

You've got 4000 characters (including spaces), which is 47 lines, to sell yourself to the universities you want to go to. This is not an easy thing to do, so here are some top tips on how to write a good personal statement.

Do

- Start early – it takes several attempts to get your personal statement just right
- Organise your information, perhaps into these 4 categories: qualifications and subjects studied; work experience and voluntary experience; achievements and responsibilities; hobbies and interests
- Focus on the skills, knowledge and insight you have gained in each of these areas
- Start by writing bullet points of everything you want to include
- Then put these in order of importance
- Write in paragraphs – even though this takes up characters (white spaces count as characters). Splitting your statement into two or three paragraphs makes it so much easier to read
- Follow the 80/20 rule. 80% of your personal statement should be about your studies and work experience and 20% about extra-curricular activities
- Good applications are those which link extra-curricular activities to the course you want to study
- Be specific. For example, don't just say you like reading/theatre/politics. Say you've recently read an article about xxx/seen a play/been to see your local MP speak and say what you found exciting about it
- Show you are up to date with developments in your chosen area of study
- Get someone else to read it over for you, perhaps someone who doesn't know you that well. It will be interesting to see what they learn about you and your ambitions. Ask them to tell you what they have learned from your personal statement. If it sounds like you and what you want to achieve, great. If not, work on it a bit more
- Be yourself, be honest and write in your own words
- Write it all in a word document first and only put it into your UCAS application once you are happy with what you have written
- Save your personal statement regularly when you paste it into the UCAS form – you don't want to get 'timed out' and lose your personal statement, especially if you've made changes online
- Get help if you're stuck or don't know where to start – ask your tutor, teachers, family, friends

Don't

- Agonise over the first line. Write something to get you started but come back to it later
- Just write a list of what you have done – that's boring and doesn't show off your skills, personality and ambitions. Instead show the passion and drive you have now got from the things you have done
- Repeat yourself
- Repeat stuff that will appear elsewhere in your application, like your GCSE grades – it's unnecessary and takes up valuable space
- Use well-known quotes – you won't be the only one
- Lift text from anywhere else. UCAS has fraud detection equipment and you could be accused of cheating

- Use slang, or be too chatty – and don't try to be too clever either by using too many long words as this can sound too pretentious
- Try to be funny. Jokes don't work
- Use bold, underlining or italics
- Get someone else to write it for you
- Get too many people to help you – it can sound muddled and unconvincing and won't let your personality come through. Stick to advice from one or two teachers
- Write everything in one big block of text – it isn't easy or appealing to read

What to include

- Say what you want to study and why
- What you want to do after you've finished the course, if you know
- Why you think you'd be good at it – include skills or experience you've gained through your education, work experience, extra-curricular activities and hobbies/interests
- Include relevant things: EPQ, Duke of Edinburgh awards, Young Enterprise, science, engineering and technology awards, summer schools, volunteering and work experience

Check out the UCAS page on personal statements

<http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/undergraduate/filling-your-application/your-personal-statement>