me to study this subject further at degree level. In particular, I have become fascinated by cell biology and what you can learn about a cell through studying it under the microscope. For example, I have enjoyed studying the process of mitosis by observing the chromosomes in each stage and using staining techniques, which can highlight areas such as the cytoplasm.

Benefit

Needs to go on to link this to their chosen Course...

Example 2

Activity

My interest in linguistics has grown from my first year of sixth form when I took a course in English Language. During this course, I studied the work of Trudgill. I found this particularly interesting as I enjoyed looking at how and why the social class of a person affects how they speak. I also found the gender and language issues relating to how males and females approach language in a different manner very interesting. I have a general interest in sociology and look forward to combining this with my interests in linguistics.

Benefit

Course

Showcasing your examples - A B C technique

- **Activity** – Be specific! Summarise 2-3 key points.
*‘Studying **INSERT TOPIC** in A level History...’*
- **Benefit** - What skills / knowledge / experience has it given you?
 - How did it develop your understanding of the subject you’re applying for?
 - What interested you/surprised you about the topic?

*‘has developed my skills in building a coherent argument and analysing primary and secondary sources. This was especially important in the essay I did on **INSERT TOPIC** where I found it interesting that...’*

- **Course** – How does this link to your chosen course?
‘At University, I look forward to applying this knowledge and building on my current analytical skills further.’





Question 1) Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Activity / example / experience (be specific)	Benefits (skills / knowledge / experience gained)	Course (link to your chosen course)



| Need some inspiration?

Some examples of things that might have inspired/motivated you to study your chosen course/s

- Personal life experiences like being a carer, the environment where you grew up or an inspirational friend, colleague or family member
- A book you read
- A news article or blog/vlog
- A project you created
- YouTube video, podcast, a show you saw or [Subject Spotlights](#)
- Work experience
- An extra-curricular activity

Question 2) How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Focus on what's most **recent** and **relevant** to the subject or course(s) you're applying for.

How your studies relate to chosen course(s) or subject area:

- This could be current or previous studies.
- From any form of formal education – think school, college, training provider, or short online university course.

What relevant or transferable skills you have that make you a great candidate:

- Are there a couple of subjects that helped develop skills required for your chosen course(s)?
- Maybe a particular module or project helped you understand where your interests and strengths lie?

Any relevant educational achievements?

- Universities and colleges will see grades on their application - don't waste space talking about these.
- Focus on accomplishments like a competition, holding a position of responsibility or representing the school/college.

Example 1

Activity

During my A level studies, I have been particularly interested in DNA and its functions. Learning about replication and protein synthesis was an eye opening experience and a real glimpse into the true intricacy present in all life. Expanding on this interest, I read 'The Selfish Gene' By Richard Dawkins and I was particularly taken aback by the chapter titled 'Immortal coils' which documents the gene-centred view of evolution. This view was new to me and I haven't looked at evolution, or other biological processes, in the same light since.....

Benefit

Needs to go on to link this to their chosen **C**ourse

Example 2

Activity

A recent achievement has been setting up a GCSE physics revision site for younger students at my school as part of my computer science A-level. I carried out a significant amount of research prior to designing the site and this was definitely a worthwhile activity. This made me realise how important communication is when producing products. My main goal is to be part of a team that creates efficient and useful software for consumers. This is something I hope to pursue at university where I know there will be elements of project work throughout my Computer Science studies.

Course

Benefit

| Need some inspiration?

Here are some examples you could use for this section:

- Specific modules or topics
- Essays or projects that explore a particular view point or technique
- EPQ – Extended Project Qualification
- School, local, or national competitions e.g. UK Maths Trust
- Private lessons and qualifications e.g. music, stage school or sports if relevant to the course
- Tutoring or mentoring
- Online courses leading to a qualification





Question 2) How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Activity / example / experience (be specific)	Benefits (skills / knowledge / experience gained)	Course (link to your chosen course)



Question 3) What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

Examples should **demonstrate** further **suitability** for the subject or course(s).

Work experience, employment, or volunteering

- In-person or virtual work experience.
- Paid for work or volunteering.

Personal life experiences or responsibilities:

- A situation you've personally overcome that has influenced your decision?
- Personal experiences that have helped you develop essential qualities for the course?

Hobbies and any extracurricular or outreach activities:

- Think sports, reading, community work, summer schools etc.
- Any activities outside of core studies that help showcase why you'd make a great student.

Achievements outside of school or college

- Position of responsibility for local clubs or groups, competitions, or qualifications you've attained outside of the classroom etc

Example 1

Activity

I participated in the Make Happen sport science summer school at The University of Essex Colchester campus. The most interesting lecture was in The Human Performance Lab. During this practical lecture we learnt about sport science practical testing. We took the athletes height and weight and got the treadmill set up for scientific testing. While exercising we measured the athletes O₂, CO₂, VO₂ Max as well as taking blood from their finger to measure glucose level throughout exercise. Using team work skills, we then wrote a report using various graphs to demonstrate their results and put together a fitness and dietary plan to improve performance. It was great to have the opportunity to practise the same skills and practical tasks I would be doing as part of a Sports Science university student.

Benefit

Course

Example 2

I have achieved my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award, am currently working towards my Silver, and am hoping to gain Gold level at university. I love planning and undertaking expeditions as they are physically demanding and require total teamwork from start to finish. I also enjoy working for the 'service' element of the award where I volunteer at a local care home once a week. This work can be emotionally draining at times but is incredibly rewarding. The resilience this has taught me will be invaluable to my psychology studies at university and eventually when I go on to train as a Psychologist.

Activity

Benefit

Course

| Need some inspiration?

Here are some examples you might have for this section:

- Extra-curricular activities, volunteering
- Personal life experiences e.g. caring for a family member
- Young enterprise
- Extended Project Qualification
- Work experience, work-based learning or shadowing
- Job/employment – part-time or full-time
- Online learning activities e.g. Springpod, MOOCs etc.
- Summer schools, campus visits or subject taster sessions
- Trips and visits - Museums, exhibitions, sites of historic interest or sites connected to your course e.g. magistrate courts for law etc.
- [Wider reading](#), Podcasts, TED talks, documentaries etc.
- Duke of Edinburgh awards



Question 3) What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

Activity / example / experience (be specific)	Benefits (skills / knowledge / experience gained)	Course (link to your chosen course)



The conclusion

The ending



Answer “why **you** should be offered a place”.

Connect to **beginning**, reinforce great points to make you **memorable**.

| Top Tips

- Vary the way you start sentences. Helpful sentence starter can force you to drill down into the specifics a lot quicker, allowing you to be more concise:
 - “Studying A-level Maths gave me an insight into...”
 - “During a lecture on criminal law at a university summer school, I learnt...”
 - “Working at X made me appreciate...”
- Check the 4,000-character limit.
- Get someone else to check your spelling and grammar as there is no in-built check! Write in Word or Unifrog first so you’ve got a copy saved elsewhere.
- Avoid clichés, quotes and catchy phrases.
- Use AI carefully! Copying chunks of text is considered plagiarism.



| Next steps

- UCAS has lots of help and resources available
 - UCAS Hub has a ‘personal statement builder’
 - ucas.com/writing-your-personal-statement#applying-for-2026-entry
 - Subject-specific guides at ucas.com/2026-personal-statement-guides
- Sources of wider reading at causeway.education/wider-reading
- Free courses at futurelearn.com/ and open.edu/openlearn/free-courses
- Get work experience! springpod.com and theforage.com are useful places to find virtual work experience programmes.
- Ask current uni students at ucas.com/chat-to-students



FAQs

What if an example could fit into more than 1 section?

- Don't agonise over which section to include information in; the important thing is that it's included somewhere in the statement as it will be reviewed as a whole by universities and colleges, so don't waste characters by repeating information across the sections.

Do I have to write the same amount in each section?

- No. The 4000 characters can be used across all the questions in whatever way works best for you. Provided you hit the minimum character count (350 per section), you can absolutely write more in one section than another depending on what's more important for you and the course you're applying for.



Are any of the questions more important or weighted more highly?

- This very much depends on the university or college you are applying to, as well as the course you are looking to study. We would recommend checking providers' personal statement guidance and advice on this. For instance, courses like nursing or medicine will lean more heavily on the importance of question three due to the focus on work experience.

What if I am applying for a brand new subject that I haven't studied before?

- Universities will be used to this for certain courses and you won't be the only student.
- It's still important to link the current subjects/courses you have done to how this has made you prepared to study this new subject. The content won't be the same but think about transferable skills!
- They'll also expect you to have used your own initiative and have a lot of course-related activities to discuss in-depth. There is plenty of resources out there for this (see links on next steps slide). You could reflect on wider reading you've done, an additional course you have completed online or volunteering/work experience that relates to the subject area.
- You could find a unibuddy that is currently studying the subject you want to apply for- ask them what it's like, did anything surprise them and what evidence they used in their personal statement (see link on next steps slide)
- Remember- they don't expect you to be an expert in a new subject area but they do want to know that you have understood what you're applying for and know what to expect. They want to avoid students starting courses that they drop out of later because it wasn't what they expected it to be.

What if I am applying to do a joint honours degree?

- E.g. 1 personal statement, covering 2 subject areas
- Firstly, you don't need to justify why they're together as subjects, as many students wrongly do. Instead, still focus on why you want to do both of them.
- Focus on the overlapping key skills and interests in both and how you can evidence them E.g. History & Art, History & Law -> analysing and comparing sources, assessing validity.
- Pick an academic topic from each subject area to discuss in detail but that still shows you have the transferable skills for both.
- Universities will understand from your statement that you're applying for a joint honours.
- Further help available at www.ucas.com/applying/applying-university/writing-your-personal-statement/how-write-personal-statement-works-multiple-courses-2026-entry

What if I am applying to a course 'with' something else (this usually means the subjects are less related)?

- These aren't usually joint honours courses- they might be higher % of one subject with a smaller % of another. E.g. Biology with French. You would be the responsibility of the Biology department but would do some modules over in the French department.
- Don't try to justify why the subjects are together or force any similarities/tenuous links. Instead, focus on why you want to do both of them one at a time.
- Example-
 - “ I want to study Biology with French due to my interest in the skills involved in each of these disciplines...
 - » A paragraph on 'I want to study Biology because...(picking a specific topic to discuss)'
 - » A paragraph on 'I want to study French because...(picking a specific topic to discuss).' This just might be slightly shorter if this is the minority subject.

What if I am applying for Medicine or a Healthcare subject?

- Be aware of early entry deadline for some of these courses and the potential for them to interview as part of the process. Make sure what you write in your statement, you can back up in an interview!
- Usually need to evidence work experience. Make sure you are taking up any opportunity to do virtual alternatives. Volunteering is a great way to show similar skills.
- As well as academic and scientific knowledge, you will need to demonstrate you have the right interpersonal skills and values for this kind of subject and career. You'll need to show more in your statement with the same amount of characters as everyone else so definitely choose high quality, indepth examples over quantity!

Can I use AI/Chat GPT to help me write my personal statement?

- Yes and No! Yes, within reason if used to brainstorm ideas, or to check readability.
- Generating (and then copying, pasting and submitting) all or a large part of your personal statement from an AI tool, and presenting it as your own words, **could be considered cheating by universities and colleges** and could affect your chances of an offer.
- When you complete your application, you have to declare that your personal statement hasn't been copied or provided from another source, including artificial intelligence software.
- The UCAS Verification Team then runs checks to detect fraudulent applications and patterns of similarity in personal statements
- UCAS guidance - [A guide to using AI and ChatGPT with your personal statement](#)

Thank you, any questions?

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