



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Writing a Competitive
**PERSONAL
STATEMENT**

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Top tip: Remember that your personal statement is personal to you. We'll give you examples throughout this guide for inspiration, but you'll need to include your own experience which is relevant to the specific course you're applying for.



HOW TO GET STARTED

It's not always easy talking about yourself and all the things you've achieved. To get started, make a list or mind-map of your experiences in school and college, work, volunteering and extra-curricular activities.

Think of your achievements that have taught you key skills you'll use at university. For example, did working on a presentation teach you to work independently? Or, maybe being a part of your hockey team has taught you to work with others.

Whatever it is, write it down and once you've got all your ideas on paper you can pick your favourites that really demonstrate why you're the perfect candidate for your course.



THERE ARE FOUR MAIN THINGS TO COVER:



1. Your future plans

Whether you want to be a lawyer or the next Steven Spielberg, think about what you want to do in the future. It may be that the course is directly relevant to your intended career, or perhaps you have already studied the subject and found it particularly enjoyable. If the subject is completely new for you, highlight what led you to this decision.



2. Your school and college life

At this point, most of your experience may have come from your school life so make sure you include the skills you have gained whilst at school or college, as well as any sporting or extra-curricular activities, or positions of responsibility you have had (e.g. prefect, librarian).



3. Your work experience

This could include the skills you gained through work experience placements or part-time work. Work experience shows your dedication and commitment to your future career, while part-time work proves you are disciplined and organised.



4. Your interests and activities

Highlight the skills you have gained through activities you are involved in outside of school such as volunteering in the community, music, team sports, and any other hobbies or interests. You'll be surprised how much you have done!

HOW TO START WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

LET'S GET WRITING!

Starting can sometimes feel like the hardest part but you've got what you want to include covered, so let's look at how to write it.



DRAFT, DRAFT, DRAFT!

Write several drafts and get feedback from others. Getting this first draft down on paper is the hardest bit, so try to get advice from friends, family and your school or college. Also make sure to check the university website for advice about what they are looking for in an applicant.

A CLEAR STRUCTURE

Keep within the character limit of 4,000 characters, including spaces. There's a line limit of 47. Like an essay, structure your information in a logical way to reflect the skills and qualities the universities and colleges value most.

GRAMMAR AND SPELLING

Use appropriate vocabulary, spelling and grammar. Use words with precise meanings, but avoid pretentious language or giving the impression you just swallowed a dictionary! Read it back to yourself out loud to make sure it sounds like something you would say – and get parents, friends or siblings to take a look through too.

GIVE EVIDENCE

Give evidence for all your claims — don't just say you have good organisational skills, provide an example of how you can demonstrate it.

WRITE YOUR CONCLUSION

Try to summarise the main points of your statement then finish it off with a positive comment about why the university should think about offering you a place. You could also end with a comment about your career aspirations.

EXAMPLE CONCLUSION FROM ONE OF OUR EDUCATION STUDENTS:

"Studying at university has been my ambition for many years. I find immense enjoyment in reading and researching history and believe that, in the future, I will be very successful in inspiring and encouraging others to study the subject."

PERSONAL STATEMENT EXAMPLES

These examples are from applicants to different courses at BCU. Take a look at the guidance and structure of these personal statements to inspire your own writing and see how our personal statement advice can apply to your subject. **REMEMBER**, you can't copy these examples word for word as UCAS checks for plagiarism!

EXAMPLE 1 – ARTS, DESIGN AND MEDIA COURSES

This example is for a Media course, but you could use this as inspiration for any Arts, Design or Media course. For example, Graphic Design, Architecture, Fine Art and Product Design all require creative thinking, communicating with others and problem solving. Personal statements for creative courses should talk about your influences and what inspires your creative practice.

Be direct and to the point. The applicant mentions the media industry straight away, making it clear that they have relevant career goals.

The media industry has always inspired me, specifically filmmaking. The first piece of technology I got my hands on was a Nintendo 3DS, which I used to create numerous short films for my own enjoyment. Now, as a creative media student at college, I produce high level pieces of work with a wide range of equipment such as; lighting, microphones, cameras and Adobe Premiere Pro. I hope to progress to one day work in the film industry.

If you're applying for a creative course, admissions tutors will want to see passion for the subject and where the inspiration for your work comes from.

As a current creative media student, I have greatly enjoyed producing and editing music videos, advertisements, film trailers and more. Media inspires creativity and has influenced me to explore my ideas and produce a comprehensive gamut of artwork. I enjoy creating content that will be consumed daily by individuals to influence their thoughts and feelings. I created a short poetic documentary to educate humans on the potential negative consequences of their actions on the environment. I was inspired by where I grew up, which is a perfect mix of city and countryside. In the city, I see a lot of carelessness towards the environment. To create the documentary, I carried out extensive research of filming locations and filming techniques that would emphasise the difference between city and countryside to the viewer. This created unique differences in the atmospheres of the two places. I enjoyed this project as studying it allowed me to tell people's stories in the city and countryside and influence people's actions when it comes to how they live and treat their local environments. I hope to create more impactful projects on my university course.

Your personal statement is unique to you! It should focus on things that have inspired you and make you a great student, which is why this applicant talks about a project here that they're really proud of.

Try to name specific projects, topics or pieces of work at school/college that you've enjoyed or found particularly interesting. After application, a portfolio will be requested for many of our creative courses so you can show off more of your work.

I feel adaptability is one of my main strengths which is why I seek to gain new experiences and continue my development. I have recently taken on a project consisting of paid work for a 5 - star rated, local beauty business. This included filming, editing and producing their work, alongside managing their social media content. This taught me a lot of new filming and editing skills. Plus, the role was varied so it taught me to be adaptable and try new things. This will be key when taking on new projects and experimenting with different media as a Media Production student.

Use the ABC method to talk about your experiences. ABC stands for Action, Benefit, Course. Firstly, talk about the task that was given and the Action you took. Secondly, explain the Benefit of the experience by explaining the skills or knowledge you gained. Finally, link back to your chosen Course.

Outside of media, I am currently employed as a sales assistant at M&S and a seasonal team member at Thorpe Park. Attaining employment at these companies has further provided me with skills such as time management, teamwork, confidence and flexibility. As a seasonal team member at Thorpe Park, I often work extremely busy days at the park. One day, there was a technical fault with a ride, meaning that a lot of customers were waiting in the queue for a very long time. I communicated with my team and coordinated a plan to relay the information to the customers and get them cold drinks whilst they were standing in the heat. As a result, the customers were encouraged to wait for the ride and the issue was resolved. Having good communication within my team and with the customers resulted in the customers having a good experience. This experience taught me teamwork and communication skills, which will be useful when working on group projects as a part of my course and working with clients in industry.

The applicant's work experience isn't related to the subject, but it's useful to include as it shows the transferable skills they have that will make them a good student. They still use the ABC method to link back to the course at the end.

In my free time, I like to watch films and take inspiration from producers and filmmakers for my own projects. My favourite genre of film is horror. Respectively, the Conjuring series. The producer of these films, Peter Safran, is someone who inspires me. His skill of making each film completely unique yet ensuring there is a continual link between them is artistic and something that I greatly admire.

It's a good idea to include your hobbies, but think about how you can relate these back to the course you want to study.

As a Media Production student, I want to experience and learn the art of diverse multimedia storytelling and develop my transferable and technical skills to one day work in the film industry.

EXAMPLE 2 – HEALTH, EDUCATION AND LIFE SCIENCE COURSES

This applicant applied to Mental Health Nursing. Their personal statement is a good example of the research and work experience required to study a health or education course. If you're applying for a course such as Primary Education, Operating Department Practice, Diagnostic Radiography, Midwifery or Nursing, it's important to show your awareness of what these roles involve and the skills and values that are required.

Without going into too much detail that may use up too many characters, the applicant talks about how their difficult personal experience has motivated them.

My interest in mental health was first sparked as a teenager when a family member experienced severe depression and anxiety. Witnessing the impact of mental illness on someone I loved helped me understand the important role of healthcare professionals who have a commitment to quality of care and treating all patients with dignity. These early experiences, plus my work experience, have motivated me to work in mental health and learn more about mental health in the elderly community.

If you're applying for a healthcare course, take a look at the key principles and the 6 Cs of the NHS constitution, which detail the qualities and values health professionals should hold. Here, the applicant uses words from the constitution to show they understand the values of the NHS.

My fascination in DNA, specifically genetic sequencing alterations has helped to direct my interest toward Mental Health Nursing. As part of a psychology group project, we had to research and present our understanding of Beck's cognitive negative triad. This concept used in cognitive behavioural therapy has enabled me to understand people's negative views of themselves, the world and their future. Not only are these feelings directed inward and result in negative feelings about themselves but they also struggle to view other people's behaviour towards them, misunderstanding care as pity and triggering feelings of guilt.

Don't waste your character count listing your school/college qualifications! Notice how the applicant mentions two subjects they study that relate to nursing in context without listing their grades. Your subjects and grades will be listed on your UCAS application.

I was appointed as a prefect during my final year at college which enhanced my communication and organisation skills. For example, during a college open evening, I supported a student with severe anxiety by personally ensuring that the student and their family were able to find their way around the building and make the most effective use of their visit. This opportunity has helped me further understand anxiety which will be useful as a mental health nurse.

I am part of my school's volunteering program to help the elderly in our local community. This involves running events at school for the elderly to get involved in, to improve their mental health and prevent loneliness. These events have shown me the scope of mental illness and how it can manifest in people of different ages. This experience has furthered my passion for helping the elderly with their mental health, as they are a vulnerable group who are often forgotten about and find it difficult to discuss their mental health.

The applicant shows that they have a good understanding of mental health and how this can manifest in different people.

The applicant hasn't completed work experience in a healthcare setting, but they use the work experience they do have to show skills they've developed that are essential to their nursing career.

One of the qualities that I believe will make me an effective nurse is my strong sense of compassion. I volunteered for two weeks in a primary school, assisting the class teacher and helping students with their work. A young student told me how they were feeling when they had to go home for the weekend and their disclosure concerned me. I listened to the student, providing an empathetic, trustworthy person for them to confide in. Following this, I reported this as a safeguarding concern and ensured the proper procedure was followed. This experience taught me the importance of being an attentive listener to create a positive environment for the service user. Plus, this helped me to understand confidentiality, gaining consent and reporting which will be key in my role as a nurse to deal with concerns I have about patients or any malpractice I may come across.

It's okay to bring up hobbies that aren't about your desired career! The admissions advisors want to get to know you as a person. Plus, skills you learn from your hobbies and interests can still be linked back to the course, as the applicant has shown here.

Resilience is a key skill for mental health nurses. The nature of mental health care often involves complex, challenging, and emotionally taxing situations. Over the years, I have developed my own resilience through a personal hobby—long-distance running. Running has taught me the importance of pacing myself; managing stress and mental toughness are crucial in overcoming obstacles, both physically and mentally. This hobby has not only improved my physical health but has also strengthened my emotional and psychological resilience, which I believe will serve me well in the demanding field of mental health nursing.

I am confident that my passion for mental health, combined with my academic background, practical experience, and personal resilience, make me well-suited for a career in mental health nursing.

The conclusion is short and sweet, rounding up the applicant's key skills that make them a great candidate.

“Demonstrate any work experience you have completed and more importantly, what you have learnt from it. If you are planning to get the experience required outline how, when and what you anticipate learning from it.”

Rosemarie Lowe,
Head of Childhood, Youth and Community

EXAMPLE 3 – BUSINESS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCE COURSES

This is an example from a Law application. This is good inspiration if you're applying for a course in Business, Law and Social Sciences. When applying for courses such as Criminology, Psychology, Business Management or Accounting and Finance, it's a good idea to show your interest in case studies or key topics in the industry and why they motivate or inspire you.

It's ok to be unsure about what your future career may hold! Giving a rough idea of the careers or industries you'd like to work in is fine.

My interest in law stems from a strong desire to advocate for fairness, justice, and the rights of others. In the future, I want to become a solicitor, specialising in areas such as commercial law or family law. I am drawn to these fields because they provide opportunities to work closely with clients and offer practical solutions to complex problems.

The applicant uses the ABC method to talk about their experience, ABC stands for Action, Benefit, Course. Action = what they did, Benefit = the skills they learnt, Course = how this will be useful in their course or future career.

The study of law has provided me with a solid understanding of legal principles, systems, and the critical role law plays in shaping society. One of the most interesting projects I worked on during A Level Law was a case study involving contract law. In this project, we were tasked with analysing a real-life dispute between two businesses over a breach of contract. I found the process of identifying the key legal principles, researching relevant case law, and building an argument to be both intellectually stimulating and rewarding. The project not only helped me understand the practical application of contract law but also allowed me to develop skills in legal research, analysis, and critical thinking.

The applicant shows how you can relate different subjects to your chosen university course. Even if you haven't studied the subject you're applying for at school or college, explain how the skills it has given you relates to the subject you are applying for.

Through my business studies, I have gained an appreciation for the commercial aspects of law, understanding how business and legal frameworks intersect and how a solicitor's role can extend across a wide range of sectors. However, it was my study of art that has given me a unique and valuable perspective on what it means to be a solicitor. While it might not be immediately obvious, art has taught me how to approach problems creatively, think critically, and pay attention to detail—all essential skills for a solicitor. Art requires you to see things from different perspectives, and be to open different ideas. These skills have been useful in my approach to legal analysis. In law, much like in art, there is often more than one way to view a situation or interpret a set of facts. Being able to consider multiple viewpoints, think outside the box, and structure my arguments clearly and persuasively are important to becoming a solicitor.

Remember that your personal statement is unique to you! This applicant brings a unique perspective to law that others may not have.

The applicant shows their knowledge by using names and dates. Where you can, use specific examples that prove that you know a lot about the subject.

I am a member of a debating society at college and participate in discussions on controversial topics and current affairs. I recently led an argument for the legislation of euthanasia in the UK. Using recent case studies, I formed my main argument around the prevention of terminally ill patients employing their free will. This included the case of Noel Conway (2017), who legally challenged the 1961 Suicide Act for subjection to an undignified and painful death from terminal illness. My clear articulation of the pro-argument challenged my opponents and I confidently answered audience questions. Whilst the audience voted against legalising euthanasia, I gained and demonstrated research and critical analysis skills in order to develop a coherent argument and developed my public speaking skills, all of which are important when studying a law degree.

Outside of my academic and work experience, I have developed a hobby that has helped me gain skills that will be valuable for university and my future legal career. I am an avid chess player, and the strategic thinking, patience, and decision-making required in chess have taught me how to approach complex problems with focus and discipline.

I am eager to deepen my legal knowledge, develop practical skills, and engage with a diverse range of legal topics. I am particularly excited about the opportunity to learn from experienced professionals and participate in internships to take the next step in my legal career.

Talking about the elements of the course you are excited for shows determination to be on the course and that you have done your research.

“Include any job experience or volunteering experience you might have, highlighting any soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and coordination.”

**Olga Kampaxi,
Course Lead for Business Management**

EXAMPLE 4 – COMPUTING, ENGINEERING AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT COURSES

This applicant is applying to Civil Engineering. Their personal statement shows the technical knowledge and experience required for a course in Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment. Courses such as Computer Science, Engineering or Quantity Surveying should show an example of your technical skills or problem-solving abilities.

Simple language is fine, don't feel like you need to use the thesaurus for every word! The admissions tutors will want to hear your own words, as long as the spelling and grammar are correct.

I want to become a structural engineer because I have always been interested in the challenges and responsibility involved in designing buildings, bridges, and other infrastructure. As a structural engineer, I want to be involved in the design and construction of infrastructure that is not only functional but also sustainable.

Use the ABC method to talk about your experiences. ABC stands for Action, Benefit, Course. Firstly, talk about the task that was given and the Action you took. Secondly, explain the Benefit of the experience by explaining the skills or knowledge you gained. Finally, link back to your chosen Course.

As an Engineering student at college, I have gained a comprehensive understanding of key engineering principles, from mechanics and materials science to fluid dynamics and structural analysis. An interesting project during my studies was a group assignment where we were tasked with designing a bridge model. This project involved teamwork, as we needed to think about load distribution, material strengths, and environmental impact and weigh up all these factors to come to joint decisions. Working on the bridge design not only enhanced my technical knowledge of structural engineering but also taught me valuable skills in teamwork, problem-solving, and project management. It showed me how, as an engineer, collaboration is essential in bringing complex designs to life. This experience solidified my decision to pursue a career as a structural engineer, as I realised how rewarding it is to contribute to the design and construction of structures that impact everyday life.

If you studied a BTEC instead of A Levels, you won't have multiple subjects to talk about in your personal statement, so choose an additional topic or project that has interested you on your course. This shows you understand different elements of your subject.

I have also gained a deeper understanding of the importance of material selection in engineering design. A key learning experience was a module about the properties and behaviours of different materials under various conditions. Through this, I learned how important it is to choose the right material for each project based on stress, durability, and environmental conditions. This knowledge will be invaluable when studying civil engineering at university, where understanding material science and its application in the real world is essential for designing safe, sustainable, and innovative buildings. It has sparked my interest in how new materials and construction techniques can improve the resilience and sustainability of infrastructure in the future.

You don't need complex sentence starters such as 'In addition to my studies...', get straight to the point and you'll have more space to write about your skills.

I work part-time in a clothing store, which has helped me develop essential transferable skills for a career in engineering. One key skill I have developed is the ability to work under pressure, which is crucial for an engineer when managing multiple projects or deadlines. For example, when we were very busy at Christmas time, I was responsible for managing stock levels, assisting customers, and overseeing sales, all while ensuring the store ran smoothly. There was one instance when we had a large influx of customers just before closing time, and we faced a backlog of orders. In that situation, I remained calm, prioritised tasks, and delegated responsibilities to my colleagues. This experience taught me how to think on my feet — a skill I know will be valuable when I'm managing engineering projects or working to deadlines in my future career.

The applicant shows an interest in university life, showing that life isn't all about their course and that they're keen to be a student in general.

I am passionate about playing the guitar. This hobby has been a great way for me to unwind after college but it's also taught me discipline. Learning to play longer, complicated pieces of music has taught me to approach challenges step-by-step. I have also had the opportunity to perform in front of audiences, which has helped me build confidence and improve my public speaking and presentation skills, which will help me be a key player in group projects at university and collaborative work in my career. I plan to continue playing the guitar at university, as I believe it will provide me with a healthy balance to my academic life and offer a creative outlet during my studies.

I am excited about the opportunity to deepen my knowledge at university. I am committed to becoming a skilled and creative structural engineer who can make a difference to the infrastructure that we use in our everyday lives.

"Applicants should demonstrate knowledge of and enthusiasm for their chosen industry. We want students to show that they understand what the industry is about and what it is about a career in the built environment that excites them."

Nicki Schiessel Harvey,
Senior Lecturer in Built Environment

IF YOU'RE WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR DIFFERENT SUBJECTS

You can only submit one personal statement for all five of your university choices on UCAS, so what do you do if you're applying for different courses, or even completely different subjects?

What to do if you're applying for courses that are slightly different:

If you're applying for two courses that sit within the same subject area, then cover the academic interests and skills you have that are relevant to the subject as a whole. Think about what those courses have in common and try to include examples of those skills or interests in your personal statement.

For example, someone applying to law and criminology may write about a case study that sparked their interest in the criminal justice system.

What to do if you're applying for courses that are completely different:

Try to focus on your skills and attributes that would make you a good candidate for all of the courses you're looking to apply to. Skills such as problem solving, teamwork and leadership can be applied to many different subjects.

You could also be transparent and explain your reasons for applying to very different courses by providing relevant reasons and examples for why you're interested in each of the subjects.

What to do if just one of your courses is different:

If four of your UCAS choices are for the same course and one course is different from the rest, then get in touch with the university you're applying to by email or phone. The university may let you submit a second personal statement directly to them.

Whether the university can accept a second personal statement depends on the institution so make sure to check before writing two!



TOP TIP:

If you're unsure on what to include, then contact the universities you're applying to. Even if the university can't accept a second personal statement, they may still be able to provide some advice on what they'll be looking for.





HAVE YOU TRIED USING AI FOR INSPIRATION?

While we absolutely advise against copying and pasting a personal statement directly from an AI tool straight into your application, there are ways you can use it ethically and to give you a boost.

- **Brainstorm ideas** – come up with ideas that are related to the subject you want to study, your interests or your experiences.
- **Help with structure** – AI tools are brilliant for suggesting a strong structure and can help organise your thoughts and ideas into a tight and persuasive narrative.
- **Proofread** – they can check through your statement for spelling and grammar errors, plus suggest some ways you could improve your writing and style.
- **Detect plagiarism** – use the tools to ensure you haven't copied anyone else's words or taken anyone's intellectual property.

Remember! Universities and colleges could reject your application if it's copied from ChatGPT or another AI tool. On completion of your UCAS application, you now have to declare that your personal statement hasn't been copied or provided from another source, including artificial intelligence software.



THE UCAS PROCESS

UCAS TIMELINE

MID-SEPTEMBER

Opening date for UCAS applications

JANUARY

Main closing date for applications

MAY

First deadline for universities to get decisions to UCAS

JUNE

Deadline for applicants to accept one firm and one insurance offer. UCAS Extra is open for those without an offer to make an additional application

FROM JULY

Universities start to receive exam results, most are communicated by UCAS to universities in August

AUGUST

A Level, BTEC and GCSE results released and Clearing commences

MANY UNIVERSITY COURSES IN THE UK HAVE NO FORMAL INTERVIEW REQUIREMENTS, MOST DECISIONS ON WHETHER TO OFFER YOU A PLACE WILL BE MADE ENTIRELY ON THE STRENGTH OF YOUR UCAS APPLICATION FORM – INCLUDING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT.

The form consists of seven sections — your personal details, course choices, education, employment, personal statement and reference.





Of those, the personal statement offers you the best chance to ‘sell’ yourself, by explaining why you are applying for that particular course and why the university should want you to join them!

At first glance, being asked to write around 500 words about yourself may seem a little daunting, and you may find it easier to break it down into sections, considering what you want to say about different aspects of your personality and experience.

For more information about the UCAS application process, go to www.ucas.ac.uk.

FOR MORE ADVICE, GO TO
www.bcu.ac.uk/personal-statements

www.bcu.ac.uk
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