

Writing the Perfect UCAS Personal Statements and References

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Personal Statements and References

- Preparation for students
- What are admissions tutors looking for?
- Top tips for effective personal statements
- The process of writing a reference
- Predicted grades
- More top tips

Teacher's role in applications

- Understanding of the UCAS process
- Encourage research and timely applications among students
- Provide advice and guidance about university choices (HE institutions can help!)
- Advise on what and what NOT to write
- Provide a Reference
- **Not** expected to re-write every statement

The importance of starting EARLY

- Processing starts in Sept 2013
- Competition now tougher

DEADLINES

- Oxbridge, Medicine, Dentistry, Vets - 15th October 2013
- Most courses - 15th January 2014
- Some Art and Design Courses - 24th March 2014
- Students should be aware of school's deadline
- Entrance tests? e.g. LNAT / UKCAT / BMAT
- Gap Year - apply for deferred entry



Personal Statements

What Admissions Tutors are looking for

- A clear well written UCAS application form
- Why have you chosen this subject?
- An understanding of the subject
- Current Studies
- Aspirations
- Enthusiasm
- Work Experience, Volunteer Work
- Extra-curricular activities
- Evidence of relevant skills

Essential Research

- Prospectuses
- University websites
- Open Days
- ucas.com



Tips

Archaeology at University of Leicester

No prior knowledge or experience of Archaeology is required, although any knowledge of the subject that you do have will be valuable. Previous experience of archaeological fieldwork and self-directed reading about the subject are particularly welcomed.

Successful students display a wide variety of key skills. These include excellent written and oral communication skills, a capacity to think critically, time management and the ability to learn independently.

In addition to academic ability, successful students will be highly motivated and self-disciplined and will be original and innovative thinkers.

Examples of Good Advice -LSE History

- Before you write your personal statement, please visit our online course guides ... For example, students applying to History at Cambridge can choose to study Ancient History as part of their degree. However the History course at LSE does not offer any Ancient History units. If the Admissions Tutor reads a personal statement which includes information on an applicant's interest in Ancient History, they will not make the applicant an offer as it does not show evidence of interest in the particular course that is offered at LSE, which focuses on International History.

A Suggested Structure

- Three parts divided into easy to read paragraphs:
 - Why do they want to study this course?
 - What have they done that demonstrates that they would be a good student?
 - Final statement summarising their strong selling points
- Students should plan as you would plan an assignment

Demonstrates that they would be a good student

- What skills are needed for the course?
- Any jobs/voluntary work or hobbies where they can demonstrate these skills?
- Other responsibilities?
- Try to make it relevant to the choice

Avoid....

- Defining the subject
- Listing their A-Level subjects in statement
- Overly enthusiastic (!!!!)
- Embroidering the truth
- Being too quirky
 - Conscientious, not wacky



Important!

- Email addresses should be appropriate
- Students should check it thoroughly **before** submitting (spelling and grammar)

Genuine Examples

“...I am working with a software developer on an application to be used in hospitals

(Do I need to talk about this job? It’s quite technical could I talk about that?)”

“...and played for the XXXX Junior American Football team. (is all this cr*p relevant or not?) (Should I mention I was head pupil in Yr 9?)”

From the horse's mouth

“A good personal statement should make it clear why the candidate wants to read their particular subject and supply concrete evidence of that enthusiasm. It should reflect the distinctive style and characteristics of its author...The worst statements are polished but boring.”

Nicholas Shrimpton

Vice-Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University

Education Guardian

Exercise - how good a judge are you?



Criminology

“From watching and reading Sherlock Holmes, Cracker, CSI and Crime watch, my interest in criminology has developed. Criminology has always had a glamorous image but it is more than that it deals with criminals and supports the justice system. Criminology is all about crime and punishment. It is an exciting inter-disciplinary subject which draws on Sociology, Psychology and Law to help examine how crime is defined, why people commit crimes, and how society responds to crimes.”

Having been a Nottingham Forest supporter for the majority of my life, I have always wondered how such an illustrious club full of history has not played top-flight football for the best part of ten years and are now currently in the lower regions of the football league. It could well be the fact that past managers making poor decisions has resulted in Forest's failure, in an attempt to bring back the glory years under the leadership of the great Brian Clough. This is where my fascination for management began. Having studied Business Studies since GCSE level, my interest of the subject has been extended to A-level.

As well as Business Studies, my other subjects at A-level include Computing and General Studies, along with English Literature at AS-level. Having enjoyed Business Studies during my AS-levels, I feel that the people and operations module was the most interesting in my opinion. In particular, the methods of motivation businesses use to keep their staff happy and the different types of leadership management used such as McGregor's theory. Using these theories to compare how successful companies are at keeping their staff motivated has encouraged me to study business at degree level.

During year 12 I was involved in the young enterprise scheme, where I was secretary for our company 'Pivot', which produced t-shirts that were designed by pupils. This involved producing minutes for meetings and keeping everyone within the company up to date on a weekly basis. This experience enabled me to become more organised and to meet deadlines when set. My other accomplishments at school include receiving full colours for football at the end of year 12, as well as being awarded form prize for year 11 at the school's annual prize giving ceremony. Being given these accolades has given me the motivation to work hard at school and to succeed in life.

My love for sport, particularly football, is backed up by being selected for the 6th form 1st team at left back. I also play football outside school, having played for my local football team, Great Gonerby Youth Football club, from 2002 to 2006. I currently play for a team close to where my father lives, Southwell City under 18's. Playing for a football team has made me realise how important it is to be able to work in a team and to be able to communicate well with others. This also provides me a welcome break from my academic studies.

I am fascinated with dentistry because I love to network and build computers.

If I spoke these words aloud, many people would think I was nuts and appear confused. At first glance, this statement seems nonsensical. However, upon closer look, however, it makes perfect sense.

When I work on computers, I am constantly working in very tight spaces inside a computer case, taking extreme care not to damage delicate equipment. As a dentist, I perform many duties within the smallest of spaces, using fine instruments on delicate surfaces.

Of course, the connection between building a computer and providing dental care. While building a computer allows me to employ my manual skills, only one has the significant interpersonal component that I seek in a career. While I am grateful to the computer technician who corrects glitches in my operating system, I have far more gratitude to the orthodontist who straightened my teeth as a child...

Websites

www.studential.com

www.thestudentroom.co.uk

www.getintouni.com

Beware ...

- Cheats will be found out!
- UCAS Similarity Detection Service - 'Copycatch'
- Research shows that 95% of UCAS applicants wrote their own PS but ...
- That still leaves 5% (or 1 in 20) who 'borrow' from others

The UCAS Reference

- What is it?
- The process
- Predicted grades
- What goes in the reference?
- Tips: Do's and Don'ts

The Reference: What is it?

An informed and academic assessment of:

- their academic performance in their post-16 education
- their potential for academic success in higher education
- why the course they have chosen is suited to them
- any personal qualities which will benefit them at university, such as skills, aptitude, enthusiasm
- what they can bring to the university, such as extra-curricular activities and interests
- 4000 Character word limit

The Process

This will be different at different schools, but we suggest...

- Students ask to provide information about themselves (pro forma and /or discussion) and to compile grade predictions
- Subject teachers provide specific comments and predicted grades
- Personal Tutor may provide statement on personal qualities and assemble the reference, editing it to include introduction and conclusion, ensure consistency and that it 'reads well'
- Completed reference added to online application for final checking and submission by senior 'authorised' UCAS contact

Predicted grades

- Predicted grades should be clear and unambiguous, and need to consider:
 - Do they match the entrance requirements of the courses chosen?
 - Are they consistent with the past academic performance of the student?
 - Do they match the reference?
- If 'No' to any of the above, need to provide explanation in the reference.

How to write the reference

Structure is not set in stone, but should include:

- Background information on the applicant and the school
- Academic performance post-16
- Extra Curricular activities / Personality
- Suitability for the course

Background/context of school

- Relevant info about school:
 - Size / type of school
 - Number of students & proportion going to HE
 - Range and number of A-levels studied by students
 - Contextual info about the catchment area
- Corresponding relevant info about the student:
 - participation in special programmes e.g. WP / G&T / Compacts
 - Individual circumstances that may merit special consideration

Academic performance post-16

- Current / past achievement in the subject(s)
- Motivation, attitude and commitment
- Supplementary course / study information
- Curriculum enrichment
- Underperformance / Extenuating circumstances?
- Note/explain deviations from standard programme
- Link to predicted grades

Extra Curricular activities/ Personality

- Complement the Personal Statement
- Personal qualities that will benefit them at university
- Skills, aptitude and enthusiasm
- What they can contribute to university
- Work experience, volunteering, sport, music
- Additional needs (e.g. disabilities)

Suitability for the course

- Has the student got the ability to succeed academically?
- What are their career aspirations?
- What type of student would they be?
- Clearly indicate if you would recommend the student

Tips: Don't



- Use stock phrases
- Repeat yourself
- Write as a report (e.g. 'John should concentrate on...')
- Refer to resits, unless it seems positive in the circumstances
- Be specific about universities
- Exaggerate
- Raise weaknesses unless documented, evidenced and communicated to/discussed with student/parents
- Be negative - omit things you can't be positive about

Genuine examples...

- *“In Maths he has demonstrated a good interest and some natural ability. However he is something of an enigma...”*
- *“If working alone, he could be focused and produce promising work. However he comes as part of a package along with his mates and this was counter productive”*



Tips: Do

- Use subject-specific guidelines as applicable
- Add comment where predicted grades are not a true reflection of potential or are inconsistent with achievement so far
- Focus on academic skills, enthusiasm, ICT skills
- Be concise
- Clearly indicate if you are supporting / recommending the student

Further advice

- ucas.com
- University of Leicester's teacher resources page
<http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/scs/resources>
- Contact outreach@le.ac.uk to book information session or workshop in school/college.

Any Questions?



2008/9
THE AWARDS
UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR

2009/10
THE AWARDS
OUTSTANDING SUPPORT
FOR STUDENTS