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# WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

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# What is a personal statement?

Your personal statement is a chance to get noticed for the **unique talents** and **experiences** you have. It's an important part of the application process as it's an opportunity to talk about **yourself** and your **passions**, outside of your grades.

I'm going to talk you through how to make the most of the 4000 characters and write a personal statement that stands out.



# NOTE:

The **personal statement** is your **only** opportunity to interact with your potential universities directly, so...

make the most of the  
opportunity!



# Why has the personal statement format changed?

You may have heard announcements that the personal statement has changed from **one longer piece of text** to **three separate questions**. UCAS wanted to make the process **easier** and **more structured** for you to really shine in your application. We know how **daunting** it can be to be faced with a **blank page**, so the new questions should help give you a starting point to shout all about you and your achievements, helping you to give strong examples to prove you're a good fit for your chosen course.

The **three questions** will help you to **scaffold** your answers and ensure you include exactly what universities and colleges want to see, to help you succeed in your applications. **Each answer** will have a **minimum character** count of **350 characters**, which is clearly labelled on the question boxes, along with an overall character counter, so you can keep track. The **4000 overall character limit (including spaces)** remains the same, as does what you're expected to include.



# The new personal statement questions

## Question 1:

**Why** do you want to study this course or subject?

## Question 2:

**How have your qualifications and studies** helped you to **prepare** for this course or subject?

## Question 3:

**What else have you done** to **prepare** outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?



# Section 1: Show your **PASSION** for the subject

**QUESTION 1: WHY DO YOU WANT TO STUDY THIS COURSE OR SUBJECT?**



**TELL US WHAT YOU  
LOVE ABOUT IT**



**WERE YOU INSPIRED BY A  
ROLE MODEL IN YOUR LIFE?**



**WAS IT A SUBJECT YOU LOVE AND  
WANT TO PURSUE FURTHER?**



# Question 1: **Why** do you want to study this course or subject?

This is your opportunity to showcase your passion and knowledge of your chosen subject area and to demonstrate to universities and colleges why it's a good fit for you and your future ambitions.

Examples of what you might talk about here are:

**Your motivations for studying this course(s)** Have you been inspired by a **key role model** or moment in your life? Maybe it's a subject you love and want to pursue further. We're all driven by something and it's important to talk about how yours has led you to this course or subject area.

**Your knowledge of this subject area and interests** Perhaps there's a **particular subject area you've researched** and can't wait to learn more about. A book or subject expert doing great things that have sparked your interest? Universities and colleges want to see you have done your research so they can be confident this is something you will enjoy and excel in. This is a great place to highlight **super-curricular activities** as evidence of curiosity and interest in the subject outside of the classroom.

**Your future plans and why this is a good fit for you** If you already have a particular profession in mind you could talk about how you'll use this to launch your career. If you don't, think about what's important to you and your future, and how the knowledge gained from your chosen course(s)



## Section 2:

Show your **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS** for university. Can you show critical analysis of an article you have read, ideally outside the syllabus. Have you won any awards for educational achievements?

**QUESTION 2: HOW HAVE YOUR QUALIFICATIONS  
AND STORIES HELPED YOU PREPARE?**



## Question 2: **How** have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

This is your chance to shout about the relevant or transferable skills you've gained from your formal education and highlight your understanding of how they will help you succeed in this subject area.

Examples of what you might talk about here are:

### **How your studies or training relate to your chosen course(s) or subject area**

This could be current or previous studies within a school, college, training provider, or even a short online university course – any form of formal education. The main thing here is to focus on what's most recent and relevant to your chosen course(s).

### **What relevant or transferable skills you have that make you a great candidate**

Maybe there are a couple of subjects that have helped you develop **a core set of skills required for your chosen course(s)**. Or a particular module that helped you understand where your interests and strengths lie. Can you show **critical analysis** of a **certain concept**?

### **Any relevant educational achievements**

Universities and colleges will see your grades elsewhere on your application so don't waste time talking about these. Consider accomplishments like winning a school or national competition, serving as a student ambassador or team captain, or landing the lead role in a play. Show interest in a subject.



## Section 3:

What have you done **OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM** which makes you suitable to study at university?

**QUESTION 3: WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU DONE TO PREPARE OUTSIDE OF EDUCATION?**

- WORK EXPERIENCE, EMPLOYMENT OR VOLUNTEERING
- PERSONAL LIFE EXPERIENCES OR RESPONSIBILITIES
- HOBBIES AND ANY EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
- OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS



# Question 3: **What else** have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

This is your chance to talk about any other **activities** you have undertaken outside of your **formal education** or **personal experiences** which further demonstrate your suitability for the course. This section is likely to be highly personal to you and anything you do include should reflect on why you're including it.

## **Work experience, employment, or volunteering**

Whether it's in-person work experience at your local school or virtual work experience through [Springpod](#), or volunteering at a dog shelter, the key thing here is for you to reflect on your experiences and the skills gained relevant to your chosen course.

Personal life experiences or responsibilities

Is there a situation you've personally overcome that has influenced your decision? Are there responsibilities such as caring for a family member that has helped you develop essential qualities for the course like resilience and empathy?

## **Hobbies and any extracurricular or outreach activities**

Think sports, reading, community work, summer schools – any activities outside of your studies that help further showcase why you'd make a great student.

## **Achievements outside of school or college**

This could be a position of responsibility such as captain for your local club, a musical achievement, competition you won, or a qualification you've attained outside of the classroom.



# What universities and colleges are looking for

When reading your personal statement, admissions tutors are looking for evidence that you're **passionate** and knowledgeable about the subject area you're looking to **study further** and have the relevant skills, experiences, and potential to be a great student.

**Helen Bousfield-Myatt**

HE ADMISSIONS TEAM LEADER, HARTPURY UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE

‘When we consider an application, we want to understand **why** someone has applied for the course, **what interests them** about it, and **what inspires them** to pursue education and a career in this area. An applicant is **more than a set of qualifications**; of **equal importance** is **what they do outside of their studies**. We use the personal statement to understand this.’



# UCAS

[UCAS Video](#)



# Stage One - Reasons

## Japanese

*'My main reason for wanting to study Japanese is because I enjoy studying complex grammar rules to see how languages come together. This is why I chose to undertake Latin at A-Level as I enjoy translating pieces of complex texts. Analysing writers techniques in presenting ideas and characters is also interesting, in particular how Tacitus in Annals I, presents Tiberius as an unsuitable emperor by often comparing him to his father Augustus, an emperor who was deemed 'an upholder of moral justice.'*

- A. Too much detail; doesn't give a sense of the student as an individual
- B. Strong reasons backed up by detailed examples



# Stage One - Reasons

## Japanese

*My main reason for wanting to study Japanese is because I enjoy studying complex grammar rules to see how languages come together. This is why I chose to undertake Latin at A-Level as I enjoy translating pieces of complex texts. Analysing writers techniques in presenting ideas and characters is also interesting, in particular how Tacitus in Annals I, presents Tiberius as an unsuitable emperor by often comparing him to his father Augustus, an emperor who was deemed 'an upholder of moral justice.'*

A. Too much detail; doesn't give a sense of the student as an individual

B. Strong reasons backed up by detailed examples

Academic evidence suggests that admissions tutors particularly value the identification of relevant skills to the subject the student is applying for. This should be backed up by specific examples where the student demonstrates that they have started to develop these skills already. This student illustrates their ability to analyse writing through reference to a particular text.



I have read extensively around the subject of philosophy. This has included reading many extra books in my spare time which have taken me beyond the A Level syllabus. My extra reading began in the world of ancient philosophy and on my summer holiday last year I worked my way through “The Republic” by Plato and “The Nicomachean Ethics” by Aristotle. This gave me an excellent grounding in the basics of ethics and political philosophy. I was therefore able to move on to more modern material, and I learnt more about deontological ethics by reading the work of Immanuel Kant. I complemented this with reading some material by a consequentialist – John Stuart Mill (I have read both “On Liberty” and “Utilitarianism”). I’ve developed a particular interest in the philosophy of “Stoicism”. I’ve read many books on this subject including “Discourses” by Epictetus. I’ve also read books on how ancient Stoic philosophy can be applied to solve some of the problems of modern living, such as “A Guide to Rational Living” by Albert Ellis and “A Guide to the Good Life” by William B Irvine. I am looking forward to learning more about ancient philosophy at university.

**Good or bad (or both) - why?**



# Little or no development, little or no critical analysis, too descriptive, ‘name dropping’, you must ‘show don’t tell’

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In my spare time I have enjoyed reading philosophy books which have taken me beyond the A Level syllabus. I read an ancient text called “Discourses” by Epictetus. I struggled with this a little at first, but once I found an updated translation of the original text by Robert Dobbin I was able to fully comprehend Epictetus’s ideas. In the book, Epictetus observes that when human beings suffer it is not because bad things have happened to them. Rather, they suffer because of their interpretation of these events and their internal narrative which tells them that these events are bad and ought not to have happened. This observation led me to develop a more general interest in the philosophy of Stoicism, which Epictetus espouses. My philosophy teacher then recommended that I read a book called “A Guide to Rational Living” by the psychologist Albert Ellis. In this book Ellis explains how he managed to use Epictetus’s ancient advice to improve the quality of the psychotherapy he was offering to his patients. By using these ancient Stoic principles, Ellis was able to make his patients feel less depressed about their lives. The final book I have read on the topics of Stoicism is “A Guide to the Good Life” by William B Irvine. This has shown me how I can use Stoic principles every day to improve my own life, such as imagining that my life is less successful than it actually is to enable me to realise how fortunate I am. Now that I have developed a particular interest in Stoicism I hope to write a dissertation on this subject at university.

## Good or bad (or both) - why?



# Personal observations, a journey, judgements, not merely descriptive, showing not telling

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# Real life examples of personal statements

I was intrigued by Professor Lord Skidelsky's suggestion, in his public lecture 'Keynes and the Crisis of Capitalism', that the execution of quantitative easing following the financial crisis was ineffective in stimulating economic recovery, due to the reduced confidence levels of firms and consumers. This helped me to appreciate the importance of not only understanding economic theories, but also knowing how to implement appropriate policy in the real world. However, I do not agree that in increasing aggregate demand after a shock, it doesn't matter what the "stimulus" is spent on. Essentially, I believe the government should invest in education and infrastructure to increase aggregate supply, limiting the extent to which growth will conflict with inflation in the long run. The opportunity to engage in debates that are crucial to every aspect of society motivates me to study economics.

**What is good about this paragraph?**

**What do you think could be improved?**



# Real life examples of personal statements

I was **intrigued** by Professor Lord Skidelsky's suggestion, in his public lecture 'Keynes and the Crisis of Capitalism', that the execution of quantitative easing following the financial crisis was ineffective in stimulating economic recovery, due to the reduced confidence levels of firms and consumers. This **helped me to appreciate** the importance of not only understanding economic theories, but also knowing how to implement appropriate policy in the real world. **However, I do not agree** that in increasing aggregate demand after a shock, it doesn't matter what the "stimulus" is spent on. Essentially, **I believe** the government should invest in education and infrastructure to increase aggregate supply, limiting the extent to which growth will conflict with inflation in the long run. The opportunity to engage in debates that are crucial to **every aspect of society** motivates me to study economics.

- What is good about this paragraph?
- Evaluation, specific examples, idea of the educational journey, questioning the prevailing orthodoxy
- What do you think could be improved?
- Long sentences?



# Example of the new personal statement – Law with Human Rights

## Why do you want to study this course or subject?

My aspiration to study law is firmly rooted in my interest in world events and with my desire to help others. Law affects our everyday lives, almost without us noticing. The news always features as aspect of law up for debate. Ethical issues are often brought to the forefront on topics such as animal testing, abortion and gay rights. I find these debates absolutely fascinating and the complexity of law continues to astound me. I built upon my initial interest by keenly reading *The Law Machine* by Marcel Berlins and Clare Dyer; it provided me with a firm grounding in the essential principles of the British legal system and highlighted its apparent weaknesses.

I believe that my ability to motivate myself is a key factor in my overall success. I am an extremely hardworking person and I am committed to reaching my goals. I believe I can contribute a genuine passion and enthusiasm for reading law and I thank you for taking the time to consider my application.

## Strengths? Weaknesses?



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## **Strengths:**

Does appear to have a genuine interest in law and human rights

## **Weaknesses:**

Spelling mistake in first line. Do not directly address the admissions tutor. Lacking in detail – somewhat vague



# Example of the new personal statement – Law with Human Rights

## How have your qualifications & studies helped you prepare for this course or subject?

I have always maintained an independent, self-motivated approach to my academic studies. Having studied a broad range of AS and A-level subjects, I feel I have acquired a strong selection of skills: from Mathematics and Philosophy I have learnt the art of questioning the world around us and developing a keen sense of intellectual curiosity; from English Language and General Studies I have understood the importance of expressing myself clearly and concisely through words; whilst from ICT I have developed a solid understanding of an area which is playing an increasingly important role in today's society.

A keen passion of mine is debating and I have represented my school in various competitions. In year eleven I was a member of the winning team in the Rotary Youth Speaks final for East Anglia. Our presentation – Is it ever justifiable to execute criminals? – was given a special award.

I was appointed a senior prefect at my school this year and it is a position which I take great pride in. It involves helping to maintain discipline amongst the younger pupils during lunch-breaks and representing the school at various events.

## Strengths?

## Weaknesses?



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## Strengths?

A very strong, specific paragraph on debating. Extremely relevant for this subject area

## Weaknesses?

Again, in parts somewhat vague and lacking in reference to Law with Human Rights



# Example of the new personal statement – Law with Human Rights

## What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

To gain a different perspective of the law I had the chance to take a work experience placement with a local solicitor's firm. My work evolved from basic administrative duties, such as filing, faxing and answering telephone calls, into accompanying solicitors to court and liaising with barristers on behalf of the firm. The opportunity to work alongside people who have dedicated their lives to the law has strengthened my decision to study this challenging discipline.

I have spent time in the public galleries of both the local County Court and High Court. I am fascinated by the processes that take place and my long-term ambition is to play an integral role in the court room. In November I am due to shadow a district judge for a week, giving valuable insight into the day to day workings of the job.

In my spare time I like to swim and play netball. Although I do not play at a recognised level, I would be very keen to continue them with hobbies when I reach university. I understand the importance of having a good balance between work and play and I am confident that I would make the most of my time as a student.

Strengths?

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### Strengths?

Work experience is something that tutors notice, particularly for a competitive degree such as Law

### Weaknesses?

The last paragraph does not add much to the personal statement. Perhaps this could be sacrificed for more detail in section 2.

