The quality of your writing reflects the quality of your thinking. Show that you know your strengths and can outline your ideas clearly. Use words you know will be understood by the person reading your statement; you might find it easier if you imagine you are talking to them across their desk. In fact, you can sometimes spot where your statement doesn't work well by reading it aloud.

What to include

Most courses have an Entry Profile that you can view in Course Search - these explain what the university is looking for in their students and what qualifications or experience you'll need for the course. Check these because they'll give you some ideas about what to include in your statement.

Below are some suggestions of what to include in your personal statement. These are guidelines only so don't worry if some of the suggestions do not apply to you.

In this section...

- Writing about the course
- Skills and achievements
- Hobbies and interests
- Work experience
- Mature students
- International students
- Future plans

Writing about the course
Two of the most important things to include are:

- **why you're applying for the course you've chosen:** this is particularly important when you're applying for a subject that you have not studied before. Tell the university the reasons why that subject interests you, and include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course, eg if applying for psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is.
- **why you're suitable for the course:** tell the universities the skills and

experience you have that will help you to succeed on the course.

Also think about:
• how your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen

• any activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)

• why you want to go to university or college.

We looked at some of the reasons why applications were unsuccessful and here's a few that were sent to applicants in 2010:
• Your personal statement does not strongly support your desire to study your chosen degree.

• Your personal statement did not show sufficient understanding, relevance or knowledge about the course you are applying for.

• You failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and interest in the subject in your personal statement.

• There is a lot of competition for places on this course and your personal statement and experience was not as strong as other applicants this year.

• Application form (including personal statement, reference and predicted grades) does not evidence accurate understanding of or motivation for subject.

• Unsuccessful as you have not expressed a strong enough interest in the subject area in your personal statement.

This should give you an idea of how important it is to show **why you want to study the course** and **what you can bring to it** - especially because it might be compared with other applicants applying for the same course.

Skills and achievements

Universities like to know the types of skills you have that will help you on the course, or generally at university. They also like to see if you've been involved in any accredited or non-accredited achievements. Include:

• non-accredited skills and achievement which you have gained through activities such as:
•   ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) awards, for example, Universities Award
•   CREST awards
•   Diploma of Achievement
•   Duke of Edinburgh Award
•   Millennium Volunteers Scheme
•   OCNW Level 3 Certificate in Personal Development for Progression (previously known as the Liverpool Enrichment Programme)

- vfifty award
- Villiers Park Scholars and Residential Programmes
- WorldWide Volunteering Certificate of Volunteering Achievement
- Young Enterprise.
- accreditation achieved for any activities in preparation for higher education, for example through the ASDAN Aimhigher Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE qualification).
- any other achievements that you are proud of, eg reaching grade 3 piano or being selected for the county cricket team.
- positions of responsibility that you hold/have held both in and out of school, eg form prefect or representative for a local charity.
- attributes that make you interesting, special or unique.

Hobbies and interests

Think about how your hobbies, interests and social activities demonstrate your skills and abilities. If there's anything that relates to your course or to the skills needed to complete a higher education course, include it - the more evidence the better.

The Assistant Registrar for Undergraduate Admissions from University of Warwick says that:

'The strongest applicants are those who can link their extra-curricular activities to their proposed course of study.'
Your statement will be more convincing and personal if you write about why an experience, activity or interest makes you a good candidate for the course. Include enough additional information to make it interesting and to demonstrate your own interest. Rather than making a statement such as

'I enjoy badminton'
try to provide context and show what you have learnt

'I play badminton twice a week with a club that plays in local competitions and I play in both singles and doubles matches. Doubles matches requires good team working, an ability to support your partner, to devise a game plan but be able to adapt it as required and fast reactions. I enjoy the social side of the club and take responsibility for organising the social activities and fundraising events. This gives me an opportunity to develop my organisational and planning skills. Fitting in all these activities while keeping up with my academic studies demands good time management and I think I do that very well.'

Work experience

Include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen course(s). Try to link any experience to skills or qualities mentioned in the Entry Profiles. For example, rather than just saying

'I spent two weeks working at a department store. I enjoyed speaking to customers and helping them with their enquiries'
you could say

'I spent two weeks managing customer enquiries at a department store. I learnt how to interact with customers and handle complaints. The experience highlighted the importance of positive communication between a business and its customers, and taught me how to manage difficult enquiries effectively. I would like to develop this skill further by studying a degree in public relations.'
If you are not in full-time education, you should give details of any relevant work experience, paid or unpaid, and information about your current or previous employment.

Mature students

If you are applying as a mature student, use the personal statement to explain what you have been doing since leaving education, and provide additional evidence to support your application.

A representative from University of Ulster stated:

'a mature student might have valuable experience (perhaps 10 years working in the courts service, or a solicitor's office), and this might form the basis for an APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) offer. So it is worth seeing if your experience could count towards an offer.'
Find out more about APEL offers >>

International students

If you're an international student, use the personal statement to tell universities why you want to study in the UK. Also try to answer these questions in your statement:

- Why do you want to study in the UK?
- How can you show that you can successfully complete a higher education course that is taught in English? Please say if some of your studies have been taught or examined in English.
- Have you taken part in any activities where you have used English outside of your studies?

Future plans
If you know what you'd like to achieve after completing a university course, explain how you want to use the knowledge and experience that you gain.

Dos and don'ts

Dos and don'ts when writing your personal statement

Do create a list of your ideas before attempting to write the real thing.

Do expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy.

Do ask people you trust for their feedback.

Do check university and college prospectuses, websites and Entry Profiles, as they usually tell you the criteria and qualities that they want their students to demonstrate.

Do use your best English/Welsh and **don't** let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your statement.

Do be enthusiastic - if you show your interest in the course, it may help you get a place.

Don't feel that you need to use elaborate language. If you try too hard to impress with long words that you are not confident using, the focus of your writing may be lost.

Don't say too much 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.

Don't lie - if you exaggerate you may get caught out at interview when asked to elaborate on an interesting achievement.

Don't rely on a spellchecker as it will not pick up everything - proof read as many times as possible.

Don't leave it to the last minute - your statement will seem rushed and important information could be left out.

Don't expect to be able to write your personal statement whilst watching TV or surfing the internet - this is your future, so make the most of the opportunity to succeed.

Size and presentation

Structure and format

Think about the structure of your statement - it needs to look and sound good. A bad statement can say a lot, so make sure you check spelling and grammar as well.

A representative from Ulster Business School told us:

'The presentation of the personal statement is of critical importance to demonstrate use of English language and grammar at a standard suitable for entry to higher education.'
We've provided examples on this website to help you plan your statement, but the formats we've used are just suggestions; it's more important that the university sees your writing style than ours.

How to provide your personal statement

You can enter up to 4,000 characters (this includes spaces) or 47 lines of text (this includes blank lines), whichever comes first. You do not have to use all the space provided. When you save text, the system will tell you how many characters are still available or if you have used too many characters. You can preview your statement after you have saved it.

Please note that you cannot use *italics*, **bold** or underlining in your personal statement - the system will automatically remove these when saved. This will not disadvantage your application.

From 2012 entry: if you want to, you can enter some European characters that are not in the English alphabet in your personal statement. View more information about European characters.

We recommend that you prepare your personal statement offline using a word-processing package and copy and paste it into the Apply system. Whether you are typing your statement directly into the box, or amending a statement that you pasted in, you should click 'save' regularly because Apply will time-out after 35 minutes of inactivity. The countdown on the screen displays how much time you have left before it times out.

The character and line count in Apply may be different to a word-processing package, such as Microsoft Word - this is because formatting characters, such as paragraphs and tabs, are counted in Apply but may be ignored in Word. Please use the size as specified in Apply as the guide.

If you want to send more information, contact your chosen universities and colleges to check that they are happy to accept further details. If they are, send it direct to them after we have sent you your welcome letter and Personal ID. Do not send it to us.

Similarity detection

UCAS Similarity Detection Service - guidance for applicants

This guide is designed to help UCAS applicants understand our similarity detection process. All personal statements sent to UCAS are tested for similarity.

There are some example personal statements on the internet that have been used by applicants, in some cases word for word. The service we use, called Copycatch, finds statements that show similarity, works out how much of the statement may have been copied, and reports the findings. It helps admissions staff at universities and colleges judge applications, and it is the institutions who decide what action, if any, to take regarding notified cases.

Research has shown that the majority of UCAS applicants do write their own personal statements. However, the number making use of other people's material was high enough to justify the introduction of the Similarity Detection Service.

What the Similarity Detection Service does

Each personal statement is checked against:

• a library of personal statements previously submitted to UCAS

• sample statements collected from a variety of websites

• other sources including paper publications.

Each personal statement received at UCAS is added to the library of

statements after it has been processed.

What happens if a personal statement has similarities?

- Any statements showing a level of similarity of 10% or more are reviewed by members of the UCAS Similarity Detection Service Team.
- Applicants, universities and colleges are notified at the same time by email when an application has similarities confirmed.
- Admissions tutors at individual universities and colleges decide what action, if any, to take regarding reported cases.

Eliminated words

The Copycatch process ignores commonly used words that many applicants use in their statements such as 'and', 'so' and 'with'.

Copycatch also ignores a selection of commonly used words and phrases including 'Duke of Edinburgh' and 'football'.

The verification process

- Copycatch identifies sentences in a personal statement that are matched to other personal statements already held in the Copycatch system.
- Levels of similarity are checked by trained staff who decide whether you and the institutions you are applying to need to be informed that similarity has been found.
- The universities and colleges you are applying to decide on the significance of the results and what action, if any, to take.
- Your personal statement will not be compared to your earlier applications, if you have applied in previous cycles or schemes.

Notification that a report has been sent to the universities and colleges

If Copycatch finds a significant level of similarity in your personal statement and the Verification staff at UCAS decide to inform the institutions you have applied to, we will let you know by email (if you have a verified email address). This email includes instructions on how you can view what Copycatch has found in Track, and gives you a link to frequently asked questions for further advice and guidance.

The report sent to you is identical to the report sent to the institutions. It displays your personal statement marked up to identify sentences similar to others in the Copycatch system.

How we show matches with other statements

We use four colours (see below) to indicate significant matches with other statements and grey to show sentences which have not been found to match.

Within matched sentences, words which are different from the one matched with it by the program are highlighted in **black**. **Underlined black** is used to show that the word is related but not identical.

What the sentence colours mean

Red is used for the sentences from the most matched statement.
Blue is used for the next best match if there are least three sentences.
Pink is used for the third best match if there are at least another three sentences.
Brown is used for any other matches if there are at least three sentences.

Grey is used for sentences for which no match has been found and for very short sentences, which don't get checked.

Examples

I grew up in a city near the sea and have always been fascinated by marine life.

If you had written this sentence and found it shown in red as above when you checked the notification report, it would mean that it had been exactly matched to a personal statement stored in the Copycatch library.

I grew up in a **town** near the sea and have always **found** marine life **fascinating**.

If the sentence you had written was marked in your report like the one above, it would mean that:

- **town** and **found** were not in the matched sentence
- **fascinating** was not found as an exact match but is similar enough to the equivalent word in the matched sentence to be identified by underlining.

The blue colour also shows you that the match was found in the second most matched statement.

The dates on the matched personal statements

At the bottom of the marked up personal statement, the number of sentences matched to library or internet sources is shown in the same colour as that used to mark up the sentences.

The date shows how long this personal statement has been in the UCAS collection. It does not mean that this particular statement was the one used as the source for the current personal statement.

Both may be taken from a source outside the library, or there may be other related files inside the library which have not been shown because there was no additional matched information.

The dates on the matching web sources

The number of web source sentences is shown in the same way, but here the date means either the date it was posted to the website, if known, or the date when the web source was identified by UCAS. Again, it does not necessarily mean that the file was the actual source.

As a feasibility study discovered, some web sources are very popular, and may appear on more than one website, or have been used in a modified form in a personal statement within the UCAS collection.

Why the program works

- A personal statement of 4,000 characters will contain approximately 600 words, about half of which will be words that are eliminated from consideration (see above).
- Usually, if two personal statements are randomly selected and compared, you would expect very little or no similarity. Most sentences will be significantly different.
- This means that if Copycatch finds two sentences in different statements which have exactly the same words, it is very likely that one is a copy of the other, or that both have been copied from a third source. Of course this can and does happen in essays if a quote from a text is included, but is very unlikely to occur in a personal statement.

If Copycatch finds a number of identical or similar sentences in a personal statement and a file held in the library, then a similarity report is generated.