



HOW TO WRITE A PERSONAL STATEMENT

A. SOME BASIC GUIDELINES

Don't think your English has to be perfect!

- Universities focus more on content, than absolute fluency in English.
- Few native speakers can write perfectly, let alone a second language English speaker.

*** This is an exception to students applying for Literature or Journalism etc. A demonstration of a high standard of English is key***

Don't write too much!

- Less is more. Aim for 80-90% of the word limit.
- Avoid mindless babbling and boring the tutor with excessive length.
- Be concise, clear and relevant.

Don't recycle the same application for multiple schools!

- You may be able to reuse much of your material in different applications, but always customise it to each university.
- Do this by adjusting the length, changing emphases, reorganising the different elements, omitting some points and adding in new ones.
- The section addressing your reasons for choosing a particular school needs to be very carefully customised for each application.
- Prepare each application separately. Pay careful attention to the wording of the questions asked and make sure that your answers fit them.

Don't try to follow a "model"!

- Do not copy samples off the internet, tutors can easily identify copied papers.
- The school wants to learn about YOU, so copying somebody else's words and ideas will not work in your favour. Your personal statement should be – personal!
- Your application may be rejected for "cheating".



B. LANGUAGE – HOW TO MAKE YOUR WRITING LOOK GOOD

Avoid long sentences.

- No more than 30 words in a sentence.

Avoid long paragraphs.

- Good paragraphing is easier to read and demonstrates logical organization of ideas.

Avoid informal English

- Do not use colloquial words or expressions.
- Contracted form, idioms and metaphors should be avoided.
- Keep your English simple, and avoid the temptation of showing off.

C. CONTENT – GENERAL PATTERNS TO PS QUESTIONS

Question 1: Your life, experience, and interests.

- Usually focuses on your academic and work experience.
- May overlap with Question 2 (*see below*)
- May be asked to choose a particular example of a topic in your field that interests you or a difficult situation that you have learned something useful from.
- May ask about what matters to you outside of work or study: eg. favourite leisure activity, or most important belief, your most notable achievement or which person you most admire.
- Can talk about extra-curricular activities, a sporting success, or overcoming a personal hardship etc.

Question 2: Your choice of course.

- Why you want to study this subject, and why you are attracted to this particular course at this particular school.
- You must do adequate research on this section (*see “Research” note below*)
- May be asked what aspect of your studies you expect to find most challenging. Eg. area of weakness in your studies, anxiety about new topics, culture shock, financial hardship etc.



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Question 3: Your plans for the future.

- May distinguish between immediate goals (plans after course finishes) and longer-term career plan.
- Short term plans may include: pursue further academic study or return to work; return immediately to your own country, or would like to work or travel overseas.
- Long terms should look towards your ultimate career goal, and may include: what field you hope to end your working life in, and how high you hope to rise in that field.
- Avoid focusing only on your own employment prospects, and show how the knowledge you gain from your studies may **benefit others as well**. Eg. Commitment to political action/charity work; sharing new knowledge through mentoring or training etc

D. THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

An admissions board wants to be flattered; they want to feel that their school is your first choice. Hence, it is vital to **customise each application** according to the university. You should **research each school, its courses and tutors in depth**.

You should therefore:

- Use the **correct title** of the course
- Show that you know about the course in detail
- Check the biographies of the tutors who will be delivering the course, and if possible, read some of their published work.
- Go beyond the school's own website and search the whole of the Internet to learn the complete career history of the tutors who most interest you.
- A well-researched answer on why you have chosen a particular course will guarantee that you stand out as being among the most impressive applicants.



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