

# UCAS: Personal Statements Support Pack

## 1. What is a Personal Statement?

- It is attached to your UCAS Application.
- It is read by university admissions tutors.
- It forms part of the evidence they use to decide whether to offer you a place.
- It is the only part of the application process written by you.
- It has a length limit of 4000 characters, or 47 lines.
- (A space between paragraphs counts as one of these lines)
- **Its sole PURPOSE is to convince the university admissions tutor why YOU should be given a place on the course.**
- A very useful website about personal statements is <http://university.which.co.uk>

## 2. What should I include in my personal statement?

- Everything must be relevant to the question: 'Why should YOU be given a place on this course?'
- There is no 'formula' – the point of this statement is that it is 'personal'; everyone's will be different.
- Nevertheless, the following areas are usually included in most personal statements:
  - A short, strong opening to engage the reader
  - A clear explanation of why you want to study this course
  - Your proven achievements that show you are capable of studying this course
  - Evidence that you have taken an interest in this course beyond the classroom (work or activity undertaken independently that has not in any way been set by the teacher)
  - Additional knowledge relevant to the course (e.g. do your other subjects relate?)
  - Additional skills relevant to the course (i.e. 'transferable skills')

NB Some examples of desired 'transferable skills' are:

Working independently, taking responsibility, meeting deadlines, teamwork, communicating effectively, curiosity to learn, ability to learn quickly, leadership, logical thinking, public speaking, being organised, being positive, problem solving, resilience, teaching.

- Enrichment activities relevant to the course

E.g. This is a list of many, but not all, enrichment activities:

Student Voice, Student Union, World Challenge, Duke of Edinburgh, sports team, playing musical instruments, drama, helping/mentoring younger students, Scouts, Guides, debating, current affairs, Toe-by-toe, 12-4-8, a job, responsibility at home, languages, other hobbies.

**KEY POINT: 75% of your personal statement should be focused on your academic ability to study this course, with only 25% about additional enrichment activities.**

### 3. **TOP TIPS for writing the best personal statements**

1. Research your chosen courses (or profession) in detail
  - Check the university website – many include advice on what they are looking for in personal statements from their admissions tutors.
  - Make sure you know the answers to the following questions:  
What specific topics do they study as part of the course?  
Which are compulsory?  
Which do you have a choice in? If so, which would you pick?  
Do they mention any particular skills you will need to have (or develop)?  
Do they mention what they are looking for in a candidate?  
How is the course assessed? Is it all exams? Is there any coursework/thesis element?
2. Always be SPECIFIC  
Try to have a specific example to support everything you say about yourself.
3. Always explain why everything you mention is relevant to **why YOU should be given a place on THIS course.**

**A – Action – What specifically have you done? Include DETAIL.**

**B – Benefit – What have you gained or learnt from this? Be SPECIFIC.**

**C – Course – How exactly does this then make you a good candidate for the course?  
Ensure it is RELEVANT.**

4. Lead with your strongest points  
Include your greatest achievements first, don't leave them until last!
5. Be unique (but not 'too' unique)  
What do you have that no one else has? How can you make yourself stand out from the crowd? (In a good way)
6. **Proof read your work**  
Spelling and grammar mistakes are a big NO.

#### 4. **What to avoid when writing a personal statement**

- According to Which? University research undertaken with university admissions tutors.

See <http://university.which.co.uk/advice/10-things-not-to-put-in-your-personal-statement>

And <http://university.which.co.uk/advice/your-ucas-personal-statement-10-more-things-not-to-put-in>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quotes from other people</li><li>• Random lists without elaboration</li><li>• Over-used clichés</li><li>• Sweeping statements or claims about yourself that are not supported by the evidence</li><li>• Limit your use of the word 'passion'</li><li>• Stilted vocabulary</li><li>• Plagiarism, lies or exaggeration</li><li>• Trying to be funny</li><li>• Negative comments or excuses</li><li>• Irrelevant personal facts</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incorrect spelling and bad grammar</li><li>• Long sentences</li><li>• Repeating academic details</li><li>• Rhetorical questions</li><li>• Talking about 'when I was young'</li><li>• Flattery</li><li>• Names of universities</li><li>• Being formulaic</li><li>• Avoid getting stressed!</li></ul> |
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## 5. Some further bits of advice?

<u>Dos</u>	<u>DON'Ts</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do break the text up into paragraphs</li><li>• Do try to avoid using 'I' at the start of every sentence</li><li>• Do mention your gap year plans if applying for deferred entry</li><li>• Finish on a positive note</li><li>• Read your personal statement at the end and imagine you are a university admissions tutor – would you give you a place?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Don't try to cram it all in – less is more</li><li>• Don't feel you have to stick to a formula</li><li>• Don't be afraid to mention how you have overcome a disability</li><li>• Don't keep using exclamation marks!</li><li>• Don't talk about things you are going to do – write in the past tense (and then make sure you do it!)</li><li>• Don't used txtspk</li></ul>

## 6. Where can I get subject specific personal statement advice?

- <http://university.which.co.uk/advice/personal-statement-subject-guides-admission-tutor-tips>

- **OR:**

<http://university.which.co.uk>

→ 'Get Advice'

- Type 'Personal Statement Subject Guides' into the page search engine

## 7. I am not confident starting my personal statement. What steps or checklist can I follow to help me?

1. Decide what you want to study.
2. Select your five courses and research these thoroughly.
3. Gather evidence or ideas – you can use the **Personal Statement Ideas Generator** to help you.
4. Once you have your evidence, turn it into specific examples – what detail can you add to it?
5. Just start writing! 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.

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

- See <http://university.which.co.uk> for more advice.

- **If you have chosen a mixture of courses...**

You will need to compose or blend your statement very carefully so that all five admissions tutors will feel it is relevant to his or her specific course.

If you're thinking of applying for totally different courses, then you should seek advice.

- **If some or all your choices are joint or combined courses**

It is important to engage with both subjects in your statement. If the two subjects have some quite strong connections with each other, it will be effective if you 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, then once again it's more about blending your statement in a way that will appeal to everyone who reads it.

<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/10-things-not-to-put-in-your-personal-statement>

## **Student A: Physics at Oxford University**

Physics is, by definition, the study of light and matter in the universe and how they interact. I struggle to recall a more elegantly simple statement from any of my studies. What interests me, however, is the complexity and challenge involved in becoming enlightened on such topics. Throughout my academic career I have been fascinated by the intricate and complex interactions between light and matter, and how these can be perceived in the real world. I hope that, by studying physics, I can attempt to understand and continue to wonder at the workings of our universe.

I have had much success academically. The quality and breadth of my grades indicates my passion and adaptability for learning across all areas. I decided to study five subjects at AS level to continue my development in a variety of skills that will facilitate physics at a higher level, from detailed analysis to extended writing, as well as demonstrating my commitment to learning. My attainment of over 98% in Physics and Maths demonstrates this commitment to my studies and my ability to effectively deal with large workloads. Studying five subjects provided me with aspects of both the sciences and humanities helping to develop skills as a well-rounded academic. My choice to study further mathematics also reflects a commitment to gain the level of mathematical proficiency required for university study.

Aware of the limitations of college study, I am always keen to extend my understanding of physics. Using MIT OpenCourseware, I am participating in online university classes for calculus. I undertake wider reading as part of my enrichment, covering a variety of topics, especially in cosmology and astrophysics. 'A Brief History of Time' is a favourite of mine, in the way it brings together ideas from quantum and particle physics to explain such a dramatic phenomenon as black hole formation. The elegant symmetry of special relativity when describing constant velocity motion from separate perspectives, though initially counter-intuitive given classical physics, is interesting, especially in the process of its derivation given the constant velocity of light and principle of relativity.

I am involved in a range of enrichment programmes, such as an Extended Project, assessing the feasibility of future travel to Mars and Proxima Centauri. As well as extending my knowledge of this aspect of applied physics, the project was also in developing skills in research and academic writing. I have also been involved in the Engineering Education Scheme, working with engineers from Boots' Pharmaceuticals. This involved a six month project, examining ways to improve the efficiency of Boots' industrial cooling systems. This gave me invaluable experience of applying physical principles learned during my studies to real world problems, as well as expanding my knowledge into new areas such as fluid dynamics. Through my work during the scheme, I was able to complete a work experience placement at the Boots' engineering department, where analysis of efficiencies I produced was used in presentation to company executives.

I enjoy a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, from regularly camping and walking as part of the Scout association and the Silver Duke of Edinburgh award, to playing in a variety of musical ensembles from Brass Band to Ska Band! For a period of six years I wrote a monthly column in a local magazine distributed to 5,000 households, which I feel demonstrates my commitment, ability to work to strict deadlines, and versatility. These activities help to develop wider, more socially oriented skills which cannot be taught, such as team work, flexibility and confidence.

I feel that my skills and passion make me an ideal candidate to study Physics at degree level, as I have the academic ability to gain the knowledge required, and the interest to develop an intricate and detailed understanding of the mathematical description of physical processes.

## **Student B: Law at Cambridge University**

My passion for Law was sparked by an inquisitive resolve that has inspired me to pursue my interest in topical issues. As a leading member of my college debating society I have discovered a fascination with crime and justice, enjoyment of arguing a challenging case and an innate ability to speak with confidence to a critical audience. These attributes, second only to my keen interest in the law and its relevance in everyday life, are why I aspire to study law.

I have a specific interest in criminal law, although I wish to secure a broad understanding of the law to satisfy my inquisitive and challenging mind. I regularly listen to the BBC podcasts 'Law in Action' and read The Guardian's law supplement. Critical debates discussed in these and other publications, such as 'What About Law?' (Barnard et. al.) and 'Law & Modern Society' (Atiyah) have provided a fascinating insight into the study of law and its relevance. Visits to the Crown Court public gallery have provided me with a real appreciation of the perception of law, linking legal theory to practice. A work experience placement with a barrister in private chambers in Nottingham allowed me to value the impact of the law. I observed different interactions within the court room; most poignantly the incessant need for criminal lawyers to remain objective. Similarly I learned to appreciate the importance of being able to think quickly, to retort and follow a line of questioning, along with trying to manipulate different pieces of evidence to your advantage. These skills are not too dissimilar to those I have gained from the debating society and academic study. I was invited to an observational work experience with Chatterton's solicitors, thus giving me an insight into another legal profession. Both opportunities opened my eyes to a diverse range of legal concepts. Whilst taking part in the training of Lay Magistrates I was able to further understand the breadth of legal provision. This experience informed me of the processes and priorities when handling criminal cases involving young offenders. I particularly enjoyed the chance to communicate with interesting and dedicated lay people from a variety of backgrounds.

My Extended Project question 'The after effects of homicide and rape on victims and victims' families and to what extent support is provided', has augmented my preference for independent learning. My analytical ability and critical reasoning enabled multi-faceted arguments within the project to develop. Likewise for my History personal study I enjoyed investigating social, historical and legal issues relating to cases of Witch-hunts in Early Modern Europe.

As an active member of my school community, I initiated and subsequently led a 'Student Ambassadors' scheme, to give students an active voice within the school. As a main feature of this scheme I was asked to make presentations to prospective parents and organise focus groups. The scheme provided me with exciting new experiences such as an interview by Radio Nottingham. These opportunities allowed me to speak more confidently in public, which I feel is one of my strongest attributes. The role of ambassador also helped me to manage some testing situations and challenging questions with poise.

I enjoy seizing opportunities; running the Robin Hood Half Marathon, organising a Christmas Party for less privileged children, writing the College Panto and waitressing to fund my independence. Currently, I am raising funds to participate in a World Challenge Expedition to Morocco, which I hope will enrich my cultural understanding along with contributing to the Moroccan community through project work.

As a determined, committed, intelligent individual with a passionate social conscience, I am keen to embrace all the challenges and opportunities of a University and legal career.

## Student C: Business at Manchester

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest" - Benjamin Franklin. I strongly believe that I am well-suited to a career in finance as I am keen to utilise skills which I have acquired through my academic studies and past experiences. Maths, business and ICT are subjects which compliment each other and all address major areas of finance in their content. I am a methodical thinker who pays particular attention to detail, and I appreciate that these skills are essential in finance. My first real interest of finance was triggered by the study of business at AS level; an area which I thrived in and thoroughly enjoyed. Through this I learnt of the fundamentals of bookkeeping within an organisation. Along side my studies I also undertook a work experience placement with Coca-Cola; from this I gained a new perspective on how large organisations operate and how crucial teamwork is to the success of a company. My academic studies allowed me to gain experience of analysing financial data, assessing the performance of a business by interpreting final accounts and carry out ratios. However, I am keen to gain further insight into investment within organisations. Working in the hospitality industry has allowed me to understand the dynamics involved in effective teamwork. I always try hard to work collaboratively with others, whether this involves helping other staff with their workload, or simply performing my job to the best of my ability. From working in a kitchen I have learnt to be well-organised; this is an important attribute for any working environment, whilst I also appreciate communicating with other staff is critical to increase efficiency in the kitchen. During my work experience placement at Coca-Cola I had the opportunity to work within the largest factory in Europe. Having the opportunity to observe and take note of the functions of a large organisation made me further aware of how important teamwork is in any business. I also got a glimpse of the financial side of the organisation through looking at the yields of the business, as well as asset care. These two sectors focus on the costs of the business coupled with the performance, and I found it fascinating how the finance team primarily measure company efficiency and work on keeping costs low. I consider myself to be a well-rounded individual and taking part in a range of activities has always been important to me. I have always loved football; I have played for my local youth team for many years and have recently begun playing for the senior team. The standard I have reached highlights my team spirit and determination to succeed. I joined the Scouts from the age of six, and I moved through all of the levels of scouting, from beaver to explorer. I feel that my involvement in this organisation has helped me to work in teams whilst also helping to develop my individual skills. As a keen musician, I enjoy listening to music and attending music festivals; such festivals have been great experiences and have heavily relied on me being mature and independent. I have also undertaken voluntary work, this including my involvement with the 'be clear on cancer' campaign by the NHS. Here I helped to raise awareness of kidney and bladder cancer, by approaching people on the streets and conducting research on the public's knowledge of the symptoms of these cancers and issuing information on the medical symptoms. Running is another interest of mine; in October 2012 I ran the Robin Hood half marathon, to raise money for the charity Cardio Myopathy, which is very important to me. After higher education I would like to find a graduate scheme, within a large organisation as I feel that within the financial section a substantial organisation where I could explore different areas of the business world and widen my knowledge. Essentially My driving ambition is to travel worldwide and I believe a career in finance could open up a world of opportunities within the global economy.

## Student D: Languages

I firmly believe no one language has a greater worth than another and as I have been fortunate enough to travel abroad frequently, I have become fascinated by language across the globe. It seems incredibly unfair to assume, as many people do, that everybody speaks English and therefore there's no need for native English speakers to learn another language. Making an effort to speak a foreign language abroad is appreciated by locals and creates stronger ties between speakers. Being able to speak a foreign language is a life skill, one that I believe everyone should strive to possess. I have a passionate desire to study Spanish and Portuguese at university not only to develop my current understanding but also to embark on the challenge of learning Portuguese.

My enthusiasm for languages developed after I took on Spanish as a second language at GCSE, having already studied French for three years. At this point I realised that it wasn't just learning French that excited me, but it was the study of foreign languages in general and the idea of being able to eliminate the communication barrier that exists between those who speak different languages.

Studying a language from scratch will broaden my perspective of languages and Portuguese appeals for many reasons. Having enjoyed studying Spanish for three years, I thought I would also enjoy immersing myself in Portuguese, as they share similar roots. What's more, I have become increasingly fascinated by Brazilian culture and have a strong desire to discover that culture first hand. Although all languages are worthy of learning, Portuguese would be particularly relevant due to the ever-growing economy in Brazil and therefore a greater demand for foreign speakers.

I am aware of the commitment needed for this course, especially with regard to studying Portuguese ab initio. However, I believe my previous studies in French and Spanish will aid my learning. Also studying English has meant that I have a greater awareness of how my own language is constructed, enabling me to better analyse and manipulate complex structures within foreign language. My understanding that I am, ultimately, responsible for my own learning is reflected in my trip to Strasbourg in 2010 to stay with native French speakers. There, I was able to visit the European Parliament. This along with a previous visit to the EU in Brussels inspired me to consider becoming an interpreter; it also highlighted to me the importance of foreign languages within such organisations.

I have opted to take part in the World Challenge project to Morocco in July 2013. From trekking in the Atlas Mountains to partaking in a community project, this experience will offer me insight into a completely new culture. Particular areas of interest for me are the variants of language spoken throughout the world. Therefore travelling to Morocco will allow me an insight into the Francophone world in North Africa. Whether it is studying Spanish or Portuguese, this aspect of language is one that I hope to study further at university.

Throughout my school life, I have participated in schemes that highlight my maturity and responsible attitude. As an ambassador during year 11, I gave presentations to prospective parents and held focus groups with students to address concerns that they may have. From this I was able to develop confidence and presenting skills, both highly important for communication in general and the study of foreign languages. I have taken on the role of a language ambassador, aiming to promote a love of language to younger students. Witnessing them develop an enthusiasm for languages is rewarding and I particularly enjoy helping them to improve their understanding, whilst simultaneously my own.

Whilst at university I hope to take advantage of every available opportunity to develop my linguistic abilities, with the view that one day, my fluency in such languages will become a secure part of me, just as English is.

## **Student E: Business at Lincoln**

With rapid growth in the business sector, one has to be equipped with knowledge and experience, as well as ambition. Business is and has always been my passion, and from a young age I have always wanted to be involved in business, with a future ambition to eventually run my own. Since GCSE, it was always my favourite subject, as is so involving. At present, I have my own online business, and have started to build it through gaining contacts abroad. I feel that the course you offer will give me the skills and understanding to progress in running a successful business. I believe that the experiences I have had so far have been invaluable to me and could potentially help me to establish an extraordinary career.

Since taking Business Studies at A-level, my enthusiasm for business has increased exponentially and has made me realise that this is the professional environment I would dream of working in. My A-level course has prepared me for such a career as I have learnt of different management systems and the structure of business planning and promotional marketing campaigns.

I recently participated in the Young Enterprise Scheme, an extracurricular course that ran after school; the objective was to create a business alongside classmates and sell a product or service to the general public. Within the team, I adopted the title of Operations Manager, which was a very challenging role, and demanded complete focus to get the products that we would be selling ready for sale on the stalls that we had. I believe that this experience was exceptionally worthwhile and gave me a clear insight into the real world of business. My passion for business has both on a practical and theoretical level, fuelled my desire to study this subject at university. I am committed to expanding my knowledge of the subject further, and I believe your course will benefit me greatly in this respect. At GSCE level, the Business and Economics course that I completed was both worthwhile and enjoyable, for it provided the skills I needed to develop my own business ideas and motivated me to go further in my study of business.

Over Christmas (2012), I will be managing a stall in my home town, selling various Christmas homeware products to the public. I intend to promote my online business during this time in an endeavour to further my company. I am using this, not only as a way to gain further business experience with interactions from customers, but also to help fund my university studies.

Studying ICT in conjunction with Business Studies has enabled me to analyse the criticality of technology in giving businesses a competitive edge. Additionally, by relating to my study of physics, I am able to use the analytical skills and problem-solving with scientific reasoning to be better adapted to problems that could occur in business. I can now appreciate how issues such as being in a 'time crucial' atmosphere and managing people effectively are fundamental in fulfilling the overall objectives of the business. Furthermore, by cross-examining these three subjects, I am able to apply knowledge combined together to benefit my overall understanding of business in everyday settings, giving me further invaluable experiences.

Outside of college, I have keen interest in computing and have enjoyed building my own desktop computers. Coupled with this, I have also completed an Open University course in robotics.

This was a 10 week course that had both practical and theoretical elements, with the result of doing basic programming and analysing the finished design, to create a virtual robot, resulting in an Open University award. I am also very enthused by adrenaline sports such as inline skating and love getting outdoors as much as possible, which I have been doing for many years now.

I am looking forward to continuing my education in Business Studies and undoubtedly believe that my natural drive for success would be well suited to studying Business Management at university.