

Supporting students to plan & write a competitive personal statement



How to do research for an effective personal statement

	Knowledge	Skills	Qualities/Behaviours
CHOICE 1			
CHOICE 2			
CHOICE 3			
CHOICE 4			
CHOICE 5			

Make a list of what any experience where those KSQBs have been developed and put them in column 2 (The same experience can be repeated)

Skill/Knowledge/Quality/Behaviour	Example
Collaborative field work	A level Geography Field work,
Research	EPQ, A level Geography Field work,
Quantitative data analysis & presentation of data	MOOC, A level Art, A level Geography, Excel, Field work report, A level Biology,
Key concepts of human geography	A level Geography, Reading 'The crisis of globalization: democracy, capitalism and inequality in the twenty-first century', Ted Talk, Filed work,
Digital research tools	Field work, GIS tools, Excel,
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Higher Value



Lesser Value

Experiences are of higher value if:

- They are academically and professionally respected.
- They involve an investment of time.
- They require the student to 'produce' something.
- They demonstrate measurable impact.
- They demonstrate a narrative of interest.

The importance of a balanced structure

Neuroscience is a new fascinating interdisciplinary science with many lingering crucial problems to be answered. The complexity of the brain, the most crucial organ as to which we know so little about and an innate desire to explore the unknown has inspired me to apply for this course as an opportunity to embark myself on a new exciting journey in the field of neuroscientific research.

Over the summer, I was invited to participate in a research study at the University of Bath. I was tasked to evaluate three anti-cancer medications - cobalt chloride, curcumin, and aspirin, and a controlled placebo drug made up of glucose using qualitative methods gathered from cell-grown models. I assessed their performance on HeLa Cancer cells and chose the best drug for clinical trials out of the three using methods like MTT assay and studying the morphology of the cells under an Evos Microscope. Upon doing my research I came to learn that the source of the HeLa cell line was a Black African American woman named Henrietta Lacks. Intrigued to learn more about her life has led me to read "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" by Rebecca Skloot. Reading about how her cell was extracted without her formal consent, I was curious to learn more about ethical rules and regulations in the field of science. Therefore, I took an Open University online course and earned certification in ethical issues in scientific research.

In my A-level psychology class, I enjoyed learning about severe mental health disorders like schizophrenia and the neural explanation for the disease. Such as, how imbalanced levels of neurotransmitters like dopamine in certain parts of the brain like the subcortex to Broca's area can cause the disorder. I learned dopamine more in-depth whilst reading Judith Grisel's "Never Enough Neuroscience of Addiction" low levels of dopamine in the nigrostriatal pathway that is vital for motor movement cause symptoms of Parkinson's disease. The vital role dopamine plays in our body, inspires me to learn more about the neurotransmitter at an undergraduate level. I enjoyed studying how the cells in our bodies interact in my A-level Biology classes and began to gain popular interest in stem cells. Over the half-term, I did a stem cell work experience with King College London and read scholarly articles to learn more about the topic. That's how I discovered neural stem cells. In the case of neurodegenerative disorders, such as Parkinson's disease, neural stem cells can help restore dopamine lost in the nigrostriatal pathway and alleviate symptoms. I'm excited about working on stem cells as part of my postgraduate research career.

I was invited to volunteer at a Kumasi children's home in Ghana to volunteer with over 100 children with neurodegenerative diseases and as a result, were shunned, marginalized, and neglected by their local community. I was later awarded the Lord 800th Mayor Anniversary Award Trust by the Lord Mayor of London. I also ran an online zoom workshop with the guidance of a consultant psychiatrist, Dr. Fido, to educate Somali parents who had little knowledge of disabilities and mental health disorders believing it was a religious demonic affliction rather than a medical illness. I was surprised to learn that the Somali language has no word nor meaning for the word autism. This pushes me to spread awareness to minority groups regarding neurological disorders, especially given that 1 in 6 of the world's population suffers from it. In my spare time, I love playing football and recently played in a friendly tournament in Helsinki, Finland. Playing football has given me communication and teamwork skills that I have implemented on and off the pitch

Brain imbalances can cause a variety of problems from mental health problems to neurodegeneration. I find that establishing solutions is critical due to these diseases having significant emotional, social, and economical consequences for society. Studying Neuroscience at your institution will equip me with the knowledge and skill needed to succeed in my dream of becoming a neuroscientist.

Introduction: 3-5 sentences

3-4 'main paragraphs'
Should demonstrate:

How you are right for the course.
Passion for the subject.

Responsibility for your own
learning.

Can be organised around relevant
'themes'.

Final section: 3-5 sentences

Themes:

Central ideas or topics that provide coherence and focus to each of the main paragraphs.

Each paragraph should revolve around a specific theme, allowing applicants to present their experiences and skills in a structured and compelling manner.

Themes help organise a student's thoughts and ensures that each part of their statement contributes to a clear and cohesive narrative.

Theme examples:

- An area/some areas of theory or knowledge specific to the courses applied for.
- Research (and its application in their subject)
- The interdisciplinary nature of the subject
- The central place of maths
- Key subject/course skills and their application
- How the subject impacts the real world
- Expected qualities and behaviours

Putting pen to paper:

First choose a theme & then:

1. Write a sentence to introduce the theme
2. Write an example experience
3. Write which KSQBs were learnt/developed as a result of the experience
4. Explain how the experience allowed you to learn/develop that KSQB or give an opinion on what you learnt/read/experienced
5. Repeat steps 2-4 to make sure you include a few experiences and/or KSBs
6. Make a connection to developing this theme on the course and/or how or why you are interested in doing more with this theme in the future.

Make a list of what any experience where those KSQBs have been developed and put them in column 2 (The same experience can be repeated)

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I like to keep up to date and informed. My morning begins listening to the Radio 4 Today programme. I keep track of breaking news via the BBC News app and read 'The Week' to get an overview of the recent political issues. I enjoy listening to podcasts such as 'The Political Party' by Matt Forde, and watching documentaries such as 'Blair and Brown: The New Labour Revolution'. Through this wider interest in politics, I have been able to understand global issues beyond what is taught in school and how they shape domestic politics. In particular, I enjoy exploring different media and alternative views which allows me to look at topics from a range of perspectives to challenge my own understanding. I am passionate about finding out more, and relish the opportunity a degree in Politics and International Relations will give me to go into greater depth into the subjects I enjoy and the networks it will allow me to build.

Putting pen to paper:

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Implied & Explicit

Implied

- Time management
- Teamwork
- Communication skills
- Essay writing skills
- Leadership
- Creativity

Explicit

- Course specific application of skills
- Understanding/interest in specific topics/content
- Key behaviours and qualities

At which stage is this personal statement?

1. No research, just notes, list of achievements
2. Some complete paragraphs, some incomplete or barely started, some full but confused
3. Complete/fairly complete - Paragraphs have all/most parts of the 5 stage model, the 'theme' is clear/fairly clear and it reads well/fairly well

Advice at stage 1:

1. No research, just notes, list of achievements
 - Go to the beginning of the process - research required/desired skills, knowledge and experience
 - Make a list of experiences that have helped to develop these and link the two lists

Advice at stage 2:

2. Some complete paragraphs, some incomplete or barely started, some full but confused

- Go back to the 4 stage writing model.

Do the paragraphs include.....

1) What they did/Where they did it

2) What they learned/developed as a result and which is relevant to the course

3) An example to illustrate how they did it

4) A connection to the course/link to their point

Use the 'So what?' rule

Advice at stage 3:

3. Complete/fairly complete

Paragraphs have all/most parts of the 5 stage model, the 'theme' is clear/fairly clear and it reads well/fairly well

Improvements usually focus around:

- Language
- Rigorously applying the 'So what?' rule
- Topping and tailing
- Clarifying the themes

The introduction

Neuroscience is a new fascinating interdisciplinary science with many lingering crucial problems to be answered. The complexity of the brain, the most crucial organ as to which we know so little about and an innate desire to explore the unknown has inspired me to apply for this course as an opportunity to embark myself on a new exciting journey in the field of neuroscientific research.

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Introduction: 3-5 sentences

Should answer one of the following –

- What was the moment you became interested in this subject? What was it about that moment that inspired you?
- What is it about the subject that particularly inspires/interests you?

Frequent visits to India, Portugal, and now the United Kingdom have allowed me to see firsthand the significant variations in economic growth across the three countries. I began to question why the execution of one distinct system in different sections of the same country could result in such discrepancies after observing the disparity between the state I lived in and the thriving capital city. This piqued my interest in economics.

Why are we different? I am fascinated by how one can, despite similar upbringing and cultural influence, think and act so differently, from moral principles to the order in which you pour cereal or milk. I often wonder how preferences are developed, if they are learnt through peer influence, or individual to our very nature. Simply, I am interested in discovering, not what makes us individual, but why we are so. Research and theory will help me understand this better and pursue my passion to explore the root of our differences.

The final paragraph

Neuroscience is a new fascinating interdisciplinary science with many lingering crucial problems to be answered. The complexity of the brain, the most crucial organ as to which we know so little about and an innate desire to explore the unknown has inspired me to apply for this course as an opportunity to embark myself on a new exciting journey in the field of neuroscientific research.

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Final paragraph: 3-5 sentences

Should answer one of the following –

- How will studying this subject help you in your career?
- How will studying this subject help you in your personal development?



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My ambition is to work in the civil service after finishing university, as I wish to work behind the scenes in policy implementation. Studying degree level Politics and IR will allow me to further develop my interest in the subject and prepare me for my future career.

Changes for 2024



UCAS Personal Statements are being replaced by a multi-question survey that gives applicants the chance to explain various aspects of their application.

This change will be implemented in the 2024 admissions cycle for 2025 Entry in the UK.

This will affect all applicants, both home and internationals, looking to attend a UK university in 2025 and beyond.

Students will need to learn how to take on these new questions rather than traditional Personal Statement writing.

Teachers will need to be prepared to do research on this new system and provide support for students in order to maximise their chances of success.

Source: <https://www.uniadmissions.co.uk/>

Changes for 2024



The specifics of this system have not been announced yet, including the number of questions and the character limits.

We also don't know what the questions will be yet as they are still being developed.

We do know the key areas that these questions will focus on:

- Motivation for Course – Why do you want to study these courses?
- Preparedness for Course – How has your learning so far helped you to be ready to succeed on these courses?
- Preparation through other experiences – What else have you done to help you prepare, and why are these experiences useful?
- Extenuating circumstances – Is there anything that the universities and colleges need to know about, to help them put your achievements and experiences so far into context?
- Preparedness for study – What have you done to prepare yourself for student life?
- Preferred Learning Styles – Which learning and assessment styles best suit you – how do your courses choices match that?

Changes for 2024



The 'Entry Grade Report' will be created, which allows applicants to see grade profiles that have been accepted for courses over a five year period.

Useful links



Personal statement overviews:

<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/writing-personal-statement/how-write-personal-statement#what%E2%80%99s-a-personal-statement->

<https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/advice/personal-statements/personal-statement-faqs>

Intros:

<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/writing-your-personal-statement/how-start-personal-statement-attention-grabber>

<https://www.immerse.education/university/how-to-write-a-personal-statement/start/>

Thank you!



Common Mistakes:

Listing:

Throughout my time at school, I took part in various coding competitions and achieved high marks in IT courses. I also attended a summer coding camp where I learnt advanced programming languages. In addition to my technical skills, I have worked part-time at a local tech shop, gaining important communication and teamworking skills. Outside of my studies, I enjoy playing video games and building computers in my spare time, which shows my love of computing.

Common Mistakes:

Listing:

Psychology has fascinated me since I chose it as an A level. For the past two years, I have volunteered at a local mental health charity, where I have developed teamworking skills. I also completed a work placement at a counselling centre, which developed my understanding of therapeutic practices. Additionally, I am a member of the school debate club and have won several awards for my public speaking skills and develop my communication & evaluation skills. These experiences have prepared me for a degree in psychology.

Common Mistakes:

Stating:

I have always been passionate about helping others, which led me to volunteer at a hospital during my summer holidays. **This experience shows** I am compassionate and good at working under pressure. I also completed a first aid course, which developed my practical skills and **means I have ability to** stay calm in emergencies. Being a member of the school science club **meant I developed** excellent problem-solving skills. **These are essential skills needed for** a career in medicine. Additionally, I participated in a biology competition, where I achieved high marks, **demonstrating my academic ability** in the sciences.

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Putting pen to paper:

1: Write down a sentence that introduces your theme and demonstrates your passion.

I enjoy taking on responsibilities as part of a team and especially in a research context.

Putting pen to paper:

2: Write down an example experience from table 2.

I enjoy taking on responsibilities as part of a team and especially in a research context.

I took part in a Geography field trip as part of my A level.

Putting pen to paper:

3: Write down the connected experience/knowledge/skills they developed as part of the activity. (from table 1)

I enjoy taking on responsibilities as part of a team and especially in a research context

I took part in a Geography field trip as part of my A level.

I developed research and recording skills.

Putting pen to paper:

4: Add an explanation of how that experience helped you to develop the KSQ you are linking it to, or an opinion of the value of that experience.

I enjoy taking on responsibilities as part of a team and especially in a research context

I took part in a Geography field trip as part of my A level.

I developed research and recording skills.

I did this by practicing observation and questioning techniques and using GIS as a recording tool before presenting my findings in a range of suitable formats.

Make a list of what any experience where those KSQBs have been developed and put them in column 2 (The same experience can be repeated)

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Putting pen to paper:

5: Repeat steps 3-4 to add more evidence, KSQs, and explanation

At this point it is okay if you use the same experience but try to add different KSQ's and further explanation.

I enjoy taking on responsibilities as part of a team and especially in a research context.

As part of my Geography A level I took part in a field trip

I volunteered to be a group leader.

Putting pen to paper:

5: Repeat steps 3-4 to add more evidence, KSQs, and explanation

At this point it is okay if you use the same experience but try to add different KSQ's and further explanation.

I enjoy taking on responsibilities as part of a team and especially in a research context.

As part of my Geography A level I took part in a field trip

I volunteered to be a group leader.

In the role I had to communicate the team's goals, give each member a role and set of tasks and then facilitate their feedback at the end of the task.

I found the exchange of ideas and collaborative critique challenging at first but came to appreciate how it helped us develop our ideas more quickly and thoroughly in the long run.

Putting pen to paper:

6: Make a connection to the course you are applying to or to the experience of university more generally.

I enjoy taking on responsibilities as part of a team and especially in a research context. **As part of my Geography A level I took part in a field trip where I volunteered to be a group leader.** In the role I had to communicate the team's goals, give each member a role and set of tasks and then facilitate their feedback at the end of the task. **To complete the task, I also developed my research and recording skills.** We practiced our observation and questioning techniques and used GIS as a recording tool before presenting findings in a range of suitable formats. I really enjoyed the collaborative nature of this experience. I found the exchange of ideas and collaborative critique challenging at first but came to appreciate how it helped us develop our ideas more quickly and thoroughly in the long run. The opportunity to continue to develop and apply these skills as part of a research team is one of the main reasons I want to study Geography at university.

Summary:

This approach....

1. Serves the dual purpose of showing they are right for the course and helping them stand out from the crowd
2. Tailors to the subject without the need for subject specialist
3. Avoids unnecessary focus on 'academic' vs 'not academic content'
4. Gives a structure that ensures support but also allows for originality and personality.