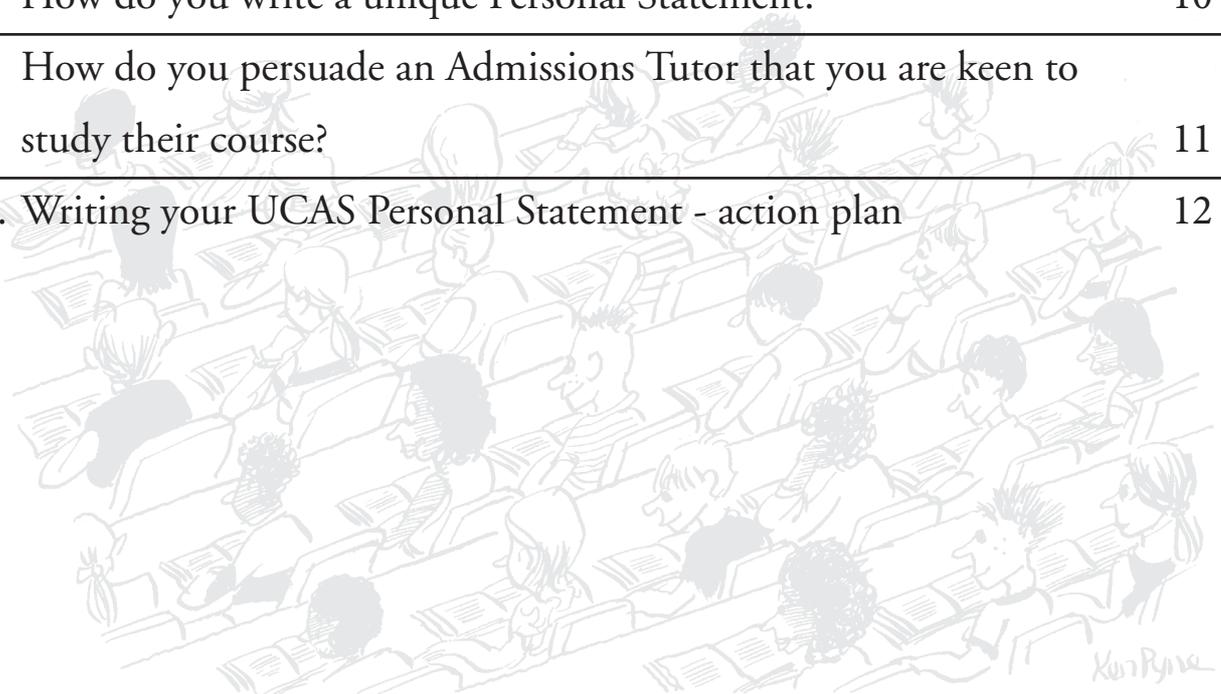


WRITING EFFECTIVE UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENTS *- Tutorial Booklet -*

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WHAT IS AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR?

When you submit your UCAS application for your chosen course at university it will be read by an Admissions Tutor. The Admissions Tutor:

- is a lecturer in the subject
- has been promoted to the position of choosing students for their degree course
- recruits the target number of students to ensure the course is financially viable (jobs can be lost if the target is not reached or even exceeded)
- is a gatekeeper between you and your chosen course
 - can let you pass by giving you an offer (e.g. AAA, BCC, DDE)
 - can close the gate by declining to give you an offer
- often starts providing offers as soon as applications are received (though some do wait - but very few!)

SO GET GOING! LET YOUR ADMISSIONS TUTORS RECEIVE YOUR APPLICATION EARLY IN THE PROCESS.

WHAT MUST YOU DO TO GET AN OFFER FROM AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR?

Most importantly, achieve the grades. So...

- don't miss lessons e.g. attending open days can damage your chances of success if you miss lessons. Instead:
 - **go on-line** to make a virtual tour of a university from the comfort of your computer
 - visit a university at the weekend / holidays. You will still get the 'feel of the place'
- Persuade the admissions tutor you really want to study a particular course. Lots of students apply with suitable predicted grades so why offer a place to you? The Admissions Tutor must ensure that you will not drop out once you have started (they lose money if you do) so you must ensure that you impress them with your reasons for wanting that particular course.

WHAT DOES A *REASONABLE* PERSONAL STATEMENT LOOK LIKE?

1. Read the personal statement printed below and underline each experience or key point that appears.
2. Count how many experiences or key points have been included in the statement.
3. How might the statement be improved?

Although I enjoy studying Mathematics and Geography, it is Business Studies that I wish to pursue in more depth. I believe a degree in Business will build on my understanding of marketing and financial management. Businesses have to operate within a legal framework and I was lucky enough to shadow a barrister for a day to gain an insight into the legal profession. I hope to study aspects of law as part of my degree.

A range of school opportunities have broadened my experiences. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme has been challenging and fulfilling: allowing me to work with a diverse range of people. My voluntary work at Help the Aged proved to be rewarding and gave me a more caring perspective on life. I have also taken part in the 'Year 7 Friends Scheme' in which I supported young students during their first term at school. Taking part in the school drama club as a technician has been fun and has taught me the importance of working to deadlines. I have further pursued my interest in drama and have so far been fortunate to see 'Twelfth Night' and 'Les Miserables'. My role as Deputy Operations Director in the Young Enterprise Scheme has given me an insight into business life. I am interested in the internet and have helped staff redesign the school web site. I hope to learn more about web site design at university. Although no-one could call me a sportsman, I am a keen football player and I regularly visit City of Manchester Stadium to watch Manchester City.

Outside school I belong to the Venture Scouts which has offered opportunities such as gliding and weekend camps to the Peak District. I have managed to balance the demands of my 'A' levels with a varied and enjoyable school and social life. I look forward to the opportunities offered at university.

WHAT DOES A *REASONABLE* STATEMENT LOOK LIKE?

- feedback -

How many experiences or key points have been included in the statement?

- ★ Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
- ★ Voluntary work at Help the Aged
- ★ Year 7 Friends
- ★ Drama club technician
- ★ Seen 'Twelfth Night' and 'Les Miserables'
- ★ Deputy Operations Director in the Young Enterprise Scheme
- ★ Helped staff redesign the school website
- ★ Keen football player
- ★ Visits Manchester City Football Club
- ★ Venture Scouts.

In all, around ten key points are mentioned.

How might the statement be improved?

1. Far more information needed about why the applicant wishes to read Business Studies at university.
2. More detail about relevant experiences such as the Young Enterprise business scheme (e.g. what was the product being marketed? Why did the person enjoy the opportunity? What did the person learn from the experience?)
3. Write less of a list of points and provide more depth to a select range of issues
4. The applicant could have been more personal about the areas mentioned
What did they enjoy and why?

BUT there are some positive features about the statement...

- Clearly written
- Dealt with choice of course (though not enough)
- Used short sentences, helping it remain grammatically correct
- No spelling errors

WHAT CAN GO WRONG WITH A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

To find out what mistakes many applicants make read through the following personal statement and attempt the following:

- Put a line through anything that you think should not be included i.e. that does not sell the student.
- Reduce the statement to half the original length.
- Decide why the personal statement does not sell the student.

After 12 years of school-study I will be making the most difficult decision and most influential one in my life. Having systematically going through each stage of choosing a suitable degree, I started by choosing a 'science' subject rather than an 'art' one. Moving on through the field of Physics, relating heavily with Mathematics, I researched the different topics possible in Engineering. With every prospectus I read, I became even more devoted to the course: Mechanical Engineering. The fundamentals of this course can be quite general giving me a wider experience in the Mathematics and Science fields, complying with my eagerness to experience Science and Engineering. The most intriguing factor of this course, I would say, is what I have always been indulged in; knowing how something operates, moves and to make it better. For me studying the root of our necessities, e.g. electricity, cars and clocks, is fulfilling. Studying in these fields (Mathematics and Physics A-levels) will help me kick-start my degree campaign with enthusiasm and challenge, increasing chances of fitting in well with the course. Aiming to use this study to progress into the world of work with the manner of a fully equipped Engineer, I know that this degree will present myself to the employer as a person of qualities efficient enough to produce upright results from a degree which requires intellectuality, initiative and common sense (in scientific terms). I regard Mechanical Engineering as having a consequential and significant role to play in British industry. Thus, taking a step back I think that a person to study a degree of this importance to be successful through the 3/4 years should have personal qualities. Working for a multinational company I have had a taste of the responsibilities of these personal qualities; listening to management, working independently to complete the tasks, working to deadlines, using initiative towards problem solving for customer service ... etc. Studying these aspects in the management segment of Business Studies A-level helps me to understand this more clearly, with ways of innovation and motivation for work. Throughout my last 5 school years, using the computer and the Internet has been momentous. From designing programmes (for I.T. coursework) in Microsoft Access to using the internet to inquire about flight arrangements, and with 40 words-per-minute I have gained sufficient computer skills to use it as a surplus for my future. As a sociable person, I have shown that I can fit into a community new to me (my sixth form). This overlaps the personal qualities aforementioned. I have also worked with children in a nursery, helping teachers. Furthermore, mentoring high school student in preparation for the end of their GCSE's has given me a differing sensation of tutoring. An important point for a student thinking of entering university is willing to be part of that community. This point will make a difference in the productivity of the student towards the community of the university. For five consecutive years now, I have joined the school football team, playing in most cup and league matches. Having represented my school in domestic competitions, I have enjoyed the essence of teamwork, winning and losing. More recently, being trained to be a Junior's coach by the Football Association has strengthened my management skills. The encouraging factor of sport for me is the social aspect, which I enjoy extensively. An exclusive ubiquity of mine is that I am contented with mixing my social with my educational life at length making the two important factors in my life none the less unabridged.

WHAT CAN GO *WRONG* WITH A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

- *the lessons to learn* -

Many students writing their own personal statement repeat some of the problems shown in the statement you have read - though usually, not to the same extent.

What were the problems?

- Begins like a life story - full of irrelevant information



- Far too long
 - it will need to be reduced for the on-line application
- Uses language the author clearly doesn't understand
 - e.g. in the last line "exclusive ubiquity of mine". Ubiquitous means 'everywhere' so how can it be exclusive?
- Many sentences are too long, making grammatical errors
- Sets out to impress but comes across as arrogant
- Has not been proof read by somebody who could have pointed out many of the problems e.g. many sentences do not make sense.

WHAT ADVICE HAVE ADMISSIONS TUTORS OFFERED?

The following advice is based on the findings from a survey of over 70 admissions tutors from over 20 subject areas in a wide range of universities.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

It depends on:

- The Admissions Tutor (some admissions tutors see it as vital, others look at grades alone)
- The nature of the degree (for some courses it is vital, for others it is not)

The point is, you do not know. So therefore treat it seriously. It can count against you if it is not clearly written.

It can be important for:

- Selection for an offer (when you apply)
- Selection for an interview
- Asking questions at the interview (make sure you tell the truth: you could be asked about the claims in your statement!)
- Borderline cases (if you are just short of a required grade e.g you need BBB but you are predicted BBC. Remember, though, generally they select those with the grades)
- If you miss the grade in August. (The Admissions Tutor might reconsider you if they have spare places - remember to call them in August if you miss the grade)

Remember, grades are most important.

WHAT ARE ADMISSIONS TUTORS LOOKING FOR?

- Interest in the course (most important)
- No spelling or grammatical mistakes
- Clearly written
- Motivation
- Able to balance studies with non-academic life

- Interesting person
- Work experience (if relevant)
- Wider key skills (e.g. Teamwork)
- Numeracy or Communication (if yet to pass GCSE Maths or English)
- Explanation of unusual degree combinations (should you appear undecided)
- Future career in some cases

WHAT SHOULD YOU AVOID?

- Waffle
- Swallowing a dictionary
- Statements with no examples or evidence
- Very ordinary interests e.g. going down the pub
- Lying (remember the interview!)
- Becoming somebody you are not
- Rushing
- Thinking you can write it without advice

SHOULD THE STATEMENT BE HAND-WRITTEN OR WORDPROCESSED?

Most statements will now be word processed especially with increased use of electronic applications. Word processing:

... the benefits

- Easier to make corrections
- Can use a spell check
- Can use a grammar check

... the problems

- Fonts that looks too small / too big
- Proof reading. Some words are spelt correctly but are not the right words e.g. using the word 'from' when you meant to type 'for'.

FURTHER ADVICE

Do **NOT**

- Follow the advice in your hand-out to the letter
- Copy other statements
- Make things up to sound impressive
- Use language that you do not understand

DO

- Have a plan of action
- Keep to deadlines
- Find out as much information about the course as possible
- Read advice about writing a personal statement
- Consult books such as Brian Heap's ' Degree Course Offers'
- Read examples of good and bad statements
- Listen to advice but not too much
- Make the most of what you really have done
- Ensure that the person on the page is you
- Give plenty of examples
- Write relatively short sentences
- Expect to draft your statement a number of times (ten drafts is not unreasonable)

IN BRIEF, WRITE A SECTION ABOUT: YOUR CHOICE OF COURSE & ABOUT YOU



HOW DO YOU WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Many admissions tutors complain of reading statements that appear the same. A response to this problem has been to try to capture the reader's attention. For example, an applicant for a Law degree wrote: *"Guilty, I confess I want to study Law!"* Now this has been used (and published!) you cannot copy it and expect to be original.



For a Politics degree a student wrote a quote from a former government minister, Dennis Healey, *"If we can keep our heads the long-awaited economic miracle is in our grasp."* Many admissions tutors now complain that students are copying these ideas and so they are no longer original!

So how will you write a unique personal statement?

- By writing about **why** you **really** wish to **study** your chosen course (by showing that you know something about the course).
- By writing about the topics you are **looking forward to studying** on that course in a **genuine** way.
- By writing a brief account about **you** (hobbies, experiences)

Nobody is likely to have all the responses to the above. Lastly do not try the gimmick that one student attempted. At the top of the statement appeared:

SEX
I LOVE IT!
That is why I wish to study human biology.

- This gimmick gives the appearance that the author is not serious.
- Do not assume that *your* humour is the same as the humour of the admissions tutor!

HOW DO YOU PERSUADE AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR THAT YOU ARE KEEN TO STUDY THEIR COURSE?

Students who are motivated and interested in the course might be less likely to drop out from university (which could cost the department money in lost revenue) so...

Try to include some of the following to help you convince an admissions tutor:

Any relevant books / articles you have read

(even writing about a short article in a chapter / journal / a few pages in a book is going to have more of an impact than simply stating you want to study the course)

Relevant courses you have studied

(e.g. why certain AS/A2 or Applied topics interested you. Write about skills you have developed that you believe to be relevant)

Relevant interviews you have conducted

(interviewing somebody who works in your area of interest - e.g. a solicitor, a doctor - talk about specific issues that arose from the interview)

Experiences that relate to the course

(conferences, residential courses, trips, people you have met, something you have read, hobbies, future plans, something you have seen - anything relevant that will convince the admissions tutor that you have given serious thought to the choice of course)

What interests you about the degree courses?

(make sure the areas you focus upon that are taught at university appear on all your choices)



WRITING YOUR UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT - ACTION PLAN -

Name
How many drafts are expected?
Staff available to support you
Useful materials available
1st draft deadline
Other deadlines
Final deadline
Who checks the final statement?
Other information