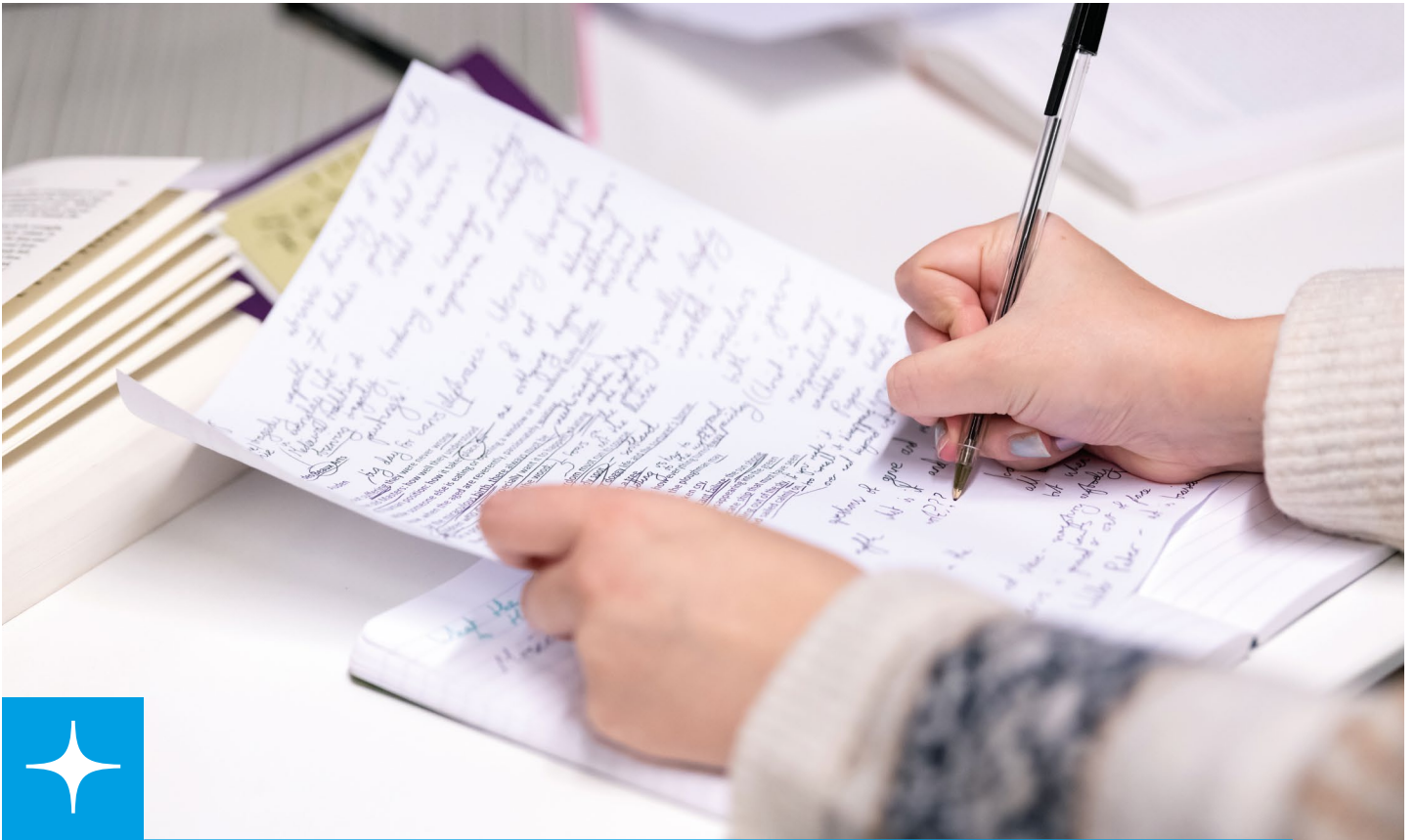




**THIS IS  
YOUR CHANCE  
TO SHINE**

**HOW TO WRITE A STANDOUT  
PERSONAL STATEMENT**



# WRITING A STANDOUT PERSONAL STATEMENT

Getting onto a degree is just like applying for a job, you need to stand out from the crowd. Many other candidates applying for the same course may have similar grades to you, so this is your chance to shine.

The keyword is **personal**. Be yourself. Your statement needs to work hard – it's how admissions officers get to know more about you and why you deserve the place you want at the institution you love.



## QUICK TIP

Keep it short and snappy. With only 4,000 characters, or 47 lines to play with, you need to show your ambitions, skills, experience and achievements in as few words as possible. Edit, edit, edit!



## QUICK TIP

One statement fits all. Avoid naming a particular uni as your statement needs to work for every course and subject you apply for. Focus on common themes instead.



# ACTIVITY 1: MYTH VS. REALITY

Test your personal statement knowledge by marking the statements below as M (myth) or R (reality). Then check your answers on page 12.

1	No one actually reads your personal statement, so it's not that important.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	An excellent personal statement can make up for poor grades.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	It's important to include a subject-related topic you're interested in and analyse it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	It's good to list as many different activities you've been involved in as possible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5	You don't need to say you've loved your chosen subject since you were a child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	Specific details and insights gained is more important than just listing activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	You need to show your personality, so focus on hobbies and interests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	Including an impressive quotation helps your personal statement stand out.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	You don't need to list your current subject(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	It's vital to include that 'lightbulb' moment: the one-off personal experience that made you want to study your chosen subject.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# WHAT TO INCLUDE

Getting the grades is one thing, but it's not all about your academic ability. Admissions officers are keeping an eye out for candidates who will contribute to uni life and community. So, talk about what makes you tick, why you're passionate about your chosen subject, what your interests are, and what you hope to gain from university.



## REMEMBER TO INCLUDE:

1. Academic interests
2. Motivation
3. Research and a wider understanding
4. Non-academic experience and activities
5. Ambitions.



## QUICK TIP

Get the right balance. Allocate 70–80% to your course, studies and career aspirations, and 20–30% to your hobbies.

## THE ABC OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS:

### Activity

What have you done that's interesting?

### Benefit

What skills have you gained from this activity?

### Course

How does it relate to your chosen course?



# ACTIVITY 2: YOUR ABC

Transferable skills are a core set of abilities you pick up over time. Think about past activities that have helped build your confidence, improved your communication, or that demonstrate flexibility, time management, initiative or even teamwork. Then show how they'll help you on your chosen course.

	Activities	Benefit	Course
Personal achievements			
Responsibilities			
Hobbies and interests			

# YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS



It's easy to forget all the things you've taken part in or achieved. So, in the run-up to applying for your degree, keep an ongoing list, including any hobbies, work experience or projects such as an EPQ. You might want to include sports competitions or clubs you belong to, musical interests, summer schools or programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. What skills did you gain? What are you proud of? Why do your experiences make you unique?

## **SUPER-CURRICULAR**

These are current activities outside of your studies that relate to your chosen course at university.

## **EXTRA-CURRICULAR**

These are current activities outside of your studies that don't relate to your chosen course but do show off those skills you'll need to succeed.

## **OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

These are non-accredited training courses or achievements that set you apart. Try to link these skills back to your chosen subject.

## **EMPLOYMENT AND WORK EXPERIENCE**

Have you had a Saturday job? Do you help out in a family business? Or have you taken part in work experience during the school or college holidays? Work experience demonstrates so much about you. But don't just state what you've done, say why it matters. Include what you've learnt and how it relates to your chosen course. If your experience doesn't directly relate, demonstrate the important skills you gained, such as time management, professionalism, punctuality, communication and teamwork.



### **QUICK TIP**

Don't just state it, relate it. Remember, it's not just about saying what you've done but explaining how it's relevant.



# HOW TO GET STARTED

Facing a blank page and don't know where to start? You don't have to get this right the first time, so don't put pressure on yourself at the beginning. You can always go back to make changes once your statement begins to take shape. With no words to waste, it's important to use the character count wisely. There are some common mistakes everyone makes, and admissions officers have read them all. Write something original that will make them want to read more.

## ACTIVITY 3: AVOID CLICHÉ

Here are some example opening statements and some reasons why using them might not be a good idea. Match them up to discover why, turn to page 12 to check your answers.

Your personal statement should be unique – take the time to find an opening sentence that feels right for you.

### OPENING STATEMENTS

- 1 I am currently studying maths, biology and...
- 2 Since I was a child, I have been fascinated by...
- 3 Law is the glue that holds society together...
- 4 Biology is all around us. It is the essence of life...
- 5 'Scientists investigate that which already is. Technologists create which has never been.'
- 6 What is the purpose of non-coding DNA? How can viruses disrupt our immune system?
- 7 Music as an art is constantly evolving, and the freedom it encompasses forms the basis of my aesthetic and academic interests.
- 8 When I was two, I wanted to grow up to be a tiger. I soon realised that this was not to be, and, with equal enthusiasm, then decided that I would like to go into the world of law and governance.

### REASONS THESE MIGHT NOT BE A GOOD IDEA...

- A This phrase doesn't make sense. It's better to use clear and simple language.
- B It's not necessary to define the subject. You could say something inaccurate which would weaken your statement.
- C Admissions officers want to see mature reasons for wanting to study a subject, not that you've decided without understanding what the subject entails.
- D You don't need to emphasise how important a subject is. You need to explain why you're interested in it.
- E Listing questions doesn't show an inquisitive mind or why you're interested in the subject.
- F Quotes have usually been seen hundreds of times before. It's not original. Better to use personal reasons or experience.
- G Your A level, BTEC or equivalent options are listed elsewhere in the UCAS form.
- H It's not necessary to 'grab the reader's attention' with humour or an eye-catching statement. A formal tone should be maintained throughout, with clear, concise points.

Use the text box to write down the corresponding letter of the explanation that best matches the opening statement.

1 =

2 =

3 =

4 =

5 =

6 =

7 =

8 =



## DOS AND DON'TS

### Do:

- Write clearly and apply the ‘So what?’ test to make sure each sentence is relevant
- Mention authors/academics when you talk about research and background reading
- Read aloud, check your writing carefully and redraft until you are happy
- Ask someone you trust to check your writing for you
- Be enthusiastic about your chosen course.

### Don't:

- Talk about your subject(s) course syllabus in detail
- Plagiarise: UCAS has software that can detect any similarities
- Try to be a comedian: you should take the process seriously and avoid informal language
- Exaggerate or lie about your achievements
- Get someone to write it for you.





# ACTIVITY 4: STRUCTURE IT

Before you write a word, plan what you want to say. Creating an outline to structure your ideas is always a good idea. It will prevent you from rambling and keep your writing sharp. Make some notes in the table below to start structuring your thoughts.

## INTRODUCTION

- Why are you interested about this course/subject?
- Which aspect are you looking forward to studying in more depth and why?
- If applicable, how does this subject relate to society or current affairs? Why is this important to you?

## SUITABILITY

- Show you understand what's required to study the course
- Why do you think you're right for the course? Mention particular skills and experience that will help you succeed. Include things that will help you with life at uni
- Explain how your current studies relate to your chosen subject
- What activities have you done that relate to your subject?

## WIDER SKILLS

- What are you most proud of?
- List the attributes that make you interesting, special or unique
- Detail any work experience (this could be part-time or voluntary work).

## SUMMARY

- What do you hope to gain from your studies?
- Explain how you want to use your degree knowledge and experience
- How does the course relate to your future goals or career?



# WHAT NEXT?

4,000 characters may not seem like many words, but writing them takes a lot of time and thought. So don't put it off – start working on it as soon as possible. Writing your statement in Word or Google Docs first will make it easier to check and edit, and you can paste it into the application when it's word-perfect.



### QUICK TIP

Make a back-up copy if you're not writing in the cloud.



## BE YOURSELF

Remember, writing a strong personal statement demonstrates your ability to structure your ideas, write well and back up your thoughts with examples – skills you'll need when you study your chosen subject at uni. Getting it right will help you stand out from other candidates and have the best chance of securing your place.

**We all have something that makes us unique. Be true to you and present your best self.**





The UCAS website has loads more guidance on writing statements and even some good examples to inspire you. Check them out at: [www.ucas.com/personalstatementskills](http://www.ucas.com/personalstatementskills)



# ACTIVITY ANSWERS:

## ACTIVITY 1 ANSWERS:

- 1. Myth** – Your personal statement plays an important part of your degree application. It is read by the institution’s admissions team, and in some cases, subject experts on your course.
- 2. Myth** – Although a personal statement cannot make up for low grades, it is used by admissions teams alongside your predicted grades to determine whether you are suitable for the course. They will look for your demonstration of skills, and in some instances, relevant work experience.
- 3. Reality** – Talking about a particular topic within your subject helps demonstrate your subject knowledge. You could talk about a particular topic covered in class that has interested you, or perhaps you have done an EPQ or a research project as part of your studies that you could refer to. The important thing here is to discuss what you have learned and how this is relevant to your degree subject.
- 4. Myth** – Avoid simply listing all of the activities that you have taken part in. Pick out the most relevant experiences to your course and expand on them in more detail. With every activity you include we want you to tell us which skills you have gained from it.
- 5. Reality** – A lot of students think they need to say that they’ve been interested in this area since childhood. For some students this may well be the case however the key thing here is that it doesn’t matter how long you’ve been interested in the subject. What is important is that you are able to demonstrate your understanding and interest in the subject.
- 6. Reality** – It is important to choose specific relevant activities and elaborate on what you have gained from them, rather than list all of the activities you have done.
- 7. Myth** – Although it is important to demonstrate your personality, around 70-80% of your personal statement should focus on your academic achievements, interests and ability. The remaining 20-30% should focus on your interests and hobbies outside of your course.
- 8. Myth** – Using quotes in a personal statement is a topic that is often debated. Your personal statement should focus on you. You don’t have a huge word count for this so quoting another individual could take up valuable space. If used well, you will not be penalised for using a quote, however ask yourself, why am I including this quote? Does this quote add value to my personal statement?
- 9. Reality** – A list of your qualifications will be provided elsewhere on your UCAS application so you don’t need to list them at the start of your personal statement. However you do need to make sure that you talk about each of your current subjects in turn and how they have prepared you for pursuing your chosen subject at university.
- 10. Myth** – Don’t worry if you haven’t had a ‘lightbulb’ moment in your life that led you to decide that you wanted to pursue a particular degree subject. Of course, if you have experienced a situation in the past that has really inspired you, please do include it. The point we are trying to make here is that you don’t need to include a ‘moment of realisation’ to demonstrate why you want to study your particular course. Be truthful with your own experience.

## ACTIVITY 3 ANSWERS:

- |             |             |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>1.</b> G | <b>2.</b> C | <b>3.</b> D | <b>4.</b> B |
| <b>5.</b> F | <b>6.</b> E | <b>7.</b> A | <b>8.</b> H |





**GOOD  
LUCK!**

**FIND OUT MORE**

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