

100 Do's and Don'ts of Personal Statement Writing

DO

- Look at the websites and prospectuses of universities and colleges you are applying for and see if they say anything about writing personal statements.
- Check university and college prospectuses, websites and entry profiles to check the criteria and qualities that they want their students to demonstrate and make sure you show them in your statement.
- Make sure you do your research about entry requirements - you can't afford to waste an application.
- Remember the aims of a personal statement. You need to show the admissions tutor why you should be accepted on your chosen course at your chosen university.
- Organise your statement so that it is structured and coherent.
- Make sure you have a good start and a good ending. A good start will interest the reader and encourage them to read the statement properly rather than just scanning it. A good ending will mean the reader remembers what you wrote.
- Make sure that your academic profile complements your choice of course.
- Write an original personal statement - admissions tutors want an insight into the character of the person who has written it.
- Show that you are aware of the demands of the course, including the need for travel or working unusual hours, where relevant.
- Show that you are familiar with topical or significant issues within your subject.
- Link your interests and hobbies to the skills required by the course.
- Make a case for why the university should choose you over other applicants.
- Make your experience relevant to your choice of course.
- Show that you understand the pressures of the course and are still committed to it.
- Make sure you show absolute commitment to a particular course.
- Show that you are dedicated to this course and have researched it well.
- Mention relevant HE open days, summer schools, lectures you have attended while researching your choices.

- Use examples to convince the reader that you are conscientious, determined, hardworking and unlikely to drop out.
- Draw upon the knowledge, experience and skills that you have developed during your previous studies or employment.
- Remember you only have a limited amount of space, so everything you write should count.
- Explain why you want to return to study and why you decided to change career if your degree will result in a career change.
- Say how your experiences have shaped your decision to apply for the course you have chosen.
- Say what particularly interests you about your chosen subject.
- Mention your social, sports or leisure activities as well as your academic interests. Tutors like to know that you know how to relax.
- Mention any relevant transferable skills gained in work or voluntary experiences.
- Mention your career plans for when you graduate from university and make sure you show that you've done your research.
- Provide evidence that you have a genuine and long-standing interest in your chosen subject/career path
- Highlight relevant activities you have taken part in, lectures you have attended, authors you have read or significant events that engendered your interest.
- Personalise your application and emphasise elements of your personal development that admissions tutors will want to hear about.
- Provide evidence that you have read or expanded your experience beyond the academic curriculum.
- Mention how you like to learn. Some courses offer high levels of tutor contact whereas others use a lot of problem-based learning.
- Take care to emphasise your enthusiasm for those subjects which have most relevance to your chosen subject.
- Let your personality shine through.
- Mention specific aspects of the courses that interest you.
- Mention experiences which led to the decision to take this subject.
- Mention where you hope a degree in this subject will lead you.
- Mention experiences that show you are a reliable and responsible person.

- Think about exactly why you want to take this subject. Even if you are totally sure that this is the course for you, you still need to get this idea across to the admissions tutors.
- Look at example personal statements to identify what kind of structure/ language works well.
- Use language which makes you sound enthusiastic about your course.
- Be positive and interesting.
- Read through what you've written slowly and try to read it from someone else's point of view.
- Make sure it's easy to read and not confusing.
- Make sure you've said everything that you want to say.
- Create a list of your ideas before attempting to write the real thing.
- Expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy with your statement.
- Make sure your personal statement supports your desire to study your chosen degree.
- Make sure that you show sufficient understanding, relevance or knowledge of the course you are applying for.
- Show evidence that you have good communication skills.
- Make sure you demonstrate sufficient knowledge and interest in the subject in your personal statement.
- Demonstrate your ability to cope with the demands of the course.
- Show that you can work under pressure.
- Mention any support issues which may affect your study.
- Convince the reader that you will be able to adjust to your new environment at university.
- Ask people you trust for their feedback on your personal statement.
- Read the statement aloud to yourself to check that you sound like an inspiring, motivated candidate.
- Remember that different departments will be able to see what other courses you may have applied for at the same university so make your choices coherent.

DON'T

- Appear indecisive. Convince the reader that you are very clear about your chosen route and don't hedge your bets.
- Use clichés like 'I've always been fascinated by the human body/ the miracle of childbirth/ the wonders of the natural world etc...
- Mention universities or colleges by name.
- Use vague generalities such as "I learned many valuable lessons about the importance of teamwork." Give examples and apply them to your intended course.
- Start every sentence with "I".
- Mention that TV dramas or reality programmes sparked off your interest in a subject.
- Talk about things that are not relevant. If you think that you are starting to, take a break and come back to your statement when you feel more focused.
- Make factual errors - getting the name of authors, books, or places wrong indicates that you have not taken time or care.
- Waste space by repeating what is elsewhere on your application.
- Copy or closely imitate a personal statement that you have read elsewhere.
- Say you've chosen a particular subject because you've always been good at it.
- Write an essay about someone who has inspired you to take a particular path.
- Write in text language or jargon – write in full and complete sentences.
- Use big words for the sake of using them, as in "Although I did a plethora of activities in college, my assiduous efforts enabled me to succeed". Keep your style clear and simple.
- Risk coming across as pompous by dwelling too much on your awards and achievements.
- Write about your failures/weaknesses without showing how you overcame them.
- Feel that you need to use elaborate language - the focus of your writing may be lost.
- Let your positive self-presentation tip over into immodesty.
- Exaggerate - you may get caught out at interview when asked to elaborate on an interesting story.
- Rely on a spellchecker as it will not pick up everything - proof read as many times as possible.

- Leave it to the last minute - your statement will seem rushed and important information could be left out.
- Expect to be able to write your personal statement whilst watching TV or surfing the internet.
- Use gimmicks to try to show the readers that you are original. The personal statement is not the time to write a haiku.
- Make careless mistakes. You need to show you're serious about your application.
- Ramble or fill the space with irrelevant information.
- Under-sell yourself.
- Include lots of quotations - the admissions tutor is interested in what you think, not what somebody else thinks.
- Talk about how you prefer one university over another - remember that your personal statement is seen by each of the institutions you apply to.
- Lie, you may be asked to provide evidence of your stated achievements.
- Be reticent about promoting yourself and your achievements effectively and confidently.
- Try to be funny or make jokes in your statement. They might not share your sense of humour and this is a formal document.
- Use vocabulary you are not comfortable with.
- Use two sentences where one will do.
- Waste words - the sentence with fewer words, is often the more effective and elegant one.
- State that you are enthusiastic or committed without offering supporting evidence that can be linked to the course.
- Write your autobiography - your statement should be future-oriented, not past-oriented.
- Repeat things already on your UCAS form.
- Say you are going to do something before you come to university, like pass your driving test or do some voluntary work.
- Write a list of all your hobbies and interests without explaining why you enjoy them.
- Include hobbies and interests which do not involve some element of personal development.
- Take any extreme political viewpoints - your personal statement shouldn't become a position paper on controversial issues such as the death penalty, abortion, war, etc.

- Get on a soapbox and preach to the reader - while expressing your values and opinions is fine, avoid coming across as fanatical or extreme.
- Apply late – a hurried statement is more likely to contain grammatical and spelling errors and be less well researched.
- Check your punctuation and grammar before submitting your statement.

Find out more at all University websites. [Here](#) is York University's page as an example.