

MAKING A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION

MAKING SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS WORKBOOK

Getting a place at your preferred university can be a competitive process, with the number of applications far outweighing spaces on many courses.

For example, the University of Southampton received 42,405 applications in 2016, yet only made 5360 acceptances.

Therefore, standing out from the crowd by creatively enhancing your application can be great way to increase your chances of success.

When making an application, you should look to engage with your chosen subject in a way which demonstrates your interests to the admissions team.



PERSONAL STATEMENT QUIZ



What do you know about personal statements?

TEST YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT KNOWLEDGE

1. How long should a personal statement be?

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2. When is the deadline for UCAS applications?

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3. Can you use Bold, Italics or underline words in your personal statement?

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4. Is the personal statement the right place to list your qualifications?

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5. Should you mention your preferred university in the personal statement?

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6. When should you start thinking about writing your personal statement?

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7. What happens if someone has been found to have copied their personal statement?

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8. Should I include personal details such as my name, DOB or height?

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PERSONAL STATEMENT QUIZ



A personal statement is one side of A4 paper



Start writing as soon as possible



Check your deadline for submission



Don't include personal details

ANSWERS

1. How long should a personal statement be?

A personal statement should be around 4,000 characters in length. This equates to about 47 lines or one side of A4 paper.

2. When is the deadline for UCAS applications?

The main deadline for UCAS applications is the 15th January, however schools and colleges will usually ask students to complete their personal statement much earlier than this to make sure the application is fully completed in good time. If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge, or applying to Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Medicine/Science the application deadline is the 15th October.

3. Can you use bold, italics or underline words in your personal statement?

No. The personal statement must be completed in full sentences and you will not be able to change any of the fonts to make certain words stand out.

4. Is the personal statement the right place to list your qualifications?

No. The personal statement should not provide information that is available elsewhere on the form. However, the personal statement is a good place to talk about the knowledge and skills that you have developed whilst studying, and how these might apply to your chosen course.

5. Should you mention your preferred university in the personal statement?

No, because it is more than likely that you will be applying to more than one university. Singling out just one institution in your personal statement would put admissions tutors from other universities off your application.

6. When should you start thinking about writing your personal statement?

As soon as possible! The more time that you have to reflect, plan and prepare the better. Most students will make a start on their personal statement before the end of their first year in Sixth Form.

7. What happens if someone has been found to have copied their personal statement?

UCAS use a piece of similarity detection software called Copycatch. If they find any similarity in your personal statement, your application will be flagged. Then they will email an alert to you and your university or college choices and this could have serious consequences for your application.

8. Should I include personal details such as my name, DOB or height?

No, no and definitely no. The personal statement should not include any personal details beyond those that are relevant to the application.

STRUCTURE

Structuring your personal statement helps to make sure that you use your 4,000 characters in the most effective way possible.

All personal statements should have a personal introduction, a wealth of information about why you are the best candidate for the course and a strong, concise conclusion.

4,000 characters,
including:



Skills



Hobbies



Interests

INTRODUCTION

COURSE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Information about your skills, knowledge and experience that is directly relevant to the course that you are making an application for.

ADDITIONAL SKILLS, HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

SUMMARISE WHY YOU WILL BE A GOOD CHOICE

ENHANCING YOUR APPLICATION

The following suggestions are by no means an exhaustive list, but should give you a few ideas about how you can engage with and demonstrate your academic interests:

Draw a line to match the terms to the description

Work experience and volunteering

Read/ watch/ listen to the news

Online course material

Attending public lectures

Reading around the subject

Online courses and MOOCs

Extended Project (EPQ)

Remain up-to-date with your chosen subject. Talking about how important issues related to your course are discussed by the media can be a great way to demonstrate your knowledge. This engagement should not be exclusive to Law, Politics or Journalism. For example, if you wish to study Medicine, Nursing or the health sciences, you could reflect upon how issues such as Brexit and NHS funding are impacting the role of healthcare professionals.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) provide a very accessible way to get a feel for learning at university level. Future Learn hosts hundreds of these courses in a variety of different subjects. They are free and vary in the time and commitment required for each. The majority of courses require 2-4hrs per week for a set number of weeks. The course list is ever changing, so keep checking back to see if there have been any new releases.

You may wish to engage with some academic subject material at this stage and many academic textbooks and journals can be accessed through local libraries and the internet. However, you could also consider 'lighter' material to demonstrate your wider interests. Magazines such as National Geographic, New Scientist and BBC History Magazine have regular academic contributions, presented through a much more digestible medium.

Check the course page of your preferred institutions for online course materials. Not all universities will provide these, but some will post sample essays, reading lists and details of the syllabus. These are particularly useful for identifying the gaps in your own knowledge and providing the basis for some extra-curricular reading.

Ask your teacher about whether your school or college offers the EPQ. If available, EPQ gives you the opportunity to develop both your independent research and critical thinking skills. The University of Southampton provides an array of dedicated online materials to support the EPQ, as well as a dedicated MOOC titled 'Developing Your Research Project': <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/learnwithustransition/academic-skills-guides/index.page>

For vocational subjects such as the health sciences, teaching and veterinary science, relevant work experience is necessary due to high demand and the need to demonstrate a realistic expectation and understanding of the profession. For other subjects, whilst work experience may not be required, it will still be extremely valuable in allowing you to demonstrate the possession of desirable transferable skills. It is best to remember that any work experience is good work experience; treat it as an opportunity to observe professionals in your chosen field and gain a realistic impression of your future career.

Most universities will host some form of public lecture series throughout the academic year. These are often open to the public, free and in some cases streamed live. Public lectures are a convenient way to engage in the world of academia and to get a realistic feel for what learning at university is like.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Once you have put the work in to enrich your application, you should now think about how this material would fit into your personal statement.

In this instance, it is important to not simply list all the things you have done, as this will likely result in the admissions staff developing a 'so what?' attitude to your application. Instead, consider the transferable skills below, and think how you could demonstrate them through your experiences.



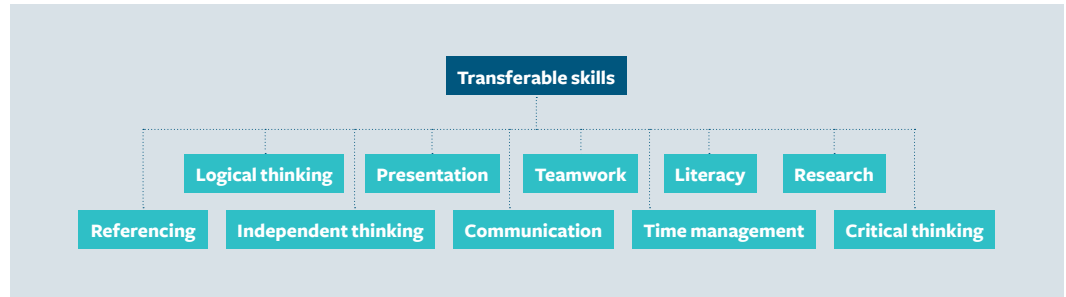
Critical Thinking



Better Communication



Logical Thinking



Here are some examples of how transferable skills could be evidenced:

Referencing:

EPQ, MOOC

Research:

EPQ, MOOC, online course materials, news, reading around the subject

Time management:

Work experience and volunteering, EPQ

Critical thinking:

EPQ, MOOC, public lectures, reading around the subject, news, current studies

Communication:

Work experience and volunteering

Teamwork:

Work experience and volunteering

Presenting:

Work experience and volunteering, EPQ, public lectures

Independent thinking:

EPQ, MOOC, reading around the subject, news, current studies

YOUR COURSE SPECIFIC SKILLS

List 5 specific skills that are relevant to the course that you are applying for and rank them from 1-5 (1 being the strongest or most important).



Teamwork



Presenting



Research

Rank in order of relevance to your application (1-5)	Course specific or transferable skill
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

COURSE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Identifying which of your experiences are going to be the best to include in your personal statement can be tricky.



Using the 'Three Step Method' detailed below, spend some time reflecting on your experiences and how these might be used to demonstrate why you are a great applicant for your chosen degree.

Step 1

Write down everything you've done including:

- Work experience
- Wider reading
- School trips
- Clubs/sports teams
- Visits to galleries/museums
- After school clubs
- Looking after a relative
- Volunteering/charity work

Don't discount anything!

Step 2

Put yourself in the position of an admissions tutor who's just found the perfect Personal Statement for the course you're applying for.

What skills, knowledge, experience would be there?

Step 3

Combine sheets 1 and 2.

Which elements of the skills, knowledge and experience that you've already got will make great material for your Personal Statement?

Where are the gaps that you feel you could work towards developing?

TALKING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES

Detailing your experiences in the right way will be an important part of developing a really strong personal statement.

Many students will fall in to the trap of simply listing their skills within the personal statement, rather than showing that they are relevant to the course.

The ABC approach is a great method to help you make the most of your experiences, and clearly show to the admissions tutors why they should give you a place.



A

Activity

What have you done

Activity

B

Benefit

Skills it's given you

Benefit

C

Course

How it relates to the course

Course

TOP TIPS

Focus most of your statement on evidencing why you are the best candidate for the course.

Universities want to hear about your skills, knowledge and experiences which relate directly to the course.

Achievements like getting your 10,000 metre badge in swimming are great accomplishments, but are they the best examples to use?



Be specific

Remember *Activity Benefit Course*. Providing specific examples of what you have done to engage with your interests, and how it has benefited you, will make for a much more impressive personal statement.

Be positive

Whilst making a good application to Higher Education can be hard work, going to university is exciting! Make sure that you reflect your enthusiasm for the subject in the personal statement.

Be original

Remember that your personal statement is personal. Try wherever possible to talk about your own reasons for wanting to study the subject, rather than relying on quotes from other people or generic phrases.

Keep a copy

Always keep a copy saved. Universities will use the personal statement as the basis for their questions if they call you in for an interview.

Get someone else to read it

Proof reading your statement before it is sent is hugely important. It would be a tragedy if your application was rejected because of bad grammar or a few missing words.

Apply for similar courses

Remember that you only get to write one personal statement for all of your choices, so make sure that you only talk about why you want to study one subject (or two if applying for joint honours).

Be aware

Different universities look for different attributes from their applicants, so be sure to read the application advice for each university before starting your personal statement.



Find out more:

<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/schools-colleges.page>

