

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Advising you what to write is difficult because admissions tutors can criticise you for adopting a formulaic approach. That said, you won't go far wrong if you follow this broad pattern.

1. Say why you want to study this subject. What aspects interest you? What parts of the A level course have you particularly enjoyed? What have you done outside the scope of your regular A level lessons that shows you have a genuine interest in this subject? What skills and knowledge have you picked up in your study of your other A and A/S levels that you can apply to degree level study? Here you might mention essay writing, independent research, group work, PowerPoint presentations, ICT skills, debates etc.
2. What other *academic* extra curricular pursuits have you followed that are pertinent to degree level study? When writing about summer schools, Open University, background reading etc ensure that you don't just say what you did but also what you learned. It's better to write a sentence or two on just one point than to list without elaboration several points. You should also mention here part time work you've done if it has relevance to your degree.
3. By now your form should be between 50 and 80% complete. The rest of the form is of only marginal relevance to admissions tutors no matter what you might think or what other people tell you. At this point you can tell admissions tutors more about yourself by elaborating on your non academic extra curricular pursuits. Rather than just listing your hobbies, clubs you belong to, part time work you've done, involvement in the college community, charity work and so on, focus on how you and others have benefited from your actions. For example, having a part time job stacking shelves at Sainsbury's is of no interest other than showing admissions tutors you can manage your time by having a job and keeping up with school work.
4. If you like, add a conclusion briefly saying how you will benefit from the rich academic, social and cultural opportunities afforded by university and say what you will contribute to undergraduate life.

Some final points:

1. Don't open with the phrase "Since an early age..." or something similar. It's boring and very unlikely to be true.
2. Don't open with a quotation, especially one you've looked up for the purpose of writing your statement.
3. Be original in your opening sentence. Grab the reader's attention with your first words.
4. Don't be conceited. You might think you are showing you are a confident, driven person wanting to show your determination to achieve your goals. The problem is you're likely to come across as arrogant. It's better for your group tutor to say in the reference that you are hard working, intelligent etc than say it yourself.
5. It's all very well saying you are passionate about a subject but, without evidence, they won't believe you. Students who really are passionate about studying Law, for example, will have recent work experience at a barristers' chambers or solicitors' firm, will belong to the De Montfort University Law Club, subscribe to the Law Review, regularly listen to 'Law in Action' on Radio 4, know which newspaper regularly carries law reports (which you always read), fairly frequently visit in your own time the Magistrates' and Crown Courts, and borrow law books from our school library.
6. Discuss the personal statement and the reference with your tutor. It is essential that you keep your tutor updated with your progress and if you have limited contact with your tutor do not complain if your reference is the last to be written, if it is written at all.
7. Don't use terminology that means little outside Beauchamp. Admissions tutors won't have a clue what a Learning Walk is but will understand if you say you went on a student-led fact finding mission to another school to investigate.... Similarly, don't tell them about very localised organisations expecting tutors to have heard of them. Thus you are a member of a local dance academy, not Deirdre's Dancers and Tiny Tots Group.

8. Don't use capital letters unnecessarily. 'I play Football for ...' is wrong.
9. Don't make any spelling or grammatical errors. With spell and grammar checkers there is very little excuse for getting it wrong. However spell checkers cannot think for you so read your personal statement very carefully to eradicate errors like confusing 'their' and 'there'.
10. Don't use the thesaurus facility on the computer. You'll probably pick the wrong word and sound silly. A personal statement is not the place to use a word that you've never before written in your life.
11. Cut out irrelevant detail. All the while, ask yourself 'Why am I telling the admissions tutor this?'
12. Don't plagiarise. UCAS will check your personal statement against the data bank of past personal statements. If you've copied from someone else or lifted a statement from the internet, the copied parts will be highlighted in red when it is sent off to the universities.
13. Double check that you have not made any errors on your UCAS form. We will not send your form back to you if you get the Leicester/Leicestershire question wrong but will return your form if you make errors with your GCSE or A/S results. This could end in a substantial delay in processing your form. Remember, you have to put down **all your GCSE and A/S grades whatever the result**. It's up to you whether or not you tell them the individual module results but you have to say what your overall grade was. When you click 'Pay and Send' your form is then transmitted to the KS5 office. At that point, check your tutor is writing your reference and that you have given your tutor a copy of your UCAS form plus any extra information you want added but which you did not include on your personal statement.

Online advice:

1. UCAS, of course
2. Studential.com. Lots and lots of examples from various subjects.
3. The studentroom.co.uk. On their site they not only have lots of examples, they then have excellent criticisms of what has been written. It's very good advice.

When you are happy with your personal statement, get the rest of the UCAS form finished and send it by the deadline. It takes a lot of time to process 400 forms and though we work as fast as we can, somebody has to be the 400th.