



TOOT HILL COLLEGE

STUDENT HANDBOOK 2020 – 2021.

HOW TO WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT.

Author Peter Waterland
Toot Hill College Advisor.
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Practical advice and suggestions to help Toot Hill College students prepare and write their Personal Statements for inclusion on their UCAS university application forms.

For the students at Toot Hill College for whom the future holds many bright and exciting opportunities.



What is a Personal Statement?

- It's a succinct statement written by you in which you explain why YOU are exactly the sort of student the University wants on their course.
- Its sole purpose is to convince the University Admissions tutor why you should be given a place on the course.
- It forms part of your UCAS Application form.

My suggested plan for writing your Statement starts on page 9.

But before you start writing it, read through these notes and advice. They **will** help you write a better Personal Statement.

Before making a start on your Personal Statement:

Read and take note of this advice:

Make sure you are absolutely sure which course you wish to study at university and which university is your first choice. Consider *all* the following points:-

- Research your chosen university course(s) and future profession/career in detail.
- Check the University website – many include advice from their admission tutors on what they are looking for in personal statements.
- Make sure you know the answers to the following questions:-
- What specific topics do they include as part of their course?
- Which topics are compulsory?
- Which topics do you choose (“electives”) and which ones would you choose from the choices given?
- Do they mention any particular skills you will need to have (or develop)?

- Do they mention what qualities they are looking for in a candidate?
- How is the course assessed? Is it all exams? Is there any course-work involved and what information do they give about writing your dissertation?

Once you have done your research, it should give you a good idea on what particular qualities you have that you need to emphasise in your own personal statement.

Your Personal Statement

- It is the only part of the application process written by you, apart from your personal details.
- Is read by the University Admission Tutors. It needs to impress them!
- It forms a major part of the evidence they use to decide whether or not to offer you a place at their university.
- It has a length limit of 4000 characters, or 47 lines.
- (n.b. the space between each word counts as a character and any space between paragraphs counts as one of the lines.)

What should I include in my Personal Statement?

- Everything must be relevant to the question: “Why should we (the university) give you a place on this course?”
- There is no set formula for a Personal Statement
- However, below I have listed the areas that should usually be included:-
 1. A short, strong opening to engage the reader
 2. A clear explanation of why you want to study this course
 3. Your proven achievements that show you are capable of studying this course
 4. Evidence that you have taken an interest in this course/subject beyond the classroom. (e.g. work, reading or activities that have been undertaken independently and have not been set by your teacher.)
 5. Additional knowledge relevant to the course. (e.g. do your other A-level subjects relate to the course?)
 6. Additional transferable skills relevant to the course.

Some examples of transferable skills

- Working independently
- Taking on responsibility
- Meeting deadlines
- Teamwork
- Communicating effectively
- Curiosity to learn and taking on a challenge
- Ability to learn new facts quickly

- Leadership
- Logical thinking
- Public speaking
- Being well organised
- Being positive
- Problem solving
- Teaching others
- Enjoying a challenge

This list is not exhaustive but shows you the kind of skills in which universities are interested. You do need to ***provide evidence*** of any transferable skill you mention.

Then you need to include relevant “Enrichment” activities which have helped develop your character i.e Activities in which you have learnt something about yourself.

Some examples of “Enrichment” activities.....

- Sports Teams
- Student Union Officer
- Student voice in Lower School
- World Challenge
- Duke of Edinburgh
- Playing musical instrument(s)
- Drama
- Mentoring younger students
- Scouts
- Guides
- Cadets
- Toe-by-Toe and 12-4-8
- Part time employment
- Responsibility at home e.g. Carer
- Voluntary language classes
- Other hobbies.

Again, this list is not exhaustive but should give you an idea of the kinds of things that may be included.

This is not the time to be modest! You need to “advertise yourself”!

- Approximately **75%** of your personal Statement should be focused on your academic ability to study this course at University.
- Only **25%** should be about additional enrichment activities.
- Always be specific. i.e. Give a specific example to support everything you say about yourself.
- Always explain why everything you mention is relevant to *why YOU should be given a place on THIS course*.
- Lead with your strongest points. Include your greatest achievements first, don't leave them to the end.
- Say what is special and unique about *you*. What do you have that no-one else has? How do you stand out from other students studying the same course? (in a good way of course!)
- **Proof read your work.** Spelling and grammar mistakes are a big NO !

What to avoid when writing your Personal Statement.

- Incorrect spelling and bad grammar
- Long sentences
- Names of Universities (remember, this application goes to every university to which you have applied)
- Rhetorical questions
- Repeating academic details
- Talking about "when I was young"
- Being formulaic and stilted vocabulary and sentence structure
- Flattery
- Overuse of the phrase "I am *passionate* about...."
- Cliches
- Trying to be funny
- Random lists and sweeping statements and claims about yourself
- Plagiarism, exaggerations or lies about your achievements

And remember the length of your Personal Statement is limited to 4000 characters (including the spaces) or 47 lines.

BUT.....

Before you start writing, you need to think through your ideas. Try using the following 'IDEAS GENERATOR' to brainstorm your ideas.

PERSONAL STATEMENT - IDEAS GENERATOR.

(If some questions don't apply to you, don't worry, leave them blank.)

Research ALL the courses you are applying for from the university websites.

What exactly are the entry requirements from each of the universities to which you are applying? Do they mention any specific skills they are looking for? What topics (compulsory/optional) will be included in your course? How will your performance be assessed?

What topics have you already studied that may be relevant to your chosen subject area?

Which of these have you been particularly good at? What evidence do you have? Which of these have you particularly enjoyed and why? Which of these are most relevant to your course?

What *additional* work have you done related to your subject outside the classroom? i.e. work that was *not* set by the teacher. e.g. Additional reading you have done? Newspaper articles? Magazines? Internet Web Pages? TV programmes? Trips? Public lectures? Museums? Documentaries? Debating Societies? Performances? Theatre trips? Concerts?

What other experience have you had of independent study?

EPQ? Coursework, Personal Study, Experiment, other situations of study where *you* decided what and how you would study and not your teacher.

What relevant work experience have you had?

How did your work experience give you more of an insight into your chosen subject and what did you learn about yourself?

Any other academic achievements you can mention?

Academic prizes? Competitions? Full marks in a piece of Coursework? Are you a "Subject Ambassador"?

Have you been involved in teaching or mentoring other pupils or students in Lower School or College?

What have all these experiences taught you about yourself?

What other subjects are you studying in College (or elsewhere?)

Which of these subjects might be relevant to your chosen degree course and how?

Have you been involved in Student Voice during your time in school and College?

**What additional ENRICHMENT activities do you take part in now/ have done recently?
Student Voice, Student Union Officer, Sporting activities, Performance, Debating Societies, Concerts, Music, NCS, DofE, Cadets, Scouts, World Challenge, etc.**

What have you learnt about yourself by taking part in these activities?

Use your bullet points from the boxes above to help you write each paragraph.

******Start writing your own Personal Statement******

Once you have read a few of these to see the sort of things other students have written in the past, you can make a start on your own. Keep referring to your relevant bullet points in the earlier boxes above.

Suggested General Plan.

Paragraph 1.

- A general opening statement or quotation about the subject you wish to study at degree level or straight into:-
- What/who/when was it that first made you interested in the subject?
- How have you're A-level studies developed your interest in the subject?

Paragraph 2 + 3.

- Mention how your other A-level subjects are relevant to the subject you wish to study at Degree level.... the content *and* the skills you have gained by studying them.

- What books and articles about the subject have you read that you enjoyed and you learnt from? (i.e. articles *not* included as part of the A-level course.) Quote something from one that impressed you.
- Any lectures attended, TV programmes/documentaries etc you have seen that are relevant? What specifically did you learn from them?
- Other experiences of independent study, e.g. EPQ evening classes etc.
- Any other academic achievements you can mention? (mentoring younger pupils, academic prizes, subject ambassador etc.)
- Talk about your relevant work experience and what you learnt from it. Also what did you learn about yourself?

Paragraph 4.

- Talk about “enrichment” activities in which you are involved both in College and out of College.
- Are you an officer in the College Student Union?
- What sport, if any, do you play? Do you play for any teams? Any major sporting achievements? Any special qualifications in your sport?
- Do you play any musical instrument and if so to what level (if relevant)
- What have you gained by being involved in these extra-curricular activities?
- What have you learnt about yourself by taking part in these activities?

Paragraph 5 (short)

- Where do you see your career going after you have graduated?
- Last sentence to sum up = something along the lines of:
“I hope I have shown I have the skills, experience and passion to make me the ideal candidate to study at your university where I look forward to developing my academic experiences further”.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do break up the text into paragraphs. • Do try to avoid the use of “I” at the start of every sentence. • Do mention your gap year plans if 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t feel you have to stick to a formula. • Don’t keep using exclamation marks!! • Don’t be afraid to mention how
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<p>you are applying for deferred entry. Try and say how it may be relevant to your future studies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be positive throughout. • Read your statement at the end and imagine you are the admissions tutor reading it – after reading it, would you give yourself a place at this university? • Do ask for advice. • Do give yourself plenty of time to write your Personal Statement. 	<p>you have overcome a disability but don't "milk it" and don't ask for sympathy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't write about the things you are going to do – write about the things you <i>have</i> done. • Don't use txtspk • Don't leave writing your Personal Statement to the last minute. • Don't panic!
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Other considerations to be taken in some special cases.

What if I am applying for different courses or joint/combined courses?

- **If you have chosen a mixture of courses** you will need to blend your Personal Statement very carefully so that all five admissions tutors will feel that it is relevant to their specific course.
- **If you are thinking of applying for totally different courses, then you should seek advice from Mr. Lawrence.**
- **If some or all of your choices are joint or combined courses** then it is important to engage with both subjects in your Statement. If the two subjects have some quite strong connections with each other, it is a good idea to draw some links between them.

If some of your choices are single honours and others are joint or combined, or if they are all joint but some of the combinations are different, it's important that you blend your Statement in such a way that it will be relevant and appeal to everyone who reads it.

Where can you get more help and advice?

- Ask to attend one of the Personal Statement Workshops as advertised in College.
- Ask your Tutor or Mentor.
- Ask Mr. Lawrence.
- Ask Mr. Waterland. (“Open Door Sessions” in the UCAS office Mondays and Fridays.)

Your teachers and mentors are here to help you but we cannot write it for you. It is easier for someone to help you if there is something there they can edit; it is much harder to give advice on a blank page.

Remember, don't feel you are struggling, ask for advice and help, that is what we are here for.

FINALLY

- Do use the Personal Statement Ideas Generator to “brainstorm” your ideas.
- Once you have collected ideas together, make a start on your personal Statement.
- Once you have written it, leave it for a couple of days or so and then come back to it to proof read it. Make any improvements.
- Ask someone else to read it through and possibly make suggestions.
- Start work on your Statement sooner rather than later.
- **In Toot Hill College, we have proved that those students who hand their UCAS applications in to Mr Lawrence early in the Autumn term are the ones who receive offers of university places within a couple of weeks, sometimes even within a few days. They beat the rush.**

GOOD LUCK!

Peter Waterland.
College Advisor.
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