



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

How to write your personal statement

Monica Kulkarni



How to write your personal statement

- **Three main sections:**

1. Writing about your course
2. Writing about your skills, extracurricular and work experience
3. Writing about your future plans

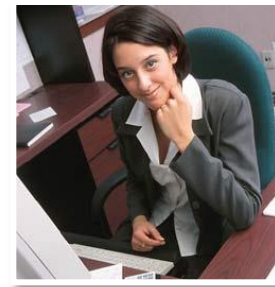
- **How to start and end your personal statement**

Personal Statements: do they matter?

- Vital for some courses
- Important for others
- Relevant at the margin for others
- Always just one part of the selection process

Who decides?

- Academic staff
- Departmental administrators
- Central administrators



How do they decide?

- Own personal judgement
- Check-list of criteria

Writing about your course

- Why are you applying for your chosen course(s)?
- Why does this subject interest you? Include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course, e.g. if applying for psychology courses, show that you understand how scientific the subject is.
- Do your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen? If so, how? And which bits do you currently enjoy that you want to learn more about?
- Have you taken part in any other activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)?
- What extra reading/activities have you done to further your interest in the course(s)

Provide evidence!!!

Skills, extracurricular activities and work experience

- Why do you think you're suitable for the course(s)?
- Do you understand which skills/experience are needed for the course?
- Do you have evidence of these skills and experience (academic, extracurricular, work or voluntary) that you will need for the course and will help you to succeed on it?
- Demonstrate that you can balance your extracurricular studies with your academic studies.

Writing about your future plans

You know what you want to do

How will you use the knowledge and experience?

How does the course relate to your plans?

You're not sure what you want to do

What do you want to gain from the course?

How will it provide opportunities?

How to start and end your personal statement

Introduction:

- Why do you want to do the course
- How did you make your decision?
- Show your enthusiasm for the subject - why do you want to spend 3/4 years at University studying this subject in depth?

- Make it personal
- Make it interesting
- Use an anecdote?
- Use a quote??

Conclusion:

- Short and sharp
- Choose your key messages carefully and convey them concisely
- Don't simply regurgitate what you've already said
- Finish on a positive note with something that adds to your statement
- Why should the University want to make **you** an Offer?

Examples

How to start and end your personal statement

Engineering

From Beijing's Olympic Bird's Nest Stadium and the International Space Station to the increasingly versatile mobile phone, it is very easy to see how feats of engineering pervade every area of our lives today. After reading *Invention By Design* (Petroski) and seeing in detail how engineers have developed weird ideas into household items, I am even more convinced that engineering is the career for me, as I have enjoyed imagining and building things since I was very young.

Politics

Politics is vital: it touches every aspect of our lives, whether the general public realises it or not. There is one political issue that I find particularly interesting: civil liberties, and their erosion. This has prompted me to join the pressure group Liberty and has introduced me to books such as *The Assault on Liberty* by D Raab. I want to delve deeper into the world of politics, to analyse and evaluate other political systems and ideologies, and to discover how political events have shaped the world, for example how WWII contributed to the formation of the EU. Moreover, it appears that the future of our planet will depend on political decisions and international co-operation. The challenge for politics is immense, and I want to be a part of the solution.

Biological Sciences

When I think about it, my interest in Biology all started when my mother told me that she was expecting identical twins. At the time I only had a very basic understanding of reproduction and I remember being utterly baffled, thinking 'How can there possibly be two?' Being inquisitive, I began reading lots of multiple pregnancy books and gained a greater understanding of how the zygote must split in two in the very early stages of pregnancy. I am still very interested in this area, as what causes the split is still a mystery amongst scientists. Nowadays my interest in Biology is much wider, for example the GM crop debate, stem cell research and of course evolution of life on Earth. An area that particularly interests me is research into methods of preventing the spread of malaria. I have read several articles about the issue. One intriguing method involves genetically engineering mosquitoes to be malaria resistant. Entomologist Michael Riehle has altered a 'signalling protein' that stops the gut from developing normally, preventing the malaria parasite developing in the mosquitoes. Although there are still initial problems with the scientific research, in this case giving the GM mosquitoes a competitive advantage, it is cutting edge, experimental science like this that makes me excited to study Biology.

Advice from an Admissions Tutor

"Writing the Personal Statement is a challenging task: within a relatively short space you need to present yourself as the type of person I would want to teach as a student. Clearly, your academic performance is very important but it only tells me about one aspect of you as a person. Why do you want to study my subject at university? What is it that really fires your enthusiasm and means that you won't just go through the motions, but will actually want to learn about the subject for its own sake?"

Writing answers to these questions will take you a long way, but what I also want to see is how you have demonstrated this enthusiasm already; how you have gone out of your way to expose yourself to the subject in ways above and beyond the basics of the courses you are being taught at school or college and, importantly, what you learnt as a result of doing that.

I also want you to tell me about you as a real, three-dimensional person. If you are the queen of salsa or play in the local rugby team, tell me about it and how you motivate yourself to do things and fit them all together in your daily life. But above all else, be an enthusiast, both for what you are doing now and also for where you see your future taking you."

Dr Jon Scott, Senior Lecturer and Admissions Tutor for Biological Sciences



More advice...

"Don't just tell us that you find a subject interesting: pick an example (a scene from a novel, perhaps, or a production of a play you've seen) and write a bit about how it works, and what interests you about it. Some of the best personal statements I've read have been quite straightforward in their language, but show genuine commitment towards reading as a worthwhile, stimulating and intellectually challenging activity."

Dr Mary Ann Lund (English)

"Evidence is the key. If a student can provide evidence this makes their statement very much stronger. For example, things like volunteering work in schools, relevant work experience, perhaps science or astronomy clubs, or work with the Institute of Physics would all be impressive evidence of passion and motivation for Physics. We're also interested in interests and achievements outside of the curriculum - so things like Duke of Edinburgh awards, membership of sports clubs, or involvement in plays, bands etc. tend to read well."

Dr Mervyn Roy (Physics)

Do	Don't
Ensure it is well written with correct grammar and spelling.	Provide lists of things without explaining why they are relevant.
Create a clear structure to your work to enable the reader to easily follow your argument.	Submit a single block of text as that can make your work difficult to read.
Explain why you want to dedicate yourself to the study of your chosen topic.	Use quotes or examples you found online. Every year admissions tutors see recycled ideas that are remarkably similar to several other applicants.
Show how you've pursued your interest outside the school/college syllabus.	Plagiarise.
Use examples from your own personal experiences to illustrate your skills.	Define the subject. Rather show what you understand and find interesting about it.
Liaise with the teacher who is writing your reference so that your work compliments one another.	Refer to particular universities or courses by name as each tutor will think that your preferred option is theirs unless you indicate otherwise!
Mention issues that you think an admissions tutor needs to take into consideration when assessing your application	

Personal Statements in summary:

- A clear well-written statement
- Academic ability
- Enthusiasm – clear reasons for wanting to study the course
- An understanding of the subject
- Application / evidence of your knowledge, skills and motivation
- Write positively, concisely and honestly in your own words
- Draft, redraft, check and check again!

Any Questions?

