

Personal Statements

What makes a good personal statement?

What are admissions tutors looking for?

The Basics:

- Word count: 4000 characters or 47 lines of text (about a side of A4, 4 / 5 paragraphs)
- Crucial part of the application, along with academic grades and teacher reference
- Initial deadline 15 Oct (medicine, vet sci, dentistry, Oxbridge) second deadline 15 Jan

The Basics:

- Personal essay - student explains why they want to do this course
- Russell Group universities generally recommend 75% : 25% split in discussing academic interests vs extra curricular activities
- Strong personal statement won't compensate for weaker academic grades

Competition:

UCL: number of applicants per place (2012/13)

Architecture 14

Biomedical Sciences 12

Economics 12

English 20

Fine Art 35

Law 17

Medicine 7

Psychology 10

(These are the most competitive: others range from 3 - 9 applicants per place)

How do Admissions Tutors use the Personal Statement?

- Use of personal statements varies: English, Law, History for example scrutinise in great detail. Maths, Physics perhaps less so, as more about grades (but still very important with increasing competition) - **this is from an admissions tutor at UCL so may not be applicable everywhere!**
- Some courses require additional assessments and tests (BMAT, UKCAT, LNAT, written tests emailed to students, portfolios for Architecture)
- Some courses interview applicants, some don't. If interviewed, students **MUST** re-read their statement: it will be heavily used for interview questions

Some examples:

Read the example you have been given. As a group decide what is good and not so good about it.

Is it clear what the person has applied for?

In conclusion: What do Admissions Tutors want?

- Originality
- Excellent writing
- Evidence of further reading and genuine academic interest in subject
- Evidence of realistic understanding of course
- Work experience / volunteering related to course
- Other extra-curricular activities, ideally related to course

Some 'Dos'

- Be specific and give details
- Personalised: why do you want to study this subject?
- Work experience, volunteering, extra curricular activities: whatever it is, analyse, reflect on it and relate it to course
- Get someone else to read your statement

Some 'Don'ts'

- Cliches: “Ever since I was a child...”
“I’m passionate about...”
- Clever jokes or puns can misfire!
- The Shopping List
- Vague, gushy, aspirational statements:
“I genuinely believe that I am a highly motivated, passionate person...’
- Plagiarise!