



University of Essex



The Winning Formula:
Personal Statement Writing Guide

Information for teachers and careers advisers

The University's Student Recruitment Office offers a selection of talks and workshops on a range of topics relating to higher education. These are aimed at students, teachers and guidance advisers and those on access courses. Topics include:

- Thinking about going to University
- Making the most of your personal statement
- Student life
- Student finance
- Parents talks
- A mature student's guide to higher education

In addition to the above, the University can provide other presentations tailored to the specific needs of your school or college.

If you would like a representative to deliver a talk please contact the Student Recruitment Office either by telephoning 01206 872002 or 01206 872800, or by visiting our website www.essex.ac.uk/recruitment/ and completing the online booking form.

Find out more

If you have questions about any aspect of admissions at the University of Essex, please contact:

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How to write a good personal statement

The UCAS Personal Statement is your opportunity to tell universities about your suitability for the degree/s that you have decided to study. You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd. Remember that the admissions selector reading your statement is an academic in your chosen area of interest and will therefore want to know the reasons why you connect with the subject.

This guide has been written with the help of admissions selectors at the University of Essex - the people who make the decisions! As well as useful tips and general advice, a sample personal statement has been written for each subject area. These are not model answers as they all have particular strengths and weaknesses. The aim is that you will become familiar with the typical content and look of a personal statement.

Getting started

Writing about yourself is not something that you do often, so you may need to practice writing in this particular style. It is a good idea to list your hobbies and achievements, then you can decide which ones demonstrate your strongest skills and personality.

Although your statement should be tailored to the particular subject area you want to study, there are certain points that every statement should include:

- why you have chosen the degree/s that you have selected;
- the reasons why that subject area interests you;
- aspects of your current studies related to the degree/s that you have chosen;
- why you think you would be a good student;
- details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work which you have undertaken, particularly if it has relevance to your chosen field;
- hobbies, interests and social activities that demonstrate you are a well-rounded person;
- non-accredited qualifications, like the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme or Young Enterprise;
- any other achievements that you are proud of, eg reaching grade three piano or being selected for the county cricket team;
- positions of responsibility that you hold both in and out of school, eg form prefect or representative for a local charity;
- attributes that make you interesting, special or unique;
- whether you have any future plans of how you want to use the knowledge and experience that you gain.

Remember that you only write one personal statement which should be relevant to all your university choices. Therefore try to allow some consistency in your scheme choices. If you are applying for a joint degree you will need to explain why you are interested in both aspects of this joint programme. The European Studies and Politics personal statement, in this guide, gives an example of how to do this.

Dos and Don'ts when constructing your personal statement

Do brainstorm your ideas on paper before attempting to write anything.

Do aim to use about five paragraphs, making sure that each one flows in a logical way.

Do expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy.

Do ask people you trust for their feedback.

Do ensure that you use your best English and don't let silly spelling and grammar mistakes spoil your statement.

Do be enthusiastic - you can have perfect grades, hundreds of extra-curricular activities and be a really great person but if admissions selectors feel you aren't passionate about your degree, you won't get a place.

Don't feel that you need to use fancy 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 waffle on about things which aren't relevant - admissions selectors will fall asleep! If you feel you are starting to ramble, take a break and return to your statement when you are feeling more focused.

Don't try to be funny as admissions tutors may not share your sense of humour.

Don't lie - if you stretch the truth you may fall down at interview when you are asked to elaborate on an interesting achievement. It is also an offence to lie on your UCAS application.

Don't rely on a spellchecker - proof read as many times as possible.

Don't leave it to the last minute - you'll kick yourself!

Don't expect to be able to write your personal statement whilst watching TV - this is your future, you only get one chance, and it's down to you!

Some common questions

Below are some questions that are frequently asked about personal statements:

Does the word limit really matter?

Yes it does. The limit is there for a reason and a key test of the process is to check whether you are able to convey your reasons for wanting to study in a clear and succinct way.

Should I mention anything about my gap year?

Yes, you should explain why you are taking a gap year and what you plan to do. Demonstrate your enthusiasm and initiative, and highlight how the activity may relate to your degree.

How far back should I go when mentioning my hobbies and interests?

Only mention things which help support your application; a long list of everything you've done is much less impressive than picking one or two things and writing about the skills you have learned through them. Activities undertaken recently will certainly carry more weight than those you did in junior school.

I'm not interesting or unique...what should I do?

Everyone has aspects to their personality that make them interesting, it's just a case of putting them into words. You may find it helpful to ask someone close to you like a friend, relative or teacher.

How should I end my personal statement?

Don't just let it fizzle out; this is your final chance to impress. Avoid being too general by writing something like "I am looking forward to becoming a psychologist"; be much more specific and end on a very positive note by closing your statement with something like "I am passionate about working with young children in the future and therefore am highly determined to make the most of my degree and achieve my ambition to become a developmental psychologist."

Subject specific guides

A significant proportion of your statement will require you to demonstrate your interest and suitability for the degree scheme that you have selected. This section contains an example statement for each subject area. Remember that these are not model answers and all have particular strengths and weaknesses. Where you see a word or sentence underlined, this indicates a mistake or weakness.

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ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE

I am applying for a degree in Accounting as I believe this degree will set me in good stead for my future career. In recent years I have become interested in the world of commerce and industry and I believe that studying this subject at university level will help me reach my goal of becoming an accountant. I have researched this career and believe that I have the necessary skills to succeed.

At my college, all Year 12 students undertake a week's work experience in July. I arranged for mine to be at Phillips and Woodstock, a small accountancy firm in my local town. During this week I learned that there are several elements of the accountancy profession and that the career is very diverse. Phillips and Woodstock specialise in helping small businesses with their tax assessments, and as a result I have become particularly interested in the business consultancy side of accounting. The MD, Mr Phillips, was impressed with my work and commitment and has invited me to work at the firm part-time in my summer holidays. I am looking forward to the opportunity to gain more experience in my chosen career.

I am currently studying towards a BTEC National Diploma in Business (Management). The modules I have most enjoyed are 'Managing Information' and 'Managing a Business Project or an Event'. For the latter module my project was based on a tender by a construction company where I took the role of estimator and tried to write a competitive tender proposal. This was a challenging and interesting task, and one which taught me the importance of expertise in a chosen field. However it was the unit 'Introduction to Accounting' which I most enjoyed and which, in retrospect, first sparked my interest in accounting.

I have a part-time job in a roadside restaurant near to my home. Although the job can be repetitive, it has been an important exercise in self-discipline as I start work at 7am on Saturdays! I have also met many new people and become friends with some of the regulars. I try to save the money I earn from this job: university has been my long-term goal for the last year and my savings should help with the costs of studying.

I am really looking forward to going to university: partly for the social experience, but most importantly to further my studies in accounting. I believe that university will help me achieve my aim of qualifying as an accountant and perhaps one day running my own business, like Mr Phillips.

Strengths

- The first sentence goes straight to the point. This implies decisiveness and commitment, and the personal statement is too short for a lengthy introduction.
- The student goes into a lot of detail about the work experience, which is good as it is relevant to his chosen subject and helped shape his career plans.

Weaknesses

- It is a shame that the student did not go into more detail about the 'Introduction to Accounting' module, and explain *how* it sparked their interest in accounting, as this would be very relevant to his university application.
- The ending would have had more impact without the closing comment about Mr Phillips.

AMERICAN STUDIES

I am currently taking A-levels in History, English Language and Literature, and Geography. I enjoy all of these subjects but History has always stood out at my favourite. As part of my History AS-level studies, I undertook an American History unit. Learning about the Civil Rights movement and the events which caused it really captured my imagination and sparked an interest in the USA, which grew after studying *Death of a Salesman* in my English Literature course. America's rich and controversial history, and its sociology, such as the existence of an 'American Dream' are so different from our own English history and heritage; it is this contrast which fascinates me.

I have attended a number of university open days in which I listened to sample lectures and talks about American Studies. The diversity of American Studies appeals to me greatly, and the flexibility of the subject allows me to develop my existing interests in history, literature and sociology. I would also like the opportunity to study another aspect of American Studies, such as Politics. British and American Politics has always interested me, but A-level Politics was not available as an option at my school.

At school, I am involved in the Debating Team, and we have had several achievements. Most recently, we came second in the inter-school county finals, the topic being Should British troops pull out of Iraq? Other topics we have debated include abortion, ID cards and the congestion charge in London. Debating ties in nicely with my interests in History and Politics and I look forward to continuing this pursuit at university.

I played hockey for my school until Year 10, and I am also a Sixth Form prefect. This responsibility involves helping teachers in lessons and disciplining the younger students in corridors. I also have a weekend job waitressing in a local restaurant. My friends are very important to me, and I enjoy spending time with them.

My sister attends the University of Derby, and I have visited her twice. This has given me a flavour of student life and as a result I feel I would fit in well at university. Overall, I am looking forward to going to university and particularly to furthering my interest in American Studies.

Strengths

- This student explains how they became interested in studying American Studies very well.
- It is good to show how your A-level studies have influenced your choice of degree.
- Evidence of good research (for example attending Open Days) is clear in this statement; this is especially important when the subject is not available at A-level.

Weaknesses

- There is no need to mention that A-level Politics was not available at her school. It implies a criticism of the school and it is important not to be negative in any way!
- It isn't advisable to mention universities by name as it could suggest a bias towards that particular university.
- Playing hockey in year 10 does not say much about the student now; it is best to talk about more recent hobbies.

BIOLOGY AND RELATED PROGRAMMES

From an early age I have been fascinated by biology. I can clearly recall spending time in the garden with my Grandfather looking at bugs and creepy crawlies. As I grew up my affinity with the natural world developed and studying biology at university is the next step on my journey.

I have had the most amazing gap year experience protecting the Lora turtles of Costa Rica from human poachers and beach erosion. As a volunteer on the programme I was able to help with research and conservation work such as night patrolling, working in the hatcheries, collecting eggs, rescuing and tagging turtles and helping the baby turtles get to the sea! This opportunity has enabled me to grow as a person in many ways. It certainly has been the best preparation possible for university life, as I have acquired all kinds of skills that will be essential for a new life away from friends and family.

A-level Biology has certainly provided me with an excellent grounding and I am confident that I have a real aptitude for this challenging discipline. I have enjoyed all of the modules taken so far, especially ecosystems as we had to consider the dynamics of such systems and look into human activities that impact on them. I particularly like doing practical work and look forward to being able to gain experience with more developed pieces of apparatus at university.

I have held several positions of responsibility. During my final year at school I was appointed to the position of Senior Prefect. This was a great honour and I learnt many new skills, including public speaking. At college I continued this type of responsibility by being nominated Student Voice Rep. This position required me to attend various meetings with different types of people including the Board of Governors. I was the voice for all 2,000 students at our college.

I am an eager table tennis player and regularly compete at county level. I find it to be an excellent form of exercise for the body and mind! I am keen to try out different sports when I reach university because it will be the perfect way to make new friends and stay healthy. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is also something that I am involved in and I have completed bronze, silver and gold awards. I am hoping to be involved in promoting the award scheme to young people in the future as I have really benefited from it and would like to be able to share my experience with others.

Strengths

- It can be good to talk about past experiences that have sparked interest in the subject. However, be careful not to go into too much detail as admissions tutors may fall asleep!
- The gap year experience is very relevant here and the student's enthusiasm is obvious: enthusiasm for a subject is very important.

Weaknesses

- This has a strong beginning and middle but concludes far too abruptly; you should always finish your statement with an enthusiastic and memorable ending.
- This student ends by talking about his Duke of Edinburgh, which though interesting, probably isn't the main reason why they are applying to university! It is preferable to conclude your personal statement by talking about your chosen subject and/or your eagerness to go to university.

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE

When I was twelve years old the car that my mother was driving was hit by lorry. Thankfully she recovered from the accident but only because she had a blood transfusion. Since that dreadful day I have aimed for a career in transfusion science because, without skilled biomedical scientists, the blood transfusion service would collapse. With such a clear focus on my chosen career, I have been able to do extensive research into the skills and attributes that a biomedical scientist must possess. I am focused and determined, and am both accurate and efficient. These skills are essential because patient's lives and the treatment of illnesses depend upon me. I am also confident that my choice of A- and AS-levels, Biology, Chemistry, Psychology and Maths, will provide me with the solid foundation needed to proceed to undergraduate level.

The practical side of biology and chemistry has enabled me to gain good laboratory skills and I am eager to acquire more developed and sophisticated techniques at university. Maths has helped me to think logically and to develop my understanding of numerical information. Psychology has improved my written communication skills, which I believe to be important for any subject at university.

Throughout my school career I have enjoyed positions of considerable responsibility. I was nominated form captain four years running and elected Head Girl during my final year. This was a demanding job as I was required to represent the school at prestigious events and do a lot of public speaking (something which used to scare me greatly). At our GCSE prize giving I received prizes for biology and maths. I was also awarded the Stubbs Cup which I am extremely proud of.

I love spending time in the country walking my dogs Mollie and Vinnie. I have taken Mollie to many open shows and am hoping to present her at her first championship show this Christmas. Showing and caring for dogs involves discipline and attention to detail. It is also a great way to socialise as I am constantly meeting new faces at the weekly club I attend. I can't wait to start university because I will get the opportunity to meet people from all over the world.

When I'm not walking the dog's I can be found in the gym. I like keeping fit and look forward to trying new sports and activities at university. I have also recently started working at the gym in their crèche. I enjoy working with children and have attained my first aid certificate.

I think that being a biomedical scientist will be a rewarding career because I will be doing work that will help improve people's health and cure diseases. University has been my goal for a long time now and I look forward to the challenge ahead of me.

Strengths

- This student clearly states the skills that she has gained from her A-level subjects.
- She has written an enthusiastic final sentence that will appeal to admissions tutors.

Weaknesses

- There are a couple of silly grammar mistakes (incorrect use of possessive apostrophe) that look bad.
- This student does not explain why they were awarded the Stubbs Cup. Details like this will support your application.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

I have always been a very academically determined and studious individual, hence why I knew that a degree at university would be my definite next step. I have a broad interest in many subject areas but feel drawn towards a business-orientated degree. Coming from the background of a small family business, I have been inspired by my parents and am keen to gain the essential skills to expand our growing empire! I am very aware that today's business requires not just balancing the books; it is about the investment and the management of assets, people, opportunities and risk. I am confident that studying a business degree at university level will prepare me well for my future ahead.

A-level Business Studies has definitely provided me with a solid foundation which I am eager to develop. 'Management, Culture and Communication' is the module that interested me the most this year and I have undertaken extensive further reading in my own time. *When in Rome or Rio of Riyadh...: Cultural Q&As for successful Business Behaviour around the World* by Gwyneth Oloffson, is an excellent read. I particularly enjoyed her views on manners and gift giving across the world.

Studying A-level Psychology has also given me insight into the human influences on organisational behaviour through looking at motivational theories, such as the hierarchy of needs model proposed by Maslow. The coursework element has developed my skills in collecting and analysing data in order to establish trends and draw conclusions. A-level English Language has allowed me to develop an ability to express my ideas clearly and concisely.

I have a wide circle of friends and we often meet in our village pub to compete in the quiz. I also enjoy playing football with friends and hope to join a team when I arrive at university. Our family business is very important to me and I work most weekends at our shop, often shadowing my father at meetings with suppliers. I take work very seriously and I feel that my conscientious approach will stand me in good stead for university study.

I recently attended a two-day Challenge of Management conference at my local university. I also had the chance to go on a tour given by a current student and this made me realise that a campus-style university is definitely suited to me. I am certainly going to take advantage of all the opportunities that universities provide to widen your knowledge like clubs and societies.

Strengths

- It is good to explain why a certain book appeals to you because this demonstrates your analytical skills and shows that you read around your subject.
- Mentioning research into universities shows that you are dedicated and focused.

Weaknesses

- The Challenge of Management conference that this student attended is very relevant and should have been expanded upon; always give details about specific experiences like this.
- If you mention that campus universities are your preferred choice, as this student does, make sure that all the universities you are applying for provide campuses!

COMPUTER SCIENCE AND RELATED PROGRAMMES

I am fascinated by the way developments in Computer Science have changed our lives and our work. The world-wide computing industry is set to continue evolving and I am determined to be part of this. Since a very early age I enjoyed playing with computers and now that I am at college I spend a lot of time working with them. As well as Computing, I am taking A-levels in Physics and Mathematics. I believe that these disciplines compliment each other brilliantly and will prepare me well for undergraduate study.

A major recent achievement has been a GCSE physics revision site which I designed for the students at my school. I carried out a significant amount of research prior to designing the site and this was definitely a worthwhile activity. This made me realise how important communication is when producing products. My main goal is to be part of a team that creates efficient and useful software for consumers.

My interest in computing has not only been restricted to school. With the help of my Dad, I have used all of my knowledge and skill to set up my own computer-related business. This challenge has given me a totally new perspective on how IT businesses operate. I had to write a business plan which was a totally alien experience for me, but once completed and implemented I was rewarded with the satisfaction of knowing that I had achieved something that most people would never have the chance to do, especially at my age.

Although computers are my passion I still enjoy many other activities, particularly reading. Science fiction author Theodore Sturgeon wrote, "a good science fiction story is a story about human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, that would not have happened at all without its science content"; science fiction is certainly the genre I like most probably because of the link between science and real-life.

When I'm not reading I can usually be found at the swimming pool. I have swum competitively since the age of nine. I hope to continue swimming at university and intend to start water-polo, as this is something which I tried at a recent summer school and loved.

I look forward to extending my knowledge of computers and believe that university will enhance the opportunities that I have ahead of me.

Strengths

- This personal statement opens with an excellent concise summary of what prompted initial interest in the subject.
- This student demonstrates that his interest in his chosen subject goes beyond the classroom, which proves his interest in the subject and will strengthen his application.

Weaknesses

- Quotes are good but keep them short and only use them if they are relevant to your application.
- The closing paragraph is very short and reads abruptly; remember to make use of this last chance to impress the admissions selector.
- This student should have provided more information on the business he has set up.

DRAMA AND THEATRE

From an early age I have always been fascinated by the stage. Far from being mere entertainment, I believe that a theatrical production can convey so much information and emotion to the audience. Although my main experience in theatre to date is through acting, I am also very interested in other aspects of productions such as lighting and set design, and am keen to learn more about this in a university degree.

For my GCSE Drama final production, a group of us produced a play based on a short story by A.L. Kennedy. Because there were only six of us in the group, we shared a lot of responsibility. I played one of the main characters and was also in charge of obtaining the props we needed. These tasks were enjoyable but the most challenging part of the production was to adapt the story for the stage, and produce a script as close to the original story as possible. This was a demanding but enjoyable job and really opened my eyes to the complexity of adapting stories to the stage.

As well as Theatre Studies, my other AS-levels are in English Literature, Sociology and Biology. In English Literature we have just completed a module on plays in which we studied *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and Shakespeare's *Henry V*. I go to the theatre as often as I can, and have seen many amateur and professional productions. I think my favourite playwright is Willy Russell. I think all his plays provide an interesting social commentary, and successfully blend comedy and tragedy. I have seen many musicals, but *Blood Brothers* is by far my favourite; I have now seen it four times! I am looking forward to discovering more playwrights while at university.

My interest in Drama and the theatre takes up a lot of my social life. I have taken part in all my school's productions and am also involved in a local drama group 'The Bournemouth and Boscombe Light Operatic Club' - BBLOC for short. Every year we hold a major production, the most recent being *Oh What a Lovely War*. I value the experience of being part of this group as I get to work with people of all different ages. I also have a part-time job in a local Beefeater restaurant. This job has taught me the value of being able to work as part of a team, and I think helps me improve my performance within BBLOC and at school, as good teamwork is crucial to a successful production.

I am looking forward to joining the Drama Society at university, and also possibly the Film Society, as the cinema and films are another of my passions. I feel I have a lot to contribute to university life and hope you will consider me for a place at your University.

Strengths

- Showing enthusiasm about joining clubs and societies at university will impress; universities like students who get involved.
- This statement shows awareness of different elements of drama beyond acting.

Weaknesses

- This statement is very narrowly focused on drama; it is good to show that you have interests outside your chosen subject area.
- The final sentence is addressed directly to the admissions tutor; this is not advisable. The personal statement is not a letter.

ECONOMICS

Since starting my AS-level studies in Economics, I have been eager to continue to a higher level. I am particularly interested in the behaviour of firms and organisations from an economic point of view and I have focused my coursework in this field. I regularly read newspapers and economic publications such as *The Economist* to keep up-to-date with developments in the field, and I find it easy to use my mathematical and analytical skills to apply different economic theories to a range of real-life economic situations. I also take Maths and Politics at AS-level and know that the skills I am acquiring from these will prepare me well for university-level study. I recently enjoyed the chance to put some of my business economic theory into practice when I took part in an economics and business project called Young Enterprise. With a group of peers I set up a small company and sold stationery packs to students at our school. It was an excellent experience and I was able to enhance my management, communication and teamwork skills. I also achieved a distinction in the associated exam.

I would consider myself to be a very hard worker both in and out of school. Since the age of 16 I have worked part-time at Tesco's and have enjoyed positions of increasing responsibility. I now co-ordinate a small group of staff on the shopfloor and have learnt a lot about the way businesses operate in the real world. I would be keen to continue working part-time within this company while at university, as I know I would be able to manage my time successfully and would enjoy being self-sufficient. I have a real passion for all kinds of sport and regularly represent my school in various activities ranging from tennis to football. I have played tennis at county-level for two years now and am looking forward to trying new sports at university. Music is also very important to me and I am a member of the sixth form rock band 'Chaos'. I am thrilled at the prospect of facing new challenges, including working and living independently. I also believe that I will gain a highly marketable set of skills from the study of economics at university, which will prepare me well for the exciting future ahead.

Strengths

- The strong involvement in sport and music demonstrates dedication.
- This student has succeeded in conveying enthusiasm without going overboard.

Weaknesses

- Attention needs to be paid to style; the paragraphs are far too long and could be broken down into at least four separate ones.
- There are a few typing errors and missing letters in this personal statement. It is also advisable to write numbers in letter format eg 'sixteen'.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

My interest in linguistics has grown from my first year of sixth form when I took a course in English Language. During this course, I studied the work of Trudgill. I found this particularly interesting as I enjoyed looking at how and why the social class of a person affects how they speak. I also found the gender and language issues relating to how males and females approach language in a different manner very interesting. I have a general interest in sociology and look forward to combining this with my interests in linguistics.

Last summer I spent a month in Spain where I worked as a teaching assistant in a local school. Working in a foreign country allowed me to experience life where I did not completely understand the language used around me. It became clear that language is an essential tool used everyday for communication. This opportunity allowed me to see language being used in different environments and I now want to understand how languages are used and how they work.

During my time at school I have been actively involved with the girls' hockey team, working my way to becoming Captain last year. Being involved in the team has allowed me to develop my communication and time-management skills, along with motivating the rest of my team. I really enjoy volunteering and once a week I help younger students to learn Spanish. After my undergraduate degree I plan to study a PGCE as I would like to become a secondary school teacher of Spanish. I believe that volunteering will allow me to learn skills which will help me with this career path.

I have also been the Managing Director of a Young Enterprise company which won two awards for quality and best product at the local awards evening. Our company has also been selected to attend the regional awards later this month. From this interesting experience I learnt a lot about how the real world works and I worked incredibly hard to achieve my highest potential and compete successfully.

As well as these school organised activities, I also work in the local supermarket. I have to relate to the customers and assist them in a variety of ways. I feel this has boosted my confidence and improved my inter-personal skills both of which I think will help me in the transition from sixth form to university. I believe that studying linguistics at university will expand my knowledge of language, which I know will be essential in my future career. I look forward to setting myself new challenges and building upon my existing experience, which will hopefully help me to achieve my ambition of becoming a successful teacher.

Strengths

- This statement shows that the student has put thought into their long-term career goal. Although this is not essential and often not possible, it does demonstrate focused thought.
- This student draws attention to the skills she has developed through being involved in her activities (hockey, Young Enterprise, part-time job), which is effective as the skills she mentions will be useful at university.

Weaknesses

- This student has used the words 'interest'/'interesting' five times in the first paragraph. It is essential, especially for a subject like English Language, to demonstrate a wide vocabulary.
- More could have been made of her Spanish skills; it is important not to under sell yourself.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND RELATED PROGRAMMES

Since the beginning of last year I have been studying for my BTEC National Diploma in Travel and Tourism. As my studies have progressed, I have become increasingly interested in the marketing aspect of the degree as it seems to me that marketing is such a key element of the tourism industry. I also believe it is crucial to all types of business. Elements of marketing are all around us, from logos to television commercials, and this is an area in which I would like to learn more.

My favourite part of my BTEC programme, so far, has been a module called 'Conferences, Exhibitions and Events' in which me and two fellow students had to organise an event and were assessed on its success. Our event was a sixth form information day in which outside speakers came to our school to address the Year 12 students. We had to contact the speakers, send them information, arrange refreshments, publicise the event to other students and write thank you letters at the end. On the day we were busy ensuring the event was a success and I got a real buzz from it, as well as learning what makes a good event. From this experience I think I would like to pursue a career in marketing and I believe a degree in marketing and entrepreneurship would set me in good stead for this.

I believe that I have the personal skills and the motivation to be successful in a career in marketing. I always help out at my school's open evenings and often receive praise from the teachers for my work. I am often referred to as a 'people person', always cheerful and well presented, and someone who can work well under pressure. I also have a lot of confidence and am not daunted at the prospect of leaving home to go to university, as I see it as a great opportunity.

I have a weekend job at the local branch of British Home Stores, which I enjoy greatly and through which I have learnt to work well with people and always put customers first. I have also recently helped the window dresser put together displays and plan promotions, and I found that my studies in marketing helped me give useful input to the store's promotions and displays. I felt real satisfaction in that my knowledge was making a difference. In my spare time I socialise with my friends.

I feel I have the right knowledge and aptitude to succeed both in a marketing degree, and later, in a career in marketing or events. I am looking forward to the opportunity university will give to study this subject in more depth and to prepare me for what will hopefully be a successful career.

Strengths

- This student makes good use of her experiences at work to demonstrate her relevant skills.
- The overall feel of the statement is very enthusiastic.

Weaknesses

- 'In my spare time I socialise with friends' is too vague and will not impress an admissions tutor. This does not add any value to your application.
- This student writes explicitly about her personality: it would be more effective to illustrate your personality through your interests, and give examples, rather than just stating 'I am a 'people person'.

EUROPEAN STUDIES AND POLITICS

(example of a joint degree application)

The history, politics and culture of the European Union, since its beginnings in the 1950s, has always interested me, and as a result European Studies is a natural choice of degree for me to study. I find Europe fascinating; that a group of diverse countries with their own cultures and heritage should come together and form common policies is an interesting and often controversial area, and one I would like to discover more about.

I have chosen to apply for a joint course in European Studies and Politics as I believe the two disciplines are closely interlinked. Politics plays such a major part in all our lives and the work of governments shapes both the life of the individual and a country's place on the world stage. Through my A-level History scheme I have studied British governments in the nineteenth and twentieth century and I also keep up to date with modern UK and foreign politics by watching the news and reading broadsheet newspapers. I am particularly drawn to European Studies and Politics as the degree would offer me the opportunity to become familiar with the political systems of several countries; I am looking forward to studying more of the history and politics of Europe, particularly in the twentieth century.

As well as History, my other two A-levels are Business Studies and German. I also have an AS-level in Performing Arts. In Business Studies my main interest is the relationship between governments and industry; how, for example, the laws passed by governments can shape the present and future industry of a country. This relationship will be the topic for my final project in Business Studies.

I have travelled to France, Spain and Germany several times, for family holidays and for exchange trips with my school. I am looking forward to the year abroad offered by the degree and would like to spend that in Germany or France.

Outside of school I play the trumpet and cornet, and am currently working toward my Grade 6 exam for the trumpet. I have played in several school concerts and am a member of the Watchet Town Brass Band. I also enjoy going to the cinema and spending time with my friends.

I am looking forward to the opportunities that going to university will provide and to studying two subjects that have always fascinated me. I have a long-term goal of working abroad, possibly for the EU in Brussels, and I hope with a university education behind me, I can be successful in this mission.

Strengths

- This student conveys her passion for both European Studies and Politics very well.
- She mentions the year abroad and talks about where she might like to spend it. It is good to show that you are thinking ahead.

Weaknesses

- Silly spelling mistakes look sloppy and there's no excuse!
- It is a shame she does not go into detail about A-level German. This subject is very relevant to European Studies and some emphasis on her language skills would have strengthened her application, particularly as she is thinking about spending her year abroad in Germany!

HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

I am incredibly interested in the way that people behave and interact, and I have always had a keen interest in healthcare. As soon as I started my BTEC National Diploma in Health Studies I knew that a degree in this discipline would be my goal. During my studies I have particularly enjoyed the modules on psychology, sociology, equality and microbiology. A degree in health sciences interests me because it is highly inter-disciplinary and applied, and I feel that this will prepare me well for finding a job in the health and social care sector when I graduate. Although I am not certain yet, I am attracted to working within the area of health promotion. My family, friends and teachers often tell me that I am good with children so I can imagine myself working in schools.

I spent my work experience working in a surgery and loved every minute of it. I acquired many new transferable skills, particularly in the area of communication, both with patients and colleagues. I also gained factual knowledge about how a surgery operates and how important patient confidentiality is. When I reach university I would like to get involved in the support services that are available for students. My sister is already at university and she volunteers for the Nightline service, which appeals to me too. I think it would be an excellent way to learn new skills whilst making new friends.

I try to get involved in as many extra-curricular activities as possible. I am a St John Cadet and enjoy this role very much. I attend various public events providing first aid treatment and medical assistance. I have learnt a wide variety of skills and techniques, from patching up a grazed knee to re-starting a heart after a major heart attack.

I enjoy reading, babysitting and keeping fit. I am particularly fond of books by Jodi Picoult and am a keen member of our village reading club. I go to the gym regularly and attend pilates and water aerobics twice a week. I think it is really important to do physical exercise, not only for health reasons but also for mental well-being. I definitely feel very relaxed after participating in the classes.

I am a caring, responsible, dedicated and hard-working person. I am a good listener and I feel that my good communication skills will certainly prepare me well for a career in the health sector. I am also confident that my stamina, energy and commitment will ensure that I succeed at university. I really do hope to become a valuable member of a profession to which I truly aspire.

Strengths

- A keen interest in the subject comes across very clearly throughout.
- The final paragraph shows real commitment and enthusiasm for the subject.

Weaknesses

- Each paragraph begins with 'I'. This is not a good use of style and you must think carefully about how your statement looks aesthetically.
- Some of the sentences are quite long; the personal statement would be easier to read if they were a little shorter.

HISTORY

I am applying to study History at university because this is a subject which has fascinated me from an early age. The study of history plays a large part in understanding who we are today, how nations are shaped, how conflicts begin and how they are resolved, and most importantly, how a country's heritage and values are created.

My GCSE and A-level syllabi have concentrated heavily on modern British history, an era which fascinates me, and which I would like to continue studying at university. In my spare time I have been reading into British immigration in the 1950s, a topic I find very interesting and a subject particularly relevant to present-day Britain. I have also been interested in the recent pardon of the British WW1 soldiers shot for cowardice. Although the pardon is a comfort to the descendants of the soldiers, I agreed with the commentator who said that we should not question judgements made in the past, as we are essentially inflicting our modern day values upon a previous era.

This link between past and present is one which fascinates me. I have been to several museums and historical sites, and am a member of English Heritage. I find that visiting historical sites is a great complement to my studies. I am passionate about preserving historical buildings as they serve to remind us of our country's past. As well as studying British History at university, I also look forward to studying the history of other countries as a comparison to our own, such as Russian or American History.

To relax from my studies I play rugby in my school team: we were recently finalists in an inter-school tournament. I also work weekends in my local Asda store, where I have recently been promoted to 'greeter'. This is a front-of-house job where I help customers with queries and make announcements over the loudspeaker system. I also watch out for suspicious activity and recently helped to catch a notorious shoplifter who was later arrested and charged. Being a greeter has improved my confidence greatly and taught me how to think on my feet and handle responsibility.

I am looking forward to going to university as it will provide me with an opportunity to be independent and to meet new people. But most importantly, I am looking forward to furthering my knowledge of history and continuing my interest in what has always been my favourite subject.

Strengths

- This student's comments about WW1 show they have an interest in history and current affairs, and can formulate their own opinions from what they have read.
- The student also shows they have given some thought to other aspects of history (Russian, American) that they might like to explore at university, which again suggests they are forward-thinking and enthusiastic about studying history at university.

Weaknesses

- There is an over-use of the phrase 'I am looking forward to...'
- This personal statement is a little short and some parts could have been elaborated upon: the student could have talked about the historical buildings they have visited, for example.

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

My name is Katherine Jones and I am 17 years old. I am applying to study Latin American Studies at university as I am passionate about other countries and cultures and I would relish the opportunity to study the development of other cultures in more depth at university.

I have an interest in all of the developing world, but Latin America has always particularly fascinated me. It has a rich history and vibrant culture and the countries that make up Latin America are so diverse. I closely follow the news and current affairs of Latin America, such as the election of Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, and the relationship between Cuba and the United States. I am also fascinated by the region's geography and how that has affected the fortunes of its countries. It has always been my ambition to travel to Peru to visit the ancient Inca civilisations.

I intend to take a gap year before starting university and plan to travel to Chile with Teaching and Projects Abroad. I am really looking forward to this experience as a chance to see first-hand the culture of a Latin American country and an opportunity to improve my Spanish! I also hope to travel to neighbouring countries and believe that spending my gap year in Latin America will surely enhance my study of the region at degree level.

I currently attend a large sixth form college, which is very different to the small rural school I went to previously. The college environment requires me to be more independent and motivate myself to study, and I have met hundreds of new people and made new friends. As a result I feel I will adapt to a university community well. At college I write articles for the monthly newsletter and help with campaigns such as boycotting Nestle products in the college canteen and running petitions on behalf of Amnesty International. I feel strongly about human rights abuse around the world and would like to continue my work for Amnesty while at university.

I have attended a number of university open days and feel I will adapt to university life well. I believe I have the passion and commitment to make a success of my studies at university, and I am greatly looking forward to the opportunity of studying Latin America in more depth.

Strengths

- The gap year is very relevant here and talking about her plans shows her enthusiasm for the subject. The student also expresses that the gap year will enhance her studies. In some subjects (such as Latin American Studies) taking a gap year strengthens your application.
- The student shows an interest in current affairs in Latin America and displays a lot of enthusiasm, which is good.

Weaknesses

- The first sentence, in which the student states her name and age, is irrelevant. You provide your name and age elsewhere in the UCAS Form.
- The student does not really talk about what she does outside college. Not mentioning any interests beyond your studies suggest you don't have any!

LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

My aspiration to study law is firmly rooted in my interest in world events and with my desire to help others. Law affects our everyday lives, almost without us noticing. The news always features an aspect of law up for debate. Ethical issues are often brought to the forefront on topics such as animal testing, abortion and gay rights. I find these debates absolutely fascinating and the complexity of law continues to astound me.

I have always maintained an independent, self-motivated approach to my academic studies. Having studied a broad range of AS and A-level subjects, I feel I have acquired a strong selection of skills: from Mathematics and Philosophy I have learnt the art of questioning the world around us and developing a keen sense of intellectual curiosity; from English Language and General Studies I have understood the importance of expressing myself clearly and concisely through words; whilst from ICT I have developed a solid understanding of an area which is playing an increasingly important role in today's society.

I have spent time in the public galleries of both the local County Court and High Court. I am fascinated by the processes that take place and my long-term ambition is to play an integral role in the court room. In November I am due to shadow a district judge for a week, giving valuable insight into the day to day workings of the job. I built upon my initial interest by keenly reading *The Law Machine* by Marcel Berlins and Clare Dyer; it provided me with a firm grounding in the essential principles of the British legal system and highlighted its apparent weaknesses.

To gain a different perspective of the law I had the chance to take a work experience placement with a local solicitor's firm. My work evolved from basic administrative duties, such as filing, faxing and answering telephone calls, into accompanying solicitors to court and liaising with barristers on behalf of the firm. The opportunity to work alongside people who have dedicated their lives to the law has strengthened my decision to study this challenging discipline.

A keen passion of mine is debating and I have represented my school in various competitions. In year eleven I was a member of the winning team in the Rotary Youth Speaks final for East Anglia. Our presentation - Is it ever justifiable to execute criminals? - was given a special award of distinction. I was appointed senior prefect at my school this year and it is a position which I take great pride in. It involves helping to maintain discipline amongst the younger pupils during lunch-breaks and representing the school at various events.

In my spare time I like to swim and play netball. Although I do not play at a recognised level, I would be very keen to continue them as hobbies when I reach university. I understand the importance of having a good balance between work and play and I am confident that I would make the most of my time as a student. I believe that my ability to motivate myself is a key factor in my overall success. I am an extremely hardworking person and I am committed to reaching my goals. I believe I can contribute a genuine passion and enthusiasm for reading law and I thank you for taking the time to consider my application.

Strengths

- Work experience is something which admissions tutors notice, especially for a competitive degree such as Law.
- Debating experience is also very relevant for this subject area.

Weaknesses

- A spelling mistake in the first line will not impress. You must proof read carefully.
- You do not need to thank admissions tutors at the end of your personal statement; this looks like you are being creepy!

LITERATURE

"Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works."

This quote by Virginia Woolf summarises why I believe literature to be so fascinating and why I have chosen English Literature as the subject I wish to study at university level. Through my studies of English Language and Literature A-level, and my own discoveries of authors such as Virginia Woolf, George Eliot and Charles Dickens, I have found that authors do more than just tell a story; they also convey their own personal thoughts and opinions, and often provide a fascinating social commentary. For example, *Middlemarch* gives a snapshot of nineteenth century provincial life, while Jane Austen's novels often reveal her own - sometimes sarcastic - views on social situations in the early nineteenth century. These are the reasons why I believe literature to be such a rich source of information and why I would really like to study English Literature in more depth at undergraduate level.

I spent my schools work experience week as an assistant in my local 'Borders' bookshop. I enjoyed working with the staff on book promotions and helping to organise a book signing which was taking place the following week. I was also asked to write reviews on books I had read which were then displayed on the shelves. As I have a passion for books and reading, I really enjoyed encouraging others - particularly children - who visited the shop to read more, or to discover authors they had perhaps not previously heard of. Although I am not longer convinced that working in retail is right for me, after university I would like to pursue a career involving books and literature, such as perhaps publishing or teaching English.

As well as reading, I also enjoy getting involved in my local community in my spare time. As part of my school's 'Millenium Volunteers' scheme, I work on Wednesday afternoons in a local charity shop. Through this work I have become friendly with some of the older ladies who work in the shop and now help them to write our village newsletter, which is distributed monthly. This is an interesting and satisfying task.

As I enjoy reading and discovering new writers and what they have to say about the world, I feel that English Literature is the right degree choice for me. I am looking forward to the opportunities I will have to discuss and write about texts, and the increased career prospects I am sure being a graduate will offer me.

Strengths

- Being able to compare and contrast texts in a concise way demonstrates passion and ability.
- It can be good to discuss books discovered outside the A-level syllabus because this shows real motivation to read.

Weaknesses

- There are several spelling and grammar mistakes. Admissions tutors will note these.
- Try to avoid comments that could be perceived as negative. For example, this student did not need to say that working in retail is no longer right for her.

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics is a subject that I have thoroughly enjoyed throughout my primary and secondary education. I enjoy the challenge of thinking in a logical way and am always attracted to mathematical problems, however difficult and regardless of the form in which they come. Having studied A-level Mathematics for a year, I have been able to have a taste of many different topics. Pure mathematics is my favourite area, particularly sequences and functions, and I look forward to learning more about these and other topics in much more depth. A Mathematics degree will provide me with the challenge that I am ready for.

I always work hard at school and have a good level of concentration. I am efficient and make good use of the time from free periods to complete my homework. Deadlines are always met to the best of my ability and I make a real effort to present my work clearly. As a member of my school community, I believe that I have contributed greatly. Having been appointed to the position of Head Maths Prefect, I am now responsible for the Maths Department during lunchtimes and run a weekly maths club called *Pythagoras*. This club is for younger years and I set logic puzzles, help with homework and hold a quiz at the end of the session. Spending time with the younger pupils has made me realise that I might like to be a teacher. My enthusiasm for the subject resulted in me winning a maths prize, which was a great honour.

Out of school I am a keen musician and play trumpet in a brass band. I have been a member for almost four years and would like to continue this interest at university. I am due to take my grade 8 exam this winter and intend to start teaching afterwards as I think this would be a valuable skill. Another passion of mine is comic art. John McLusky, who was the original artist of the James Bond 007 Strip Cartoon Series in the *Daily Express*, is my hero, and I enjoy visiting his exhibitions whenever I can.

I am greatly looking forward to the transition from school to university because of the independence and opportunities that university life will offer. I will get involved in many different clubs and societies and try some new sports, like karate, that I am not able to do at school. I believe that the challenge of studying and developing my mathematical knowledge to a higher level is going to be one that I will thoroughly enjoy.

Strengths

- This student demonstrates real interest for the subject. Don't sell yourself short; if you are involved in clubs at school remember to talk about these.
- The student has given thought to the future: talking about hobbies they want to continue, others they would like to take up and a possible career as a teacher. It is always good to be forward-thinking in the personal statement.

Weaknesses

- More detail could have been given on the maths prize, as this award is relevant.
- The student does not mention any of his other A-level subjects. Although not essential, an interest in other studies beyond Maths could be useful, especially if they complement your Maths studies (eg Further Maths, Physics).

MODERN LANGUAGES

'If you can speak three languages, you are trilingual; if you can speak two languages, you are bilingual; if you can speak one language, you are English'.

This German joke is one which I find amusing but also slightly shocking. Learning languages has always been a passion for me and it is my ambition to be fluent in at least one other language. This is why the decision to study Modern Languages at university was an easy choice to make. The ability to speak foreign languages and the privilege of communicating with others in their own language has always fascinated me. My mother's side of the family is Welsh and one of my earliest memories was being upset that my cousins were speaking a mysterious language which I could not understand. I find it frustrating not to be able to communicate with others through a common language and I believe that by studying Modern Languages at university I will be helping to enrich my career prospects and gain invaluable skills I will use for the rest of my life.

I am currently studying for A2 Levels in French, Spanish and Art. I enjoy all my subjects, and they challenge me in different ways. I am keen to continue my studies in French and Spanish at university, and I would also like to take up a third language such as Italian or Russian. The history and culture of Spain and France also interests me. In my AS studies, I researched the Spanish civil war and how it was reflected in pieces of art such as Picasso's *Guernica*. In French I also wrote an extended essay on how the region of Brittany was once a separate country with its own language and customs, and drew parallels between Brittany and Cornwall. I believe that my language studies will be enriched by also studying the history and culture of the countries where these languages are spoken and look forward to learning more about France and Spain at university.

I plan to take a gap year before starting university and have been researching into organisations which offer placements teaching English to children. I would like to go to a Latin American country, such as Chile or Brazil, so I could improve my Spanish. These plans tie in with my interest in language learning and I would like to share my passion for languages with others.

In my spare time I play the piano and read. I also have a part-time job in a local café and babysit for several families in my village. I am looking forward to university as I believe it is the next step in my life and will help me reach my linguistic goals.

Strengths

- It is good to show that thought has been given to gap year activities, as this demonstrates strong determination and good organisation skills.
- It is sensible to discuss various A-level topics if they relate closely to the degree(s) being applied for.

Weaknesses

- This applicant fails to elaborate on part-time jobs and hobbies, so does not make full use of the opportunity to highlight extra skills and knowledge.
- Make sure that you know what you are talking about; Brazil is a Portuguese-speaking country!

PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy involves a critical examination of our most fundamental beliefs about truth and reality, right and wrong. It challenges many of our assumptions about what we know and how we should live. It is for these reasons that Philosophy intrigues me more than any other discipline that I have studied. My teacher told me that the best reason for studying anything is if you enjoy it. I thoroughly enjoy Philosophy and know that I will have the determination to do well at university.

A-level Philosophy has provided me with an excellent grounding on which to build. By reading Plato's *Republic* I have become particularly intrigued by the field of ethics, and I am especially interested in the apparent conflict between causation and free will. This issue has profound significance to society and social justice, and the ways in which we choose to reward and punish. Psychology is another favourite subject which I am taking at A-level and I am definitely acquiring transferable skills which will assist me when I reach university.

I enjoy music and gained a Distinction in my Grade Five Flute Certificate. I have also achieved my Millennium Volunteers Award for 100 hours voluntary service which involved charity fundraising and caring for the elderly. I have been lucky enough to travel to many different countries across the world and meet people from cultures. These experiences have made me very aware that cultural diversity is a fantastic thing and I am very excited about meeting new people at university.

Apart from academic study, I believe that university life will offer me a solid start in life generally and I am eager to become involved in such a large community.

Strengths

- This student has a keen enthusiasm for the subject and presents this well.
- The first paragraph is very strong. Remember that the opening few lines are the most important as they have to capture the reader's attention.

Weaknesses

- This statement is too short. It gives the impression that the student has little to say about themselves. It is important that you make the most of this chance to sell yourself.
- This student does not elaborate on their experiences whilst travelling, which is a real shame.

POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

I am eager to read Politics at university, particularly Comparative Politics and International Relations. I am currently studying History, Economics and English Literature at A-level. These subjects have enabled me to gain a selection of skills that I believe will prepare me well for a university degree.

I am involved with the South Suffolk Liberal Democrats and have worked on many campaigns. I worked as a volunteer delivering leaflets and newsletters. I found this highly enjoyable and my ambition to become involved in real life politics was confirmed. This has also increased my knowledge of the British political system.

I enjoy becoming involved in debates. I have taken part in several on issues including the Iraq war, capital punishment and fox hunting. This has developed my ability to form arguments and improved my public speaking skills. At the last general election my school held a mock election. I loved this experience and look forward to doing more things like this at university.

I was recently involved in helping to organise a visit to my school by our local Labour MP, including a question-and-answer session with the students. This was followed by a visit to the Houses of Parliament in which we met with the MP again, and were also given the chance to watch a session of Prime Minister's Question Time. This was interesting because it was at the time when many questions were being asked about the consequences of the war in Iraq.

Dancing is my passion and I have been attending ballet, tap and modern classes since I was three years old. I was recently selected to attend a summer school at the Royal Ballet School. This was an excellent experience as I was chosen to play Juliet in the final show. I also work in a gift shop on Saturdays.

My career ambition is to have a job in professional politics as an MP. I want to play a part in national policy making and legislation, as well as experiencing the pride of being a democratic representative of the people. I am excited by the prospect of becoming a student and relish the challenge ahead of me.

Strengths

- This student's interest in Politics is clearly demonstrated by their extra-curricular activities and their current political involvements.
- The student's determination and enthusiasm really show through, and it is good that they highlight skills they learned from debating, that they will no doubt use at university.

Weaknesses

- This student says that they gained a selection of skills from the A-levels that they are studying, but fails to describe and elaborate on these.
- There isn't much evidence of an interest in International Relations. Try not to focus too much on one part of a joint degree.

PSYCHOLOGY

From an early age I have been interested in people and the way that they behave. This keen interest has been enhanced through my study of psychology at A-level. I enjoy the variety of psychology and am eager to gain deeper knowledge and acquire practical skills in new areas of the discipline. My favourite module so far has been Social Psychology, with particular emphasis on physical attractiveness and the formation of relationships. My final-year project, 'Do birds of a feather flock together?' tests the hypothesis that people select partners who are of a similar level of attractiveness. I really like the way that you can apply different psychological theories to real-life situations.

Although Psychology is my strongest subject, I have thoroughly enjoyed my other academic subjects whilst at college and can appreciate how they will help me with my future studies. I have strengthened my assessment and evaluation skills through A-level Religious Studies, particularly the modules on philosophy and ethics. I believe that my study of ethics will be very advantageous when applied to the often problematic field of psychological research at university-level.

I have achieved my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award, am currently working towards my Silver, and am hoping to gain Gold level at university. I love planning and undertaking expeditions as they are physically demanding and require total teamwork from start to finish. I also enjoy working for the 'service' element of the award. At the moment I visit the elderly residents at the local sheltered housing association once a week. This work can be quite emotionally draining at times but incredibly rewarding.

At weekends I work in a restaurant and have recently been promoted to head waitress. This position means that I am in charge of four other waiting staff during service and am responsible for co-ordinating the weekly rota. People often comment that I possess good communication skills and that I am a real team-player. I know that these qualities will prepare me well for life at university.

I am very determined to make the most of my time at university. I am looking forward to making lots of new friends and being able to get involved in different sporting and social activities. Although I don't have any clear career plans, I know that a degree in psychology will provide me with an excellent set of transferrable skills for the future.

Strengths

- Discussing involvement in youth awards such as Duke of Edinburgh is an excellent way of illustrating teamwork skills.
- It can be effective to talk about a project you have undertaken as part of your studies, especially if it is work you are particularly interested in or proud of.

Weaknesses

- This student doesn't actually write that they would like to study Psychology at university until the very end. It is important to state in your opening paragraph what subjects you are applying for and why.
- Many students don't have 'clear career plans', but it looks better if you don't declare this in your personal statement.

SOCIOLOGY AND RELATED PROGRAMMES

I like the way that Sociology makes you question the world around you. For example, why do some people commit more crime than others? It was this question that sparked my interest in this discipline. During my AS-level studies I have had the opportunity to become familiar with various sociologists and their perspectives. I am particularly interested in the thoughts of Emile Durkheim in relation to crime and deviance. I am quite confident that when I graduate I would like to enter the police force, as my father and grandfather have done so before me.

I have considered applying for a more focused criminology degree; however, I am attracted to the broad approach of a sociology degree and know that I will enjoy learning about all aspects of the discipline, not just crime. I also look forward to being able to acquire new skills within the area of research methods as I am able to appreciate the connection between theory and research.

I also study Drama at AS-level and this has considerably increased my confidence as an actor over the past few years. My greatest dramatic achievement to date was performing in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee earlier this year. I was selected to play the part of Atticus Finch and this was a fantastic experience. I had to work intensively with four people I didn't usually associate with outside lessons, which greatly enhanced my communication and teamwork skills. The lengthy script that I had to commit to memory helped to further my confidence and self-belief. Another reason for enjoying this play is that it's most important theme is the moral nature of human beings - that is, whether people are essentially good or essentially evil.

I am a keen chess-player and regularly compete in competitions at regional and national level. In 2003 I reached the finals of the UK Chess Challenge and that was without doubt the most pivotal moment in my chess-playing career. When I reach university I intend to get very involved in clubs and societies as I think this is an excellent way to socialise and develop your skills and hobbies.

I work at the police station at the weekends doing administrative duties. This is an excellent opportunity as although I am not able to get quite as involved as I'd like, I am able to absorb information that will prepare me well for my future career. University life will suit me well because I am a sociable person who enjoys spending time with people. I am confident that I will be able to balance my studies with a healthy social life because I am organised and good at working to a timetable. Thank you for taking the time to read my application, I hope you can see my potential.

Strengths

- There is evidence that this student has read around the subject and has researched the degree schemes available.
- The part-time job at the police station demonstrates both focus and commitment.

Weaknesses

- Each paragraph begins with 'I'; this is very repetitive and shows lack of stylistic consideration.
- The final sentence is unnecessary and could have been better used.

SPORTS SCIENCE

I have always wanted a career in sport. Since taking A-level Sports Science my eyes have been opened to the opportunities that are available at undergraduate level. Detailed research has confirmed that a degree in Sports Science will provide me with a solid understanding of the biology, physiology and psychology required to succeed in my chosen discipline.

I am fascinated by the various methods used to assess and measure physical activity and the changes in physiology that result from exercise and training. Last summer I attended a residential sports science summer school at my local university. We had various taster sessions with academics and I thoroughly enjoyed all of them. I was particularly fascinated by the Human Performance Unit because it was jam-packed with the latest gear. We were shown how all the different apparatus worked and were allowed to carry out tests using some of the more basic pieces. I also heard talks from current students and they really made me realise that I would fit into student life easily.

Sport is obviously very important to me and I do get involved both in and out of school. I play hockey at county-level and will want to continue when I reach university. I am also eager to become involved in new sports and will enjoy helping to run clubs as I feel I have a lot of knowledge and experience to share. Football is also strong a passion of mine and I have recently been selected to assist with coaching the youth team at my town club. I am looking forward to working with children as I know that I will gain lots of new skills.

I have a part-time job as a retail assistant in a leisure wear shop. I really enjoy helping customers and advising them on the most appropriate clothing and equipment. I am also responsible for the tills at the end of the day and am often trusted to close the shop. I would consider myself to be an excellent communicator and I also possess good time-keeping skills; I hate being late for anything! I know that both these attributes will stand me in good stead for academic life.

I am so determined to become a student, studying the subject that I love. I know that I will put every effort into making the most of my time, both academically and socially.

Strengths

- It is good to mention any previous experience of visiting universities, eg summer school or A-level conference, as this demonstrates keen interest to the admissions tutor.
- This student backs up their interest in sport through a lot of extra-curricular involvement, which will be impressive to the admissions tutor.

Weaknesses

- Although this student is clearly focused on the subject and has a sporting interest which is very important for his chosen subject area, they fail to present themselves as a well-rounded person and is also slightly vague about what their career in sport will be.
- The final statement is slightly weak and would have been more effective if the student had summed up by re-iterating the reasons why they are looking forward to going to university to study Sports Science.

What not to write: example of a personal statement with several weaknesses

For a number of years I have been keen to apply university as I believe having a degree will help me find better employment in later life. After much consideration, I have decided that Business Management is the right degree for me as I would like to learn the skills to help me become successful in business, and I am interested in finding out how businesses work. My father runs his own business and I have learned a lot from watching him work and hearing about the ups and downs of being a small businessman. I would now like to learn more about the theoretical side of business management.

I do not currently take AS-level Business Studies, this is not because of any lack of interest or motivation on my part, but because I suffered a personality clash with the Business Studies teacher at my school. I am currently studying Maths, IT and History, I also took AS Further Maths but decided to not to continue it at A2 level, when I decided that although I enjoy Mathematics, I did not want to do a Maths degree at university. I enjoy all the A2 subjects I am taking as I believe they complement each other well, but they also differ. I really enjoy the class discussions, especially in History. I am quite a confident person so I like debating points and challenging the opinions of others in the class. It is a shame that there is not a debating club at my school as I would definitely have been an active member, but I look forward to perhaps getting involved with one at university.

Outside of the classroom I like to relax by playing football (I am a member of my school team and a local five-a-side team) and by boxing. I love boxing as it keeps me fit and helps me release my anger. I am also a keen supporter of Crystal Palace FC. I have supported them since I was five and have stuck with Crystal Palace through thick and thin, which I think displays my commitment and loyalty, qualities that I value very highly in a person. I also have a part-time job at my local Sainsbury's store. At times this can be very demanding as I work on the delicatessen and some customers can be very picky about how thickly you cut their ham or how well you wrap it, but I feel my part-time job has taught me valuable lessons in patience and also in dealing with members of the public.

I think my enthusiasm for going to university is perhaps displayed by the fact that I have carefully chosen which universities to apply to and researched each one thoroughly. I believe I have the motivation and commitment to be a good and successful student, and I hope that gaining a degree will help me reach my ultimate goal of running my own business.

Where did they go wrong?

This personal statement does have some good points, as the student displays their interest in Business Management and touches upon future career plans. However many parts are negative and should have been left out:

- a 'personality clash' with a teacher: NEVER mention a dislike of or lack of respect towards one of your teachers or employers;
- the part about not 'wanting' to study maths at university is negative and not relevant (also some business management degrees will have mathematical elements);
- it's good to talk about the benefits of certain hobbies but saying that boxing helps you release your anger makes this student sound a little scary!
- the comments about the lack of a debating club are also negative. Admissions tutors might wonder why the student could not start a debating club at the school by themselves;
- there is too much detail about the part-time job in Sainsbury's and again it paints a negative picture of the student.

Overall this example shows how important it is to always be positive in the personal statement and to always to portray yourself in the best possible light. Even a flippant comment or observation might give a bad impression of you, however unintentional. The best way to avoid this is to get someone else to read your personal statement carefully and for you to be prepared to take others' advice and, possibly, change what you have written.

References

Your school/college will write your reference, which, along with the personal statement, admissions tutors value highly when making decisions. At most schools and colleges, the reference is written by more than one person: usually your Head of Sixth Form/Department in conjunction with your subject tutors. Most references will talk about you from the teacher's perspective: how you work academically, how you interact with other students and teachers, for example. The reference will include the teacher's predictions of your final grades at A2-level.

Most references will also contain the following information:

- information about your performance in individual AS modules: for example, if you were one mark from an A grade, the tutor may highlight this;
- your proposed career plan - if you have one - so make sure your tutors are aware of your career ideas and of any work experience you have undertaken;
- their opinion of your suitability for a particular profession (for example, a calm and caring nature for nursing);
- anything that may have happened to you that has affected your academic work (e.g. an ongoing illness);
- any other personal circumstances which may have affected, or will affect in the future, your performance, for example, the illness or death of a close relative;
- information about any special needs you may have, such as a disability or learning difficulties, and how you cope with these at school/college.

If you have an issue that you would like the universities to be aware of when considering your application, such as your grades being affected by an illness, this should be in the reference rather than the personal statement so discuss this with your Head of Sixth/Department.

The reference is the admissions tutor's second opinion of you, and will have a mostly academic focus. Most referees focus on the student's academic successes and potential at university, and how they have progressed in each of their subjects. If a student has a problem area, such as poor attendance, this would not be mentioned in the reference. The reference is almost always a positive record of a student's performance and academic abilities: remember that your tutors want you to get places at university and are writing the reference to help you get them!



Good luck with your personal statement!