



**LONGSANDS
SIXTH FORM**

Astrea Academy Trust
INSPIRING BEYOND MEASURE

A GUIDE TO WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

“Consider the personal statement as an ‘electronic interview’”



T Walker and D Cullen

INTRODUCTION

At this stage of your school career, it is useful for all students to produce a Personal Statement. These can be used if you are applying for any sort of employment, including part-time jobs. They are essential for degree applications and they can also form the basis of cover letters when applying for apprenticeships and other vacancies. Writing a professional statement/cover letter will create a positive impression with degree admissions tutors and prospective employers.

The personal statement needs to be written carefully, with excellent punctuation, grammar and expression of ideas.

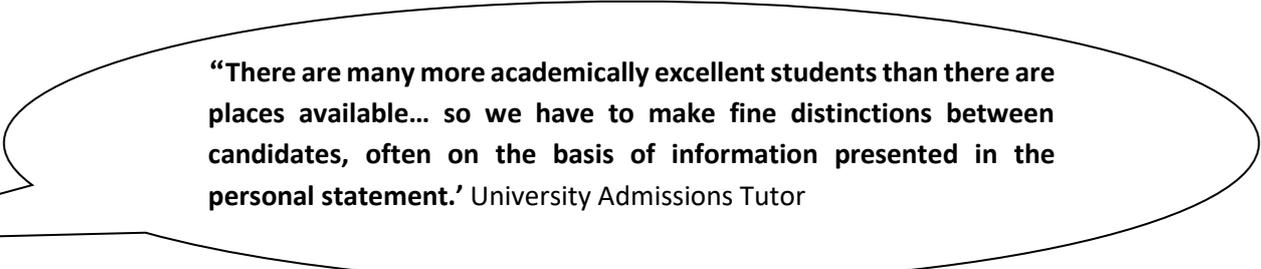
Applications to University are made through UCAS and the personal statement is submitted as part of the application.

The character limit for Personal Statements is 4000 characters, including spaces. The line limit is 47 lines of text. You need to meet both of these criteria before you can submit your statement.

The Sixth Form uses Unifrog to help students write their personal statement, track progress and gather feedback from their tutor.

Note: although you will write your statement in Unifrog, you will need to copy and paste it into UCAS (when it has been checked by your tutor).

Why do I need a good personal statement?



“There are many more academically excellent students than there are places available... so we have to make fine distinctions between candidates, often on the basis of information presented in the personal statement.” University Admissions Tutor

UCAS Buzzword: please ask a member of the Sixth Form team for your year group’s buzzword.

A GUIDE TO ORGANISING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Personal statements often follow a standard format. There is one format described below and you will find a similar format on Unifrog. When you are planning and writing your statement, we suggest that you use one of these formats.

Note: If you are intending to write your personal statement using a very different style, please speak to your Head of Year before you begin. Some Oxbridge colleges, and admissions tutors on specialised courses, can sometimes encourage students to write their statement in a particular way.

Warning: do not be tempted to copy a personal statement from those available online. It will not be personal and, if you are caught, the university has the right to remove you from your course.

We advise you to focus on using UCAS, Unifrog and University webpages when writing your statement – this will help to prevent plagiarism and it will be easier to keep the statement focused on you.

The suggested structures for a personal statement

Personal statement structure 1 (traditional):

- Section 1: the course/subject you are applying for and why you chose it.
- Section 2: The evidence about why the university should make you an offer, based on your current studies. The skills and knowledge you have learnt and how they relate to your chosen degree course or helping you to be a better degree student.
- Section 3: your personal qualities and extra-curricular activities and achievements and how they might support your studies at university.
- Section 4: the future: What will you do with your degree?

Personal statement structure 2 (alternative):

- Section 1: the course you are applying for and why you chose it; what you would like to do in the future with your degree.
- Section 2: The evidence about why the university should make you an offer, based on your current studies.
- Section 3: your personal qualities and extra-curricular activities and achievements and how they might support your studies at university.

A suggested process for writing the PS

Step 1 read all of the advice and information in this guide and on Unifrog

Step 2 choose your subject/course

Step 3 choose the universities you will apply to

Step 4 completed the UCAS questionnaire to help you think about your current experiences and knowledge (a copy is included in this guide).

Step 5 check each university webpage for the course and see what things they are looking for. Make a list of important prior knowledge, skills and characteristics that are frequently mentioned.

Step 6 plan each section of the PS

Note: If you are not sure how to start the first section, then leave it until last, you might want to start by writing the second and third sections. It can often be easier to write the first sentence when you have already got a good idea about the rest of the PS.

Step 7 choose a style of writing that you are happy with. It is usually better to write in a way that feels natural to you. For example, you could write in an academic way, or a story telling way, or in a descriptive way. Trying to sound “different” can make your writing hard to read, difficult to follow and sometimes cheesy.

Step 8 write a draft of the PS

Step 9 read it out loud to see how natural it sounds.

Step 10 onwards... redraft/edit and then redraft/edit...

Step 11 show the edited version to your tutor/friends/parents

Step 12 use the feedback to make final changes

Note: do not ask too many people for feedback. It really is a case of “too many cooks spoil the broth”. Writing is subjective (based on personal opinion) and when you ask too many people, it can be difficult to know what you should do to make improvements.

“Help!”, I am applying for two different subjects/courses:

If you are applying for two very different types of courses, please speak to your Head of Year for advice about your personal statement.

For example, you are applying for 3 Psychology courses and 2 English Lit courses.

If this is you are planning to apply to two or more subjects, your statement might be harder to balance, so make sure that you get all of the help you need.

UCAS Personal statement worksheet (an electronic version is available in the Unifrog locker)

This worksheet is designed to help you think about information you could include in your personal statement. We've included space for you to write down any thoughts you have as you go along. More detailed advice and guidance about writing your personal statement, including our UCAStv video guide, is available at

www.ucas.com/personalstatement.

Why are you applying for your chosen course(s)?

Why does this subject interest you? Include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course, e.g. if applying for psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is.

Why do you think you're suitable for the course(s)? Do you have any particular skills and experience that will help you to succeed on the course(s)?

Do your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen?

If so, how?

Have you taken part in any other activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)?

Skills and achievements

Universities like to know the skills you have that will help you on the course, or generally with life at university, such as any accredited or non-accredited achievements. Write these down here.
Examples can be found at www.ucas.com/personalstatementskills.

Also think about any other **achievements** you're proud of, positions of responsibility that you hold or have held both in and out of school, and attributes that make you interesting, special or unique.

Hobbies and Interests

Make a list of your hobbies, interests and social activities. Then think about how they demonstrate your personality, skills and abilities. Try to link them to the skills and experience required for your course(s).

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 related to the course.

Future plans

If you know what you'd like to achieve after completing the course, explain how you want to use the knowledge and experience that you gain. How does the course relate to what you want to do in the future?

Advice from UCAS

What to write about?

Answer: You!

You're telling admissions staff why you're suitable to study at their university or college.

It's important to remember you can only write one personal statement – it's the same for each course you apply for. So, avoid mentioning any universities or colleges by name.

If you've chosen similar subjects, talk about the subject in general, and try not to mention courses titles. If you've chosen a variety of subjects, just write about common themes, like problem solving or creativity. If you have chosen more than one subject (e.g. Psychology and English Lit, speak to your Head of Year for help with the PS).

Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Look at course descriptions and identify the qualities, skills, and experience it requires – you can use these to help you decide what to write about.
- Tell the reader why you're applying – include your ambitions, as well as what interests you about the subject, the course provider, and higher education.
- Think about what makes you suitable – this could be relevant experience, skills, or achievements you've gained from education, work, or other activities.
- Include any clubs or societies you belong to – sporting, creative, or musical.
- Mention any relevant employment experience or volunteering you've done

If you've developed skills through Duke of Edinburgh, ASDAN, National Citizen Service, the Crest Awards scheme, or young enterprise, tell them.

Personal circumstances

- If there are any personal circumstances which have affected your educational performance, outline them in your personal statement. For example, this might be something that caused you to miss school - such as a physical or mental health condition, or caring for a family member.
- If your personal circumstances have affected your qualification choices, you can mention this in your personal statement. For example, a change of school which did not offer the same options, or having gained non-different qualifications, skills and experience to many other people (e.g. through the Armed Forces).
- If you have suffered financial hardship during your studies (e.g. received a bursary to cover the costs of your education), you can let the university know about that here.

Personal statement Dos and Don'ts

Dos when writing your personal statement

- Do use your best English and don't let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your statement.
- Do 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.
- Do be enthusiastic – if you show your interest in the course, it may help you get a place.
- Do expect to produce several drafts of your personal statement before being totally happy with it.
- 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 – but not too many.
- 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 write your own statement. Universities and colleges will check for plagiarism. They put all personal statements through a similarity detection test!
- Do use language appropriate for a 17-18 year old. Too many students include words that they do not understand in an effort to sound intelligent. This is rarely successful.

Don'ts when writing your personal statement

- Don't exaggerate – if you do 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 proofread 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 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 plagiarise. Do not copy something from the internet and pass it off as your own.
- Don't go off track and include too much detail 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 expect to be able to write your personal statement whilst watching TV or surfing the internet.
- Don't rush your personal statement, it can be the most important part of your application.

General writing advice

The following advice might be helpful when writing your personal statement. Read the following advice to help you connect your sentences and paragraphs together as well as help you vary the language you use in the Personal Statement.

- **IN ADDITION**

'In addition to my work experience I have also gained valuable skills throughout my voluntary work.'

- **AS WELL AS**

'As well as my involvement in team games I am also keen on playing individually competitive sport.'

- **REINFORCE**

'My involvement in the school voluntary programme has reinforced my decision to study a degree in Nursing.'

- **STRENGTHENED**

'My decision to study a degree in Economics has been strengthened by my enjoyment and success in my 'A' level course.'

- **FURTHERMORE**

'Furthermore, I am particularly suited to a degree in Chemistry because of my love of the subject and my keen interest to further my knowledge of the subject.'

- **BESIDES**

'Besides my involvement with sports I am also involved in amateur dramatics.'

- **NOT TO MENTION**

'Being involved in the voluntary work programme, not to mention my work experience, has provided an opportunity to work with a diverse range of people.'

- **MORE RECENTLY**

'Although I have taken part in classical music concerts, more recently I have decided to learn to play the piano.'

- **ENABLED ME**

'The opportunity to play in the school football team enabled me to work as part of a team.'

- **PROVIDED ME**

My part-time job provided me with an opportunity to develop my ICT skills.'

- **OPPORTUNITY TO**

'The opportunity to work with people was provided by my involvement with Young Enterprise.'

ADVICE ABOUT USING 'I'

Beginning multiple sentences with 'I' is very easy to do, especially when writing about yourself. Instead, try to create varied sentences with a range of alternative stating points.

Try not to write

I am captain of the Hockey Team ...

I enjoy playing sport ...

I am studying A levels in ...

I enjoy socialising ...

I have taken part in ...

I have gained a number of skills ...

Instead write

Being Captain of the Hockey team ...

Having enjoyed playing football...

My A level subjects are ...

Socialising is important to me because ...

Taking part in ...

The skills I have gained from ...

UCAS: Tips from previous students

Personal statement top tips...

1: use evidence – show you'd be a great student by linking experience from your studies and other activities to the course.

2: be honest – don't be tempted to exaggerate. Admissions tutors often refer to personal statements during interviews.

3: start early – you'll probably redraft it several times before you're happy with it, so allow yourself plenty of time.

4: let friends and family read it – they may have suggestions you haven't considered and can tell you whether it makes sense.

5: proofread it several times – reading it out loud will help you to spot bad punctuation and messy wording.

There's more advice on personal statements at www.ucas.com/personalstatement.

UCAS

Example personal statement

Sample personal statement by an Astrea Sixth Form St Neots student with annotated advice and guidance (remember this statement is the final version after several drafts.)

Begin with a memorable opening sentence to engage the Admissions Officer.

Your opening paragraph should demonstrate why you want to study this subject at degree level. Please don't say you 'love' the subject! This statement must be your best quality writing!

Briefly outline the skills you have learnt from your other subjects and, if you can, relate these to your degree subject choice.

Move on to extra-curricular activities, but begin with those that relate to your degree course.

If appropriate you might include details of employment, focusing on the skills you have developed.

In a brief final paragraph you should comment on the future and what you might do with the degree you plan to study.

Almost everything in the world can be related back to Mathematics in one way or another; whether it is the unlikely probability of England winning the World Cup or the way in which we are able to manufacture the unlikeliest designs for buildings. I used to enjoy maths for the "incorrect/correct" style it had, but now it is the subtleties of the subject: the unanswerable questions, the quest for an elegant solution that engages me the most. Naturally, people would normally need something to spark an interest in doing maths at degree level; for me this was studying two particular topics at A level. Firstly the transformations of graphs in Core 3; finding out the distinct position of a graph simply by looking at the equation. I enjoy this because of the way that we can establish the position of curves without having to make any sketches, just by knowing the rules of transformation; seeing how even the most complex function is a transformation of the simplest graph. Another topic I find strangely interesting is trigonometry. I enjoy the varied links between the Trig. identities. Also appreciating the many applications of trigonometry in real life situation; trying to establish bearings and distances of things from each other, perhaps boats across an ocean, but also being able to see what position they are in after a period of strong wind perhaps using mechanics.

Obviously Maths plays a big part in the life I lead, however it is not the only subject that has shaped the person that I am. Taking English Lit and Lang at A level, has also taught me that there are all-manner of opinions surrounding one topic, depending on the perspective. This course has enabled me to explore how language changes and to write creatively. Similarly, in doing Economics, I have learnt, that all problems can be solved, from international to local issues, using a very wide range of methods, making most problems answerable.

Last year I took part in Maths mentoring for children aged 11-12, enabling my student and me to go through any work he didn't understand; providing him with alternative methods to do the work he had been set in class and as homework. This partly contributed to my realisation that teaching is a profession I would enjoy. As well as participating in school sport since year 7, I have completed sports related coaching courses: rugby, football and sports leadership, all giving me the chance to organise and run sports tournaments and sessions. Other extra-curriculum activities that I have taken part in include the Young Enterprise scheme where I was the sales manager which cemented my ability to have close contact with people making sales. Finally, I have recently taken part in the Cambridge University Maths Challenge at my school where I earned a silver certificate for my efforts.

Being a keen cyclist, and particularly due to the etiquette expected on and off the track, I know how to present myself in situations; both formal and informal. I am a member of the St. Neots' Cyclist Junior Committee and have recently been elected as President of the Junior Section for the year 2010/11. Being on this committee, competing each week and working part-time in a local shop has taught me many things, including responsibility, honesty and organisational skills. These have also meant that I am in contact with people on a regular basis giving me good people skills.

While I am open minded about my future after university, I am determined to study a maths degree; highly enthused by the challenge of a tough university course. At present I wish to become a secondary school maths teacher because of the hands-on, fun role I feel I could bring to the students, helping them enjoy one of the hardest subjects to learn and understand.

Finally....

Notice the style of this personal statement – the reader is convinced of the student's enthusiasm and interest in the subject they wish to study at University. The student has made an effort not to start every sentence with I or to end up writing a list about what they have done. On average Admissions Tutors spend ten minutes reading each personal statement so yours must impress them immediately and stand out from the pile!



Using Unifrog to write your Personal Statement

Below are some suggestions of what to include in your personal statement.

This is very similar to the information given above but you might prefer the three-section style.

Remember if you are writing a personal statement for a University application 75% should be focused on why you want to study your chosen course.

Section 1 – Why do you want to study this subject? (1200 characters)

- Your knowledge of the subject area
- Why you have chosen the course(s) - this is particularly important when you're applying for a subject that you have not studied before
- What interest you most about the subject area
- Where your studies could lead
- Evidence that you understand what is required to study the course, eg if applying for psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is
- Why you want to go to university or college

Section 2 – What have you done in the past that makes you particularly suitable to study the subject? (2400 characters)

- How your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen
- Your academic record, in particular your interests beyond your subject
- Your personal qualities and extra-curricular activities and achievements
- Hobbies, interests and social activities that demonstrate your skills and abilities
- Details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen course(s)

Section 3 – What else have you done that would contribute to the university community? (400 characters)

- Details of non-accredited skills and achievement which you have gained through activities such as: Young Enterprise

Details on activities and experiences beyond your subjects that you can include

Extra-curricular activities: Try to relate these to your course choice. Have these activities enabled you to develop particular skills relevant to your choice of course:

- Do you play a musical instrument?
- Do you play any sports
- Have you represented the Sixth Form or other organisation in a sport?
- Have you represented the Sixth Form in any other way?
- Have you been involved in drama productions/charity or volunteer work?
- Do you have any other hobbies?
- Have you been on any relevant visits/work experience (recently)
- Anything else? Part-time work

Super-curricular activities:

- Have you been on any courses outside of school which link to your area of study?
- What wider reading and study have you completed beyond the specification?
- Have you any work-experience which directly links to your choice of subject?
- Have you been on any trips or visits (school-based and independently) which link to your subject choice?

Example from Unifrog: English Literature Personal Statement dissected



With the following personal statement, the student was able to receive four offers from Russell Group universities, including University of Bristol, University of Manchester, University of Nottingham and an unconditional from University of Birmingham.

<p>Through literature, I can live a different life, gain a new perspective on the world and explore cultures and time periods that would usually be out of reach. Whether it's learning about the struggles of modern day teens through John Green's novels or exploring the social landscape of Georgian England with iconic writers such as Jane Austen, English Literature compels the reader to question their beliefs and emotions.</p>	<p>Your introduction should be short and a means of highlighting your passion in the subject.</p> <p>Avoid using phrases like "I love English" and "I have a passion for the subject" as they are essentially empty words - instead, do what you can to show that you feel that way.</p>
<p>Texts like The Great Gatsby have provided me with many moments of questioning, leaving me to decide whether I believe Gatsby's love for Daisy is true. Whilst one could argue convincingly for either side, I choose to believe that his image of her is too distorted for him to truly love her as she is. Destructive love such as this is interesting to read as it comes in such varying forms. In Wuthering Heights, it's Heathcliff's extreme love for Cathy that many people believe provides his character with redemption whilst in Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita, Humbert's love does the opposite— instead condemning him in the reader's eyes, and rightly so.</p>	<p>You should avoid trying to make your writing expression too stylised; when trying to fit the character limit, you will have to remove extra words and swap long words for much simpler ones.</p> <p>In this paragraph, I show my wider reading by linking three very different books together with a common theme. If you find that you want to talk about a series of books from very different time periods and genres, then finding a common theme among them is a great way of connecting them and showing your reading range.</p> <p>Don't be afraid to put your own opinion in the statement - in fact, you should aim to provide something about how the text personally affected you as it shows that you were engaged by the work and not just mentioning it for the sake of having a text mentioned.</p>
<p>Looking into the lives of characters can be thought provoking, especially when considering the many ways those experiences relate to real life. From reading The Colour Purple, I realised that though society has moved forward regarding the treatment of black</p>	<p>English, as you will obviously know, is a highly text based subject - as a result, my Personal Statement is also highly text based. In this paragraph, I show further evidence of wider reading as well as linking that further reading into another aspect of my study.</p>

<p>women, many problems faced by the characters then still remain now, such as the glorification of light complexions. Furthermore, the novel could be connected to feminism which is a topic that I enjoy to read around. By doing so, I discovered amazing novels such as The Handmaid's Tale, a story that made me question what femininity is and the various ways it can be perverted. Those topics shaped my EPQ, leading me to adapt and translate Chaucer's Wife of Bath character into a modern version, largely inspired by hip hop music and culture. This has developed my researching skills while also giving me the chance to explore my creativity.</p>	<p>Again, I use two very different novels, choosing to link them with a central theme that can be found in both texts. As well as this, by mentioning feminism, I show that I am aware of the critical aspects of English - though only briefly.</p> <p>If possible, try to find ways of linking the texts you are discussing with other subjects and extracurriculars as that is one way of displaying your pervading interest in English. In this paragraph, I talk about my Extended Project Qualification and discuss how my wider reading inspired me.</p> <p>If you are completing an EPQ, do what you can to integrate it into your personal statement as an EPQ provides you with many skills you'd need at university and if related to English, it shows further commitment to the subject.</p>
<p>Discovering the many intricacies of Shakespeare is challenging but also highly rewarding. After watching A Comedy of Errors when I was eight, I realised that Shakespeare can be enjoyed despite the difference in time periods due to his complex and engaging plots; something as small as the subtle change from blank verse to prose can reveal characters and their intentions. When reading Hamlet, I thought his madness was simply an act to deceive his uncle but upon watching the play, it was harder to make the distinction between what was real and what was an act. This taught me that watching the play could give a vastly different experience to reading it, something I kept in mind when watching King Lear and MacBeth.</p>	<p>In this paragraph, I explore another branch of English: plays, in this case, particularly Shakespeare. When studying your degree, you'll be faced with a mixture of prose, poetry and plays so be sure to include at least two of those text types in your personal statement, if not all three.</p> <p>As I mentioned before, try to relate every text you mention to something personal for you - whether that is something you learned from it or an opinion you formed whilst reading (or watching) it.</p> <p>At the end of the paragraph, I name drop two plays without developing on them. Try to avoid doing this but keep in mind that with the limited character count, it'll be impossible to discuss every text you mention in detail so make sure you pick the texts that you care about most to develop and that you don't name drop too often.</p>

My experiences at UNIQ summer school were amazing. I was able to study Shakespeare in new ways, exploring *The Tempest* from a postcolonial perspective with Prospero representing the coloniser and Caliban being the native. It was also possible to view the play as meta-theatre, depicting the creation and development of art. This connected well with Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* as both those texts also had themes revolving around the artist and what inspires their work. I particularly enjoyed the way Wordsworth developed nature into a maternal figure for himself throughout the poem. My time spent at the summer school helped me to further develop my essay writing, as well as allowing me the opportunity to engage in valuable discussion and debates.

Your extracurriculars will not always be academic; that is not something to be worried about however, as long as you ensure that you properly relate it back to English. If they are not academic, try not to talk about them too much.

Fortunately, I was able to attend an extracurricular that was academic, allowing me to discuss it in my personal statement in detail. In the paragraph, I discuss what I learned from the summer school as well as the texts that I studied there.

Due to the character limit, I chose to discuss Wordsworth in detail rather than the James Joyce novel that I mention as I felt as though I had discussed plenty of prose and needed to discuss some poetry instead. When writing your personal statement, always be aware of what texts types you have and haven't discussed so that when necessary, you can make the best decision of which text to discuss.

My school and community are important to me; I am a prefect and volunteer at my local primary school, helping students with their literacy and numeracy. This is rewarding and interesting as it allows me to see the building blocks that develop children's reading and writing abilities. Furthermore, it makes me contemplate how much my own abilities have developed over the years and look forward to how they'll grow during my time at university.

Don't stress out too much about having an amazing conclusion as due to the character limit, the conclusion will often seem abrupt and sudden - this won't damage your application at all as admissions tutors would rather you spend the characters on other content such as texts you've read and so on.

For my conclusion, I talked about my non-academic extracurriculars briefly, connecting them into my hopes and thoughts of the future. Talking about the future is always a good place to end your personal statement as it shows that you are ready and looking forward to university.

UCAS Web links to help with personal statements

Personal statements quickfire – answers to common questions

<https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/personal-statements-quick-fire-questions-answered>

Video clip on writing PS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 8hFkMAjW-l>

UCAS top tips for personal statements

<https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/ten-places-get-personal-statement-pointers>

Unibuddy – chat to current students about courses

<https://www.ucas.com/chat-to-students>

Aimee's blog on how to complete your personal statement

<https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/how-complete-your-personal-statement>

Charlotte's blog on writing your personal statement

<https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/charlottes-blog-post-writing-undergraduate-personal-statement>

Personal statement advice from different universities

The University of Portsmouth

<https://www.port.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying-for-undergraduate-courses/writing-your-personal-statement>

Durham university

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/study/ug/apply/ucas/personalstatement/>

Christ's College, Cambridge

<https://www.christs.cam.ac.uk/how-apply-1/uk-support/personal-statement>