

Welcome back to

Highly Competitive applications

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

**NORFOLK HIGHER
ASPIRATIONS SCHEME**



Norfolk County Council



Buckle your seat belts... this session requires your brain.

Make notes. Get ready to think.



Year 12 AimHigher Session

- What are personal statements and why do they matter?
- What does a powerfully effective personal statement look like, and how do you write yours?
- Putting it to the test... analysing two real examples

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Q: What even is a personal statement?

Answer from **UCAS**: “The personal statement is your chance to describe your ambitions, skills, and experience to university and college admissions staff.”

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Q: What even is a personal statement?

Answer: The only part of your UCAS application where you can express yourself freely, telling your universities about:

- Your interests and motivations to study **the specific course** you're applying for.
- What you already love about **the subject and course area**
- Any experiences that make you a great candidate **for this course**

For clarity's sake... literally what is it?

- The big section on UCAS where you actually have to write stuff: much more personal
- 4000 characters (including spaces), split up over 3 sections / questions (more on that later)
- You only get **ONE** – and this goes to ALL your universities, so it must cater for all your courses [note: Cambridge have the “My Cambridge Application”]

So what do
they actually
want?

Top tips...



600,660

**UCAS applications for
undergraduate courses each year**

Who's your reader? Remember these two?!

Job Title:

Professor of Social Theory, Fellow, Tutor
and Director of Studies at Selwyn College

**Job Title:**

Professor in Sociology, Fellow and
Director of Studies at King's College



**So in one sense,
it's personal but
it's not about
you...**



Not this...

“Ever since I watched 'Shaun the Sheep' on CBBC, i have been passionate about becoming a farmer. For me, nothing in life would be as good as a farmer's life.”

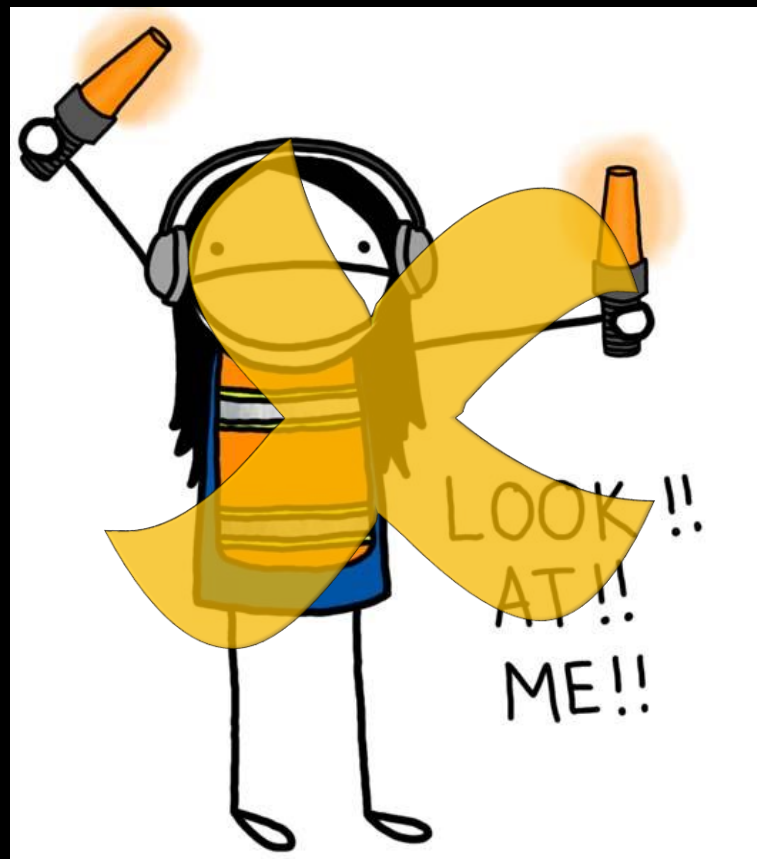
“I have a black belt in karate and enjoy marital arts.”

“I am well-respected by my classmates. At school, I hold the position of head bog and it is a post I am performing well.”

**“What is physics?
I don't know;
that's why I want
to take it at
university.”**

5 things

1. Here's the big thing: subject focus



Oxford University on personal statements...

"It really doesn't matter if you haven't got any friends or hobbies or if you don't do any charitable work. **It's purely academic judgement.**"

Sussex University on personal statements...

Your personal statement is an explanation of why you want to study your subject at university and is your chance to stand out from other applicants. Universities want to see...

**Commitment and
enthusiasm for
the course**

**Skills that will
help you with
university level**

**Examples of how
you developed
these skills**

**Evidence that you
will participate in
university life**

**Excellent
communication
skills**

Top tip: be an academic bloodhound.

Start by reading / observing / experiencing something in your area. Anything that interests you.

Once you've picked up that thread...

These trails of learning, where pursuit of an interest led you down an intellectual rabbit hole, should be explicit in your personal statement!

On medical work experience, you meet someone with dementia...

...which leads you to read an article on dementia...

...which leads you to read a book on illnesses affecting the elderly.

You listen to a podcast on the history of political ideas about Weber...

...which leads you to reading one of Weber's books...

...which leads you to a TED talk on political philosophy...

...which leads you to another book on a different political thinker



Top tip: be an academic bloodhound.

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Once you've picked up the trail, follow it down.

You listen to a podcast on the history of political ideas about Weber...

...which leads you to reading one of Weber's books...

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...which leads you to another book on a different political thinker

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I was fascinated by an episode of David Runciman's podcast "Talking Politics - History of Ideas" which focused on Weber's concepts of the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. The idea that violence might be the backbone of a largely peaceful modern state like the UK felt like an alarming paradox to me, so I went on to read Weber's 1919 lecture on "Politics as a Vocation", and was struck by his insistence on the necessity of legitimate violence in order to maintain the existence of the modern state. Wanting to pursue this further, I watched a TED Talk by..."



2. Reflection is key!

- ✓ Reflecting on your reading and experiences (rather than simply listing them) is the key thing for writing a great statement.
- ✓ Consider these real examples, with reflections in red...

An article from The Economist which caught my attention was ‘200% and Counting’, which discussed the unique and complex nature of China’s national debt. **I found it staggering that even an economy which is doubling in size every decade has such a high national-debt-to-GDP ratio.**

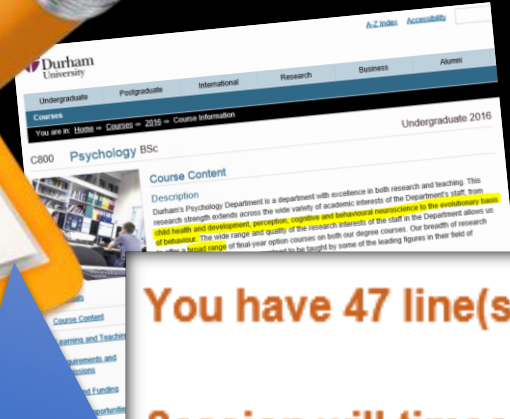
However, my favourite read thus far was “War and Peace” by Tolstoy. **The tenderness with which Tolstoy presents his characters, especially the children such as Natasha, makes him, in my opinion, one of the finest novelists ever.**

John Gribbin’s, ‘In Search of Schrodinger’s Cat’ introduced me to quantum mechanics and the enormity of its impact in the 20th century. **I was particularly interested in the Many Worlds theory: the notion that each possible alternate history could create its own real branch of the universe has profound implications for our perceptions of science and humanity.**

Additionally, my part time job in Waitrose both Saturdays and Sundays **has taught me to be disciplined with my studies during the week.**

3. Tailor-make it!

Your personal statement should be made to measure for whatever your particular range of courses / universities are looking for!



You have 47 line(s) and 4000

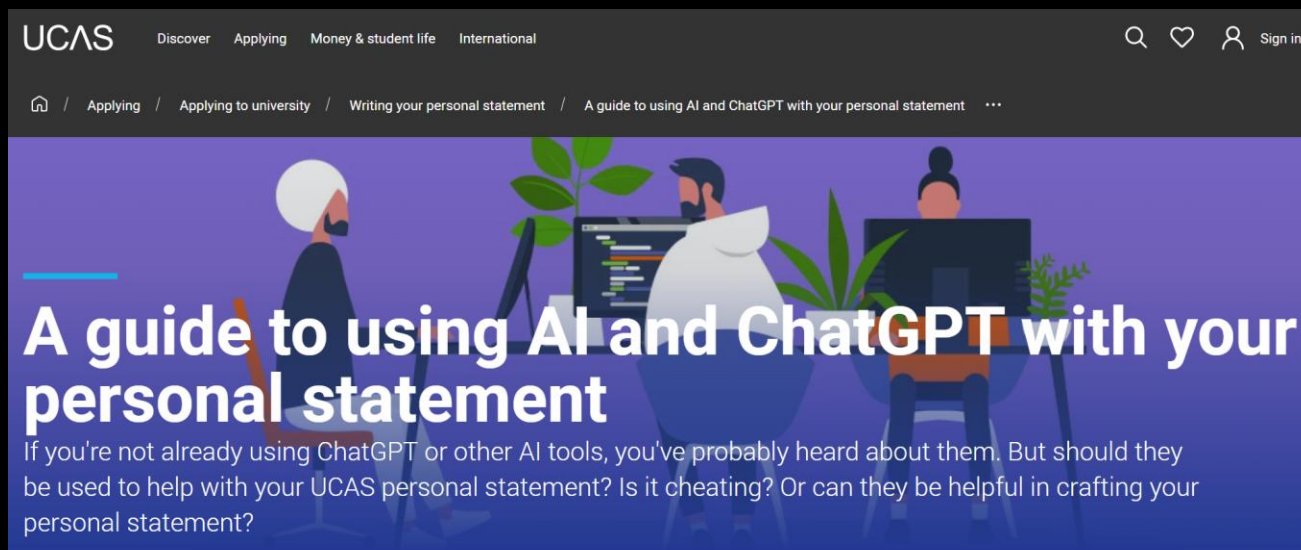
Session will timeout in 32:5



4. Be genuine!

- Don't lie – obviously
- Don't copy anyone else – they'll know
- Don't pretend to be someone else – they want to know about **you**

And be
very, very
aware of
this →



The screenshot shows the UCAS website with a navigation bar at the top containing links for Discover, Applying, Money & student life, and International. On the right of the navigation bar are icons for search, a heart, a user profile, and a 'Sign in' link. Below the navigation bar is a breadcrumb trail: Home / Applying / Applying to university / Writing your personal statement / A guide to using AI and ChatGPT with your personal statement. The main content area features a large illustration of three people (two men and one woman) sitting at a desk with computers and a potted plant. Overlaid on this illustration is the title 'A guide to using AI and ChatGPT with your personal statement' in large white text. Below the title is a paragraph of text: 'If you're not already using ChatGPT or other AI tools, you've probably heard about them. But should they be used to help with your UCAS personal statement? Is it cheating? Or can they be helpful in crafting your personal statement?'

UCAS Discover Applying Money & student life International

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Home / Applying / Applying to university / Writing your personal statement / A guide to using AI and ChatGPT with your personal statement

A guide to using AI and ChatGPT with your personal statement

If you're not already using ChatGPT or other AI tools, you've probably heard about them. But should they be used to help with your UCAS personal statement? Is it cheating? Or can they be helpful in crafting your personal statement?

5. Finally: structure...



What is changing with personal statements?

Personal statements are changing from one longer piece of text to three separate sections, each with a different question to help shape the focus for students' answers. Each section will have a minimum character count of 350 characters, which is clearly labelled on the question boxes, along with an overall character counter, to ensure students know if they're on track. The new web page for submitting the personal statement will also feature helpful on-page guidance for each question.

The new questions are as follows:

- 1 Why do you want to study this course or subject?
- 2 How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
- 3 What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?



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1

Think about why you want to study the subject

- Have you been inspired by someone, a news story, a documentary, or a podcast?
- Do you have career aspirations in this area of study?
- What interests you about the subject – be specific; rather than saying you enjoy it or are good at it, try to explain the 'why' behind your reasoning.
- What do you already know about the subject and what are you looking forward to learning more about?

2

What makes you suitable to study the subject?

- Have you done projects or essays in this subject at school or college?
- Think about who you are as a person; your personality, your strengths,

2

What makes you suitable to study the subject?

- Have you done projects or essays in this subject at school or college?
- Think about who you are as a person; your personality, your strengths, your experiences in life – how do these make you suited to study the subject?
- How have you shown an interest in the subject outside of school or college – have you done extra reading, online courses, been part of clubs or competitions?
- Your current subjects and grades will be included elsewhere in your application, so try to think about specific things you've learned during your studies that relate to the subject, rather than listing your grades and subjects.

3

Look at the bigger picture

- Have you done any work experience, an internship or had a part-time job in this subject area or related? Most job or work experience will give you transferable skills, even if it's in a different industry.
- Do you have any hobbies you can mention that might relate to your chosen subject? Many hobbies show that you can be motivated outside of school to achieve and succeed in something you're interested in.
- Think about how your life and personal experiences have helped make you the person you are today, and how these challenges and experiences can support your application by evidencing essential qualities for certain subjects.
- If you've got ambitions and goals for your life and career, can you express how this subject will help you reach these goals?

2026 PERSONAL STATEMENT GUIDES

Explore this **section** ▼



Business

- Accounting and finance
- Business and management studies
- Economics
- Events management
- Hospitality, leisure, and tourism
- Marketing
- PR and communications



Engineering and architecture

- Aeronautical and aerospace engineering
- Architecture and planning
- Building and construction
- Chemical engineering
- Civil engineering
- Electrical and electronic engineering
- Engineering and technology
- Manufacturing engineering
- Materials science and engineering
- Mechanical engineering



Healthcare

- Biomedical science
- Counselling, psychotherapy, and occupational therapy
- Dentistry
- Health
- Optometry
- Paramedic science
- Pharmacy, pharmacology, and toxicology
- Physiotherapy, physiology, and pathology
- Radiography and medical technology
- Social work, childhood, and youth studies
- Veterinary science

Headlines for the 3 questions

- 1. Aim for a roughly equal split of characters across the boxes,** but don't stress too much about what goes where! The 3rd box is particularly flexible (super-curricular, work experience, extra-curricular).
- 2. Top-end universities still only really care about the academic,** subject-related content, so keep material in the 3rd box / question as subject-focused as possible.
- 3. Keep your examples recent,** in all the boxes, e.g. from the last couple of years.
- 4. Universities read the whole thing:** no need for separate intro and conclusion for each one
- 5. There are 3 questions but that doesn't mean 3 paragraphs:** subdivide for readability!
- 6. Question 1 might be the hardest!** Start with Question 2, and Question 1 will probably come to you.

So...

Make a “mark scheme” for personal statements – a list of things you would look for in good ones. We’re then going to apply it to some real examples...

First, read this, and tell me in the Q&A why it's weak...

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to pursue the subject at degree level. At university I look forward to examining a range of historical sources. I am particularly interested in French history, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness.

I hold many responsibilities: organising and attending school functions, delivering speeches to the school body, being an active member of the school council, working effectively with other students. Having played in school concerts with the keyboard orchestra when I was in Year 9, I have recently taken up piano lessons.

I am a keen sports player and I am a member of the school hockey team, netball team, the athletics squad and the volleyball team, earning me the 'Sports Personality of the Year award.

I have taught information technology skills to younger students and helped a particular student to overcome language difficulties. I have organised sports days and Christmas parties for the elderly; and written, directed and performed a series of short plays. I have always enjoyed reading but more recently my 'A' level studies have enabled me to explore foreign literature.

Currently, I am involved in the European Youth Parliament Competition in which I will be representing my school at a residential debating conference. The winner will represent the United Kingdom in Cyprus. This venture enhanced my general knowledge (specifically of genetic engineering and drug legislation).

Now for
something a little
more impressive...

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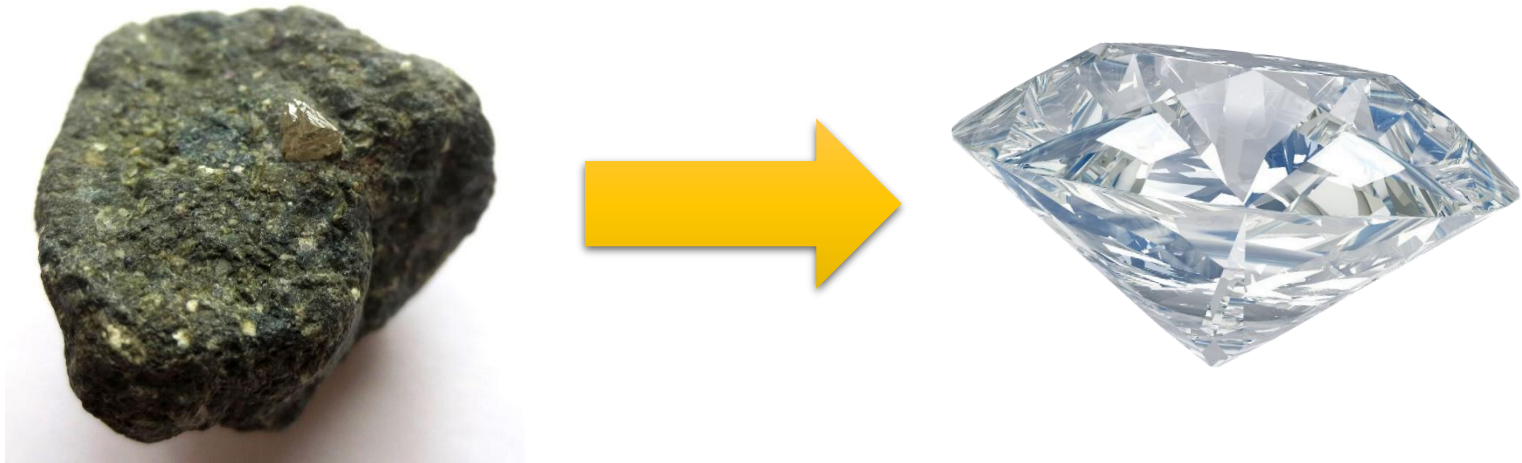


Final thought...

All this advice might make you think you have to 'get it right' first time. You don't.

Sit down, and just write down whatever comes out, however rubbish it might feel.

Think "rough diamond..."



Questions in the chat?

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