A good personal statement can support a well-focused application and a poor personal statement can undermine it, but the foundation of the application must be solid. In particular:

- **Academic prerequisites must be met**
  - for school leavers, any specified grades should be already achieved or achievable. Any required subjects must be taken at the right level (these can vary from one university to another so make sure you’ve done all your research);
  - for students who are returning to learn after a break and who have other skills to offer, there can be more flexibility.

- **Some account must be taken of the competitiveness for the particular course.** For popular subjects you should include some less competitive courses among one of your five choices. School leavers applying for very popular programmes should have predicted grades at or above the typical offer.

### What to include in your personal statement

If you have a record of achievement or an up-to-date CV, it can remind you which activities to include, but the key is being analytical about what you write. Do not just put a list of your skills or attributes: make sure what you write is relevant to the courses and universities you’re applying to. As a rough guide you should only refer to current or recent activities.

In the personal statement, the Admissions Tutor will hope to find:

- clear layout and development of ideas;
- an organised and literate presentation, with no mistakes in paragraphing, punctuation, grammar or spelling.

### About the course

Your statement should give:

- Clear indication of your motivation towards and your relevant background for the courses applied for. Ask yourself: Why do I want to study the subject? Is there something I can say about how my interest has developed or how I have pursued it to make it convincing? (This may be especially important if you are applying for something you’ve not studied before.) Be specific and give examples. Give evidence of commitment beyond the curriculum: for competitive programmes this is vital.
- Evidence that you realise what the study of the subject is likely to entail. Ask yourself: Am I mentioning only the exciting or accessible aspects of this subject or associated career? Do I know the subject broadly enough? Have I shown that I am prepared for the breadth and depth of a university degree?
- Interests of relevance to the courses you are applying to and avoid supporting only one of your applications, even if it is your favourite.

### About work experience

Describe any work experience, especially if relevant to the course. For some courses – such as medicine, teaching and some courses in media – work experience is vital. It can also be useful for subjects that may be harder work or less glamorous than their image (e.g. archaeology, social work).

### About you

Your statement should give:

- information about extra-curricular involvements and activities or, for applicants not in school or college, life experience and previous employment. These can help to demonstrate general levels of energy and enthusiasm, some capacity for time management and setting of priorities and evidence key skills. They may also be relevant to the course applied for. A reflective and well-organised presentation of this information is advantageous; you need to point out the relevance of your experience even if the bare facts are mentioned elsewhere on the form;
- mention of career plans or gap year plans, if real and relevant;
- information about yourself, in greater detail than what you have already supplied on the UCAS application.

### Production of the personal statement

- Use a word-processing package so you can do a few drafts and then cut and paste the statement into UCAS Apply when you’re happy with it.
- Leave some white space by skipping a line between paragraphs – this will make it easier for Admissions Tutors to read. You will still find you can produce a text of about 450–500 words in the space available.

Remember that the personal statement may be the only piece of written work they get to see so use it as an example of what you’re capable of doing at university.
- Allow time for proofreading and editing and ask other people to read it; they may spot problems or opportunities.
- Remember to ensure that this is all your own work. UCAS uses the Similarity Detection Service which means they will scan through your personal statement to spot anything which has been submitted before.

Remember, the personal statement may be the only piece of your written work that the University sees, so it will convey a vital impression of your competence. If you are interviewed, the personal statement can help set the agenda for the interview discussion.