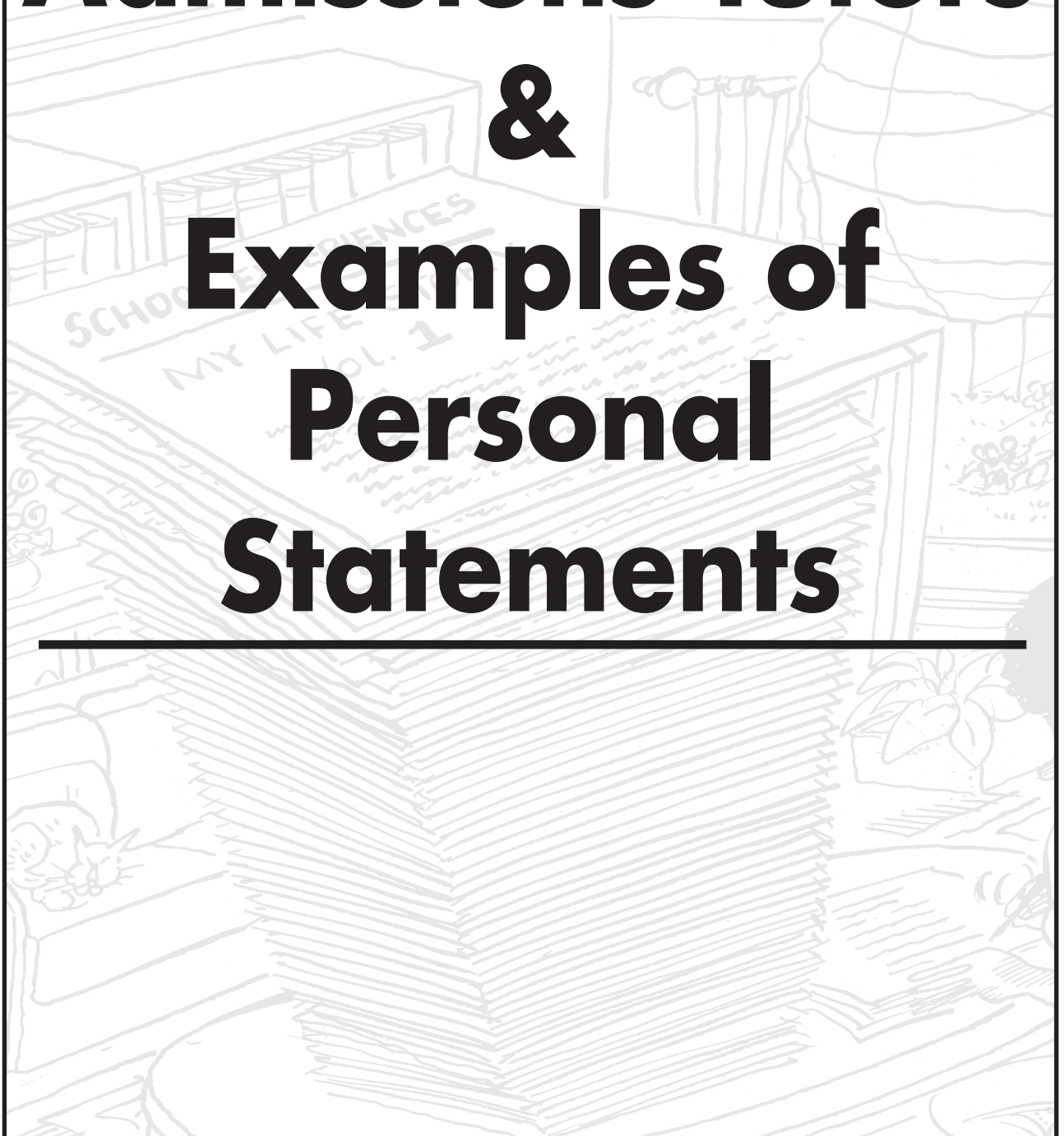

Subject Specific Advice from Admissions Tutors & Examples of Personal Statements



ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Mr. Bill Homes, Architecture, South Bank University, London

Mr. Paul Johnson, Product Design, Nottingham Trent University

Mr. Peter Bowcott, Contemporary Arts, Nottingham Trent University

This section covers a range of courses from Fine Art to Product Design. The ethos varies substantially between these different courses. What they all have in common is that they are concerned with aesthetics and with visual creativity, among other things. These courses usually operate in a different way from most others, being studio-based as a rule. The admissions procedures tend to be rather different too. Very many of these courses will ask you to produce a portfolio of your work and great importance is attached to this. However, it is still important to give the tutor the most positive background information you can by means of the personal statement.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

Tutors in this area are much more likely than others to use the presentation of your personal statement as a selection criterion. After all, these courses are all about visual presentation. Take your time to work from your rough drafts to your final version ensuring a good visual impression. This could be achieved either through word-processing or writing by hand if your handwriting is particularly clear.

HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

There is no reason for you to produce a long piece of writing. You do need, however, to explain to the person reading the statement your reasons for choosing a particular discipline within Art or Design. You should relate this to your own personal experience of Art and Design by outlining your own work as well as through reading, exhibitions and so on.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

You should mention this if you have done some work which is related in any way to Art or Design, even if it isn't in the particular field that you have chosen to study. Other work experience is likely to be of less interest.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

“Work experience generally indicates both an interest in career terms and some, albeit slight, experience of what she/he is undertaking.”

What the tutors thought was useful to include in a statement:

“Items indicating that the student is motivated to do more than is asked of her/him.”

“The ability to convey an interest in experimentation”.

“Skills, Attitude, Aptitude, Progress!”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- PRODUCT DESIGN -

The creative aspects of Product Design is a particular discipline to which I am attracted to. I am hoping to enhance and apply my practical skills through a design-based programme of study. I am hoping this will incorporate skills gained during my Design & Technology GCSE course. My manufacturing and design skills enabled me to construct a fully operational electric guitar. Through such endeavours I have subsequently become engrossed in the more graphical elements of design and this has been evident in the time spent in the Graphics Department within the School.

Outside my 'A' level studies I have been working towards a portfolio of artwork, which displays a leaning towards product-based material. After research into the possibilities within the design field in general, I found myself drawn increasingly to the product design sector. I have supplemented my interest by reading books on topics such as technical illustration and visual presentation, and have found the work of Dick Powell and Richard Seymour of particular interest. In the past two years I have gained valuable experience of rendering using studio markers, as well as pastel, airbrush and luma watercolour amongst other graphic media.

I enjoy listening to a wide variety of music, from jazz to rock and also dance music. I supplement my interest in dance music by composition and I also aspire to be a DJ. I play guitar in a band with whom I have played various venues in the Manchester area. Fitness is also a priority of mine: I make regular visits to the gym which enables me to play Sunday League football. I also gain pleasure from watching Manchester City Football Club on a regular basis.

During my time in the Sixth Form I have taken on extra responsibilities in the form of part-time work. I work in McDonalds Restaurant and I have gained confidence when working with the public, always maintaining good customer relations! Other positions of responsibility include organising the music section in the School Magazine, and controlling the lighting rig for school plays.

I feel that the tutorial aid I am receiving, along with my creative flair for the field of design, would mean I would gain greatly from formulated study. Exposure to new techniques would serve to stimulate my progress even further, and would certainly benefit my application as a designer.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Content of first paragraph is good: it shows achievements in Product Design at a school level
- ▼ Mentioning particular design books gives a good point for discussion at interview (as long as they have been read properly!)

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ The first sentence of a statement often makes more impact on the reader than any other: make sure it's grammatically correct!
- ▼ The work experience is not relevant in this case
- ▼ Too many irrelevant points: this could be cut to half the length without losing anything of importance

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES INCLUDING BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE

This section includes advice from the following tutors:

Dr. Robert Allan, School of Chemical and Biological Sciences, University of Huddersfield
Dr. Ken Backen, Department of Biological Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University
Dr. C. Bray, School of Biological Sciences, University of Manchester

There is a wide range of Biological Sciences degrees available, from the general courses to more specialised ones such as Biochemistry and Ecology. Biomedical Sciences are included here but not Medicine because, although many of the areas studied are similar to those studied in Medicine, Biomedical degrees do not lead to medical qualifications.

HOW DO BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES TUTORS USE THE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

The main decision-making tools used by the tutor will be your predicted grades and the confidential reference. Many tutors in this area use the Personal Statement as evidence of a rounded personality.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT MY STATEMENT?

Best of all would be very neat, fairly large handwriting. Remember that the application form is reduced when it is copied for the tutors. Word-processing would also be fine: but legibility and care are all-important!

HOW SHOULD I STRUCTURE IT?

You need to combine personality with clarity of thought, so make it a piece of continuous writing that flows well. However, scientists tend to have a marked dislike of anything "vague". One hundred words that convey your personality are better than lots of "padding".

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD I INCLUDE?

Concentrate on projecting your personality in a positive light. Explain clearly why you want to do the course, but limit this to a few sentences. Work experience is not vital but mention it briefly if it has improved skills of communications or teamwork. For Biomedical Sciences make sure you demonstrate that you want to do this subject for its own sake and not as a "reserve option" in case you can't get into Medicine.

FURTHER ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES:

Give a rounded picture of yourself to "break the ice" at an interview

What do Biological Sciences tutors think about skills that are worth mentioning?

"Show that you're a "team player"

"If you've done any relevant study at all, such as night classes, this is well worth mentioning"

"Discuss your IT skills if there is something that you have done that can demonstrate these"

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- BIOLOGY -

From an early age I have been fascinated by Biology. I enjoy learning about the mechanics and mechanisms of the body from a molecular level through to the whole functioning of systems. The study of physiological topics on the 'A' level syllabus, such as nitrogenous excretion and water control in the kidney, has confirmed my wish to pursue a Biology course at university.

I currently have several positions of responsibility. I have the privilege of being a prefect and also a House Captain for one of the four school Houses. These roles involve communicating with both pupils and teachers in the organisation of groups of people and events, where I have to show leadership qualities and support people within the school taking part in activities. Being a co-writer of the school magazine's music section I am able to combine a strong interest of mine with being active in school.

I enjoy two part time jobs - as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant, and as a checkout assistant in a local supermarket. In both jobs I use communication skills and handle money. I feel that with these positions I have become more mature and have learnt to manage my time more efficiently.

I am a keen sportsman, being vice-captain of the school rugby second team and also with the rock-climbing club I regularly visit an indoor centre and outdoor areas. I enjoy the exercise and team spirit for rugby and love the feeling of freedom that I get from climbing. Having been on a school fell-walking holiday for the past three years I have learnt responsibility for the planning of walks, safety of others and arranging activities like football games. This holiday lasts a week and I hope to go again this summer as well as finding a full-time job to raise money to visit South Africa.

Recently I have received confirmation of a year out with appointment as Assistant Tutor for a school near Johannesburg. This is an amazing opportunity to return to the country where I was born, before starting university, between September 1999 to August 2000. The position will include helping with teaching in the junior school during the mornings then assisting with sports in the afternoons.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Responsibilities and work experience are used to point out skills acquired
- ▼ If you're planning a year out, say why, and what you will get from it: this applicant has outlined a gap year which sounds interesting and it appears like a 'real' option. It is not speculative (e.g. "I am trying to organise...")
- ▼ Good overall structure: a paragraph for each aspect of statement

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ The introductory paragraph is very 'wordy' and goes into too much subject detail
- ▼ The statement needs reading and redrafting several times to improve the "flow"
- ▼ Lots of sentences begin with "I". There could be more variation to show the applicant can write well

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR BUSINESS AND RELATED COURSES

This section was based on advice from the following tutor:

Dr. Michaela Cottee, Business School, University of Hertfordshire

Business can be taken as a degree in its own right, though there are many degree programmes which combine Business with another subject: which could be anything from Chemistry to Modern Languages. Obviously, taking a course in Business implies that the applicant is thinking about the “world of work” after University, though this is not a narrow vocational course. You need to make it perfectly clear that you want to study this type of course because you find it interesting for its own sake, and not only because you think it will make you more employable.

WHAT SORTS OF THINGS ARE BUSINESS TUTORS LOOKING FOR?

The “Key Skills” which often get mentioned in schools are important here. In other words, you need to have good communications skills, to be numerate and to have familiarity with IT in various contexts. In addition, if you can demonstrate that you have good interpersonal skills and you can organise information well, this is to your advantage.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

As these courses are work-related, it would be useful to mention any work experience you have had in a “business” setting. Any kind of work which involves the skills mentioned above is also worth discussing.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

You need to take a good paragraph to explain why you have chosen this path. Remember what was said above about showing that you’ve got the “right” motives.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN BUSINESS

“Relevant work experience...speaks for itself, but any work experience from which the student has benefited is worth mentioning.”

Responses to a question about Key Skills:

“Numeracy and Communication skills are essential.”

“Evidence of group work / team working is invaluable, as is relevant work experience .”

“IT skills are important.”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- BUSINESS AND MARKETING -

I have always been fascinated with the concept of business and have chosen a degree that will enable me to combine theory with practice. I feel I am particularly suited to a degree in Business and Marketing because of my flair for the subject and a keen interest in furthering my knowledge.

The need to combine study with part-time employment has made it necessary for me to organise my time efficiently as well as giving me opportunities to work as part of a team. Dealing with customers has enhanced my interpersonal skills, such as talking to different people in a variety of situations. In addition to my part-time job I have also gained valuable skills through my voluntary work at a local primary school, where I assisted staff with classroom reading. I found the work to be an enjoyable and challenging experience that gave me the chance to develop a deeper sense of responsibility.

For the past two years I have taken part in the Youth Award Scheme to develop a range of key skills such as improving my own learning and performance, communication and working with others. I found this course to be very stimulating and practical and believe I have gained much of value for my life at university. I also took an active role in the school's Young Enterprise programme and this enabled me to demonstrate my knowledge and skills in a competitive commercial environment.

Travelling to America, Canada, India and Sri Lanka has given me an opportunity to understand other cultures and lifestyles. Furthermore I have a great interest in astrology and enjoy reading adventure and horror novels. I am also keen on team sports such as netball, basketball and hockey. I take great pleasure in meeting new people and socialising with friends.

I look forward to building on my existing understanding and hope to further my knowledge of business. I have gained a significant amount of expertise which has prepared me for higher education and my chosen degree in Business Marketing will hopefully widen my perspectives. I believe that I have the necessary determination and aptitude to succeed at university and feel very positive about my chosen degree.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Voluntary school work is always worth mentioning: the word "responsibility" is a good choice in this context
- ▼ Youth Award Scheme, like the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and other schemes, shows other sides to your character

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ Applicant's justification for course suitability in the first paragraph is too vague and poorly expressed
- ▼ As this is a Business degree, it might have been useful for the applicant to say a little more about their place of work
- ▼ The Young Enterprise Scheme is very relevant for this application. It could have been expanded upon more
- ▼ Most of the penultimate paragraph is irrelevant - some aspects (e.g. socialising) could have been cut
- ▼ Key words such as "practical", "responsible", "expertise" and "aptitude" need to be justified with concrete examples or an explanation

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Dr. John Ferguson, Department of Computer Science, University of Strathclyde
Dr. John Mariani, Department of Computer Science, University of Lancaster

Degree courses in this area can have a number of different titles: Computer Science is perhaps the most common, but Computer Studies, Information Systems and Information Technology are all used as well, and there are several others. The ethos and emphasis will vary between different courses, therefore Admissions Tutors' demands will be somewhat different. For example, some courses will demand 'A' level Mathematics, but this is by no means always the case. You need to check the course content and requirements very carefully! This has become a more and more popular area of study as the profile of Information (& Communication) Technology has increased. Because of this, many courses in this field are highly competitive. Tutors will be keen to make sure your interest in this area is genuine.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

It would be good to present this as a fairly brief but well-structured piece of prose writing. Tutors would like to see that you are a "well-balanced" human being, not just someone who lives and breathes computers! Convey your skills of communication: this is valued just as highly as logical thinking.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Yes, if it's relevant. Most applicants will have had contact with IT in some way: many jobs give the opportunity to use computers. If you can comment intelligently on your own use of IT and how it fits in to a larger scheme of things, so much the better. Remember, though, that other skills are valuable as well. Most real IT professionals work in teams, so evidence of good group working skills is useful.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

It definitely needs commenting on, if only to show that you have thought about it in some depth. You need to have some more substantial reason than "I like using computers"! Make this a good paragraph.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN COMPUTER SCIENCE

"The things I look at most are the predicted grades and the confidential reference. The personal statement can sometimes offset negative impressions given by these."

One tutor's response to the question, "What information on a student's Personal Statement do you find particularly useful?" was:

"If they have work experience, and ... their general outlook towards the topic area, what they're trying to achieve. What their goals are and whether they seem realistic, and whether they seem really motivated towards this area."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- COMPUTER SCIENCE -

I would like to continue to study Mathematics but would also like to develop my interest in computing. I am especially interested in artificial intelligence and intelligent systems as they incorporate aspects of psychology, linguistics and philosophy. My career aspirations are to develop new systems for computers in the field of communication, travel or entertainment. I have some knowledge of computers having surfed the Internet and used packages such as Lotus, Microsoft and VAMP, the network used by medical practices.

I enjoy travelling, having visited India and various European countries, the most recent destination being Italy. I have taken part in the German exchange twice and hope to spend a year abroad as part of my degree.

Being the founder and Chief Executive of the alternative school magazine, which now attracts a readership of over 150, and Assistant Personnel Director of the Young Enterprise scheme has developed my motivation and organisational skills. Producing the magazine also enabled me to use office equipment and to use Microsoft Publisher. Outside school, I have undertaken voluntary work for two months in a hospital geriatric ward and at an Infants' School for a year, where I helped children with mathematics and reading. This has developed my communication skills with people of all ages.

I like to be involved in raising money for charity. Having participated in fund-raising events for Comic Relief, I have found myself skipping, singing and enduring a very short haircut, all in the name of charity.

My creative interests include playing musical instruments such as the guitar and keyboard and writing original songs. I have taken part in a school play, and more recently, written, directed and had a role in an Indian comedy play performed at a medical reunion at a large hotel in Manchester. I also enjoy reading, especially cultural and contemporary fiction and technical magazines, watching films and playing basketball and football in my spare time.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Gives the impression of being an all-round personality
- ▼ Good to mention that voluntary school work was done for a whole year: it reflects genuine commitment. If you aren't specific about times, it could be assumed that you did voluntary work for a couple of weeks just so you could use it as C.V. filler!
- ▼ Statement shows some research about the subject and specifically mentions the names of two specialist fields

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ Motivation to do this course is not put across convincingly
- ▼ Computer use mentioned, but it's vague: Microsoft and Lotus are companies, not packages: which packages were used?
- ▼ Very general pursuits such as reading and playing football casually are not much help to an admissions tutor

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR ECONOMICS, POLITICS AND RELATED COURSES

This section was based on advice from the following tutor:

Ms. Louise Burton, Admissions Officer for Government Courses,
London School of Economics

These courses fall into the category known as Social Sciences. As such, they have much in common with other degrees within this area. The Personal Statement seems to be given a relatively high priority by many admissions tutors within the broad area of Social Sciences. You should show that you are able to reflect on your studies and other experiences and, based on this, produce a piece of writing of a high standard.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

A piece of prose of good length is best. Tutors within Social Sciences and Humanities appear to value the statement as an opportunity to examine the quality of your written English. As mentioned above, the ideal statement would contain a good deal of discussion and reflection, related to your studies and to the wider world. Given the nature of Social Sciences, if you can include your own experiences in this reflection in an intelligent way, so much the better.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

It is not vital as these courses are not vocational. However, any work that has an aspect which is relevant to your discussion, or which demonstrates useful skills, should be mentioned.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

This is important, particularly if you have not studied the subject or subjects before. For instance, if you are applying for Politics, you probably won't have followed a subject of that name at school, though you might well have done subjects such as Economics or Sociology: aspects from either of these subjects might have touched on politics. Show that you have undertaken your research well, that you understand the course and its demands, and that you will benefit from it.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN ECONOMICS, POLITICS AND RELATED SUBJECTS

“The scope and breadth of their intellectual interests should be indicated, particularly if new, wider subjects are concerned in the choices.”

Areas that tutors found particularly useful:

“Reasons why the applicant has chosen the course applied for, and indications that the applicant understands the scope and demands of the course.”

“Comments which indicate that the student is grasping some of the methodical problems involved in any study [and] has an understanding of how the study will be developed in advanced courses.”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT - POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY & ECONOMICS -

“If we can keep our heads the long-awaited economic miracle is in our grasp.” Dennis Healey, July 1976

“What I have always said is that no government can produce an economic miracle.” Dennis Healey, December 1976

In the past year, both Economics and politics have inspired me and fuelled my interest. I believe the two go hand in hand, as illustrated in the above quotations. My Economics A-level course has been challenging and engaging and I believe my keen interest in debating and systematic analysis will provide me with the appropriate skills to enjoy the study of both Politics and Philosophy. I hope that university will afford me an opportunity of acquiring a deep understanding of all three subjects and enable me to develop skills and flexibility for the future. My other A-level subjects of History and Geography have enabled me to develop analytical skills as well as my ability to present a well-reasoned argument.

Within school I recently embarked on the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award Scheme, enabling me to develop new skills and friendships and promoting both teamwork and independence. Other extra-curricular activities in School include drama which provides me with a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction as well as supplying me with a wealth of experience on public speaking. At the end of Lower Sixth, I was fortunate enough to be appointed a School Prefect.

Travel is extremely important to me and I hope to increase my experience of the world during a gap year in the Far East, developing my independence and allowing me to obtain further knowledge of our world's people and cultures before continuing my education. It promises to be an unmissable adventure. My other hobbies include the saxophone and especially playing and listening to Jazz and Blues. I also regularly support Stockport County Football Club and I have gained an Open Water PADI Diver qualification. My final great passion is reading, both of fictional and reference books and my favourite authors include Frederick Forsyth and Tom Sharpe. I have aspirations to be a novelist myself in the future.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Good quotes to start: states something about the nature of the subject
- ▼ “Keen interest in debating and analysis” is useful, but we should have more detail on this
- ▼ Duke of Edinburgh Award is useful to illustrate team skills
- ▼ Detailed first paragraph explains reasons for choice of course

WEAKNESS:

- ▼ The statement reads too much like a “list”. There could have been a greater degree of reflection about personal experiences and how these relate to the subject area

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR EDUCATION

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Mr. John Archer, Design and Technology Education, Nottingham Trent University
Dr. William Large, Religious Education, College of St. Mark & St. John
Mr. D.C. Williamson, Primary Education, Nottingham Trent University

This section covers first degrees which include education studies and teaching practice, and lead to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Some Education departments offer other first degrees which don't lead to QTS, such as Educational Research. These are different in nature and we are not covering them here. Be aware, too, that there is another common route into teaching - this is to do a non-Education first degree and then to study for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The education element in this route is not part of your first degree, so we do not cover it.

WHAT SHOULD I BEAR IN MIND ABOUT FIRST DEGREES IN EDUCATION WHICH LEAD TO QTS?

Education is a unique area for a first degree. Not only will you be learning about subject areas, but you will also be finding out about communicating your knowledge with other people, learning about educational ideas, and going on teaching practice. Although many courses, especially in certain Secondary Education subject areas, are not heavily subscribed at the moment, this does not mean that you should neglect the Personal Statement. On the contrary, tutors in this area will be looking for commitment and they will want to know as much as they can about your personality. You should therefore take care over your Personal Statement.

HOW SHOULD I STRUCTURE MY PERSONAL STATEMENT?

The "shape" of the statement is not critical, but an impression of care and attention to detail is absolutely vital. Make sure it is legible, and take plenty of time over it.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

If you have any relevant experience, you should mention it. This could include helping younger children with reading, organising camps or activities, or any other work with children. Quite a high proportion of applicants are "mature", i.e. not coming straight from school. If this applies to you, it is always worthwhile talking about the nature of the work you have done and the relevant skills you gained.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN EDUCATION

"What they have written is...a discussion point. The better ones give an insight into their background, into why they want to teach, the sort of things they're interested in outside school life."

"Breadth of school experience is important."

When asked what was particularly important, these tutor replies stood out:

"The wish to be involved in the education system!"

"School-based and other work with children."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- PRIMARY EDUCATION -

I firmly believe there is no role in society more crucial than that which shapes children's lives and prepares them for adulthood. I have had a longstanding interest in education and my A-levels have laid good foundations for the degree I wish to study. My knowledge of the principles of Physics has been enhanced by studying this at A-level, whilst Maths has improved my ability to use logical thinking. Geography field excursions have given me experience in working as part of a team.

At School I have always been keen to assist at events such as Parents' Evenings which have helped me with both organisation and communication skills. Throughout my time at school I have taken advantage of the various educational and sporting opportunities. I am a member of the school choir and have taken various roles in school productions, as well as working in all aspects of stage, including choreography, operating lighting and designing scenery. I have found the added commitment of being a Prefect extremely rewarding.

Having been a member of a Youth Theatre Company for eight years I have been able to perform in an annual musical. I have also organised a drama summer school for primary school children. I have learnt the importance of motivation and self-determination. I am looking forward to acting at the Palace Theatre in February to raise money for a local Hospice.

My dedication to a variety of dancing since the age of six has enabled me to become a Ballet, Tap and Modern dancing teacher. At present I am teaching fourteen children aged four to seven years old. The ability to understand the children I teach has been enriched by spending a month every year for six years working voluntarily in a class of my local infant school. This year I chose to branch out from mainstream schools and help at a Special School once a week. Working full time at a legal expenses company during the summer has improved my IT skills whilst introducing me to a professional environment.

In conclusion, I firmly believe that this course is right for me, as I have had valuable experience working closely with children and my broad educational and recreational background has prepared me for all aspects of both the course and university life as a whole.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Has pointed out extensive work with children, both in primary school and as a dance teacher
- ▼ Skills in communications, use of number and IT are stressed on teacher-training courses and in the teaching profession. The IT skills gained at work have been pointed out explicitly

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ The rather general comments about the 'A' level subjects are fairly useful, but don't write any more than this unless it's more specific!
- ▼ A lot of this statement is about rather school-focused activities: it would be helpful to write a little about other activities for balance

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR ENGINEERING

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Dr. D.S. Macdonald, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Imperial College, London
Mr. Henry Green, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Manchester Metropolitan University

Engineering subjects are vocational: most applicants will be intending to become Chartered Engineers eventually, though of course some of them may change career paths before they get to this stage. There are large numbers of Engineering courses. They have varied titles, though generally they fall into one of the established divisions within Engineering - Mechanical, Civil, Electrical and Chemical being the best-known ones. Although the content of these courses will vary, there is a great deal of common ground among them in terms of the Engineering "ethos" and the skills needed.

WHAT SHOULD I BEAR IN MIND ABOUT ENGINEERING COURSES?

Mathematical ability is vital for all these courses - you will almost always be asked for Maths at A-level or Higher Grade, or an equivalent. You will usually be expected to have sciences at this level as well.

HOW SHOULD I STRUCTURE MY PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Don't make it too long - waffle is definitely not wanted here! Given that constraint, structure it as you see best - the actual "shape" of the statement is not critical, though the content, of course, is important!

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

If you have work experience in an area related to engineering or science, yes. Bear in mind that engineers rate problem-solving and teamwork skills very highly, so anything that demonstrates this convincingly is useful, too.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

The word that Engineering admissions tutors use is enthusiasm - so spend as long as you need to convince the tutor that you have real enthusiasm for this course, but don't pad it out!

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN ENGINEERING

"If the applicant has relevant work experience which she/he has enjoyed, it indicates real interest in the course."

"We're looking for enthusiasm, we're looking for motivation, we're looking for interest in the course."

"At the interview the statement can often form the starting point for a discussion about what the student has done and what he/she enjoys."

"While they're here, they'll be working in small groups and larger groups, so it's very useful if they've got any kind of...experience of working in a group."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- ENGINEERING -

For a long time I have been interested in the underlying principles of the world, which have been introduced in my studies of mathematics and physics. Although I would like to study many aspects of engineering in greater depth, the most stimulating areas to me are information systems and electronic engineering, because of my long-standing fascination with computing, and lately with electronics. However, it is also the diversity of engineering that appeals to me. This is why a number of my chosen courses involve some 'general engineering' with the freedom to specialise later in the course.

I believe that I am well suited to an engineering course. Having a logical, mathematical brain, I have performed well in a number of Invitational Mathematics Challenges. In addition, I have about 10 years' experience working with computers and a good grasp of the principles of many programming languages.

Last summer I worked on a four-week bursary project where I built an optically controlled mobile robot which used a transmitter/receiver of my own design. During the summer of 1997 I secured a six-week placement at BAESEMA, an engineering consultancy, where I helped to design a library database to aid report writing in the office, and then to operate it across a wide area network.

In school, I have held a number of positions of responsibility: I am currently a prefect and the first flute in the Orchestra, with a distinction at Grade 8. I organise a group of twelve upper sixth-formers to welcome and help a form of new students through their first few months at school. Last year I was involved with the school's Young Enterprise company. Prior to that, I was an organiser of the Computer Club.

Out of school, I am a member of the local tennis club's U-18 squad, and I sail at a nearby lake. I am the editor of an online software magazine known as Independent Software Reviews. However, my main pastime is walking: I frequently go walking in the Lake District and in 1997 organised a Youth Hostelling holiday with four friends. Last May I was a group leader on the school camping trip.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ The enthusiasm for the subject comes across well
- ▼ This applicant seems to have researched Engineering courses in some depth
- ▼ Relevant work experience and demonstrable IT skills
- ▼ Engineering and computing interests are balanced by outdoor pursuits

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ The "online magazine" may be as significant as it sounds, or it may be just a glorified title for Web home page: this may very well be picked up on!
- ▼ Mathematical ability does not really need stressing so much: it should be apparent from previous results and predicted grades
- ▼ Experience working with computers could be more specific

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR ENGLISH

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Dr. Gail Marshall, Department of English, University of Leeds
Mr. John Mowat, Department of English, University of Lancaster

Your personality will be important to an Admissions Tutor for English, but you need to think carefully about how you choose to put this over. It should come as no surprise that the quality of written English is important to tutors in this area. This means that you need to spend time on your statement in order to make sure it has the right “feel” and that it flows well.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

For English courses, the Personal Statement should be a piece of well-constructed prose which shows an ability to adapt your style to suit the circumstances. The style you should adopt in this case is one which is suited to personal writing: it should reveal something about the kind of person you are. It almost goes without saying that spelling, punctuation and grammar are most important in applications for this subject. Do check carefully: careless errors will influence the Admissions Tutor’s perception!

HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

You need to give yourself a chance to demonstrate your ability to write, so it shouldn’t be too short!

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Certainly, if it demonstrates useful skills. As in many other areas, IT skills are valued quite highly. Many applicants will have had jobs which combined IT skills with the creative use of English - for example, word-processing or desktop publishing experience. Communication skills of all kinds are obviously useful to mention.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

In this case, quite a lot! You need to convince the Admissions Tutor of your motivation. This means that you could spend most of your statement discussing why you want to do the course. You should relate this to your own experiences as well as to your reading.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN ENGLISH

Responses to questions about what they thought was important in a statement:

“Information on reading and interest in the study of literature.”

“Awareness of interconnection of subjects (studied at school), comments that indicate ability to be self-reflective about study.”

A response to the question, “Do you value broadly-based skills such as teamwork and ability to organise information?” was:

“Yes, if they can make that information relevant to their anticipation of study at the Higher Education level.”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE -

My desire to study English stems from love of literature. I have a large personal collection of quotation anthologies and enjoy searching for works by particular writers. A-level has broadened these interests, introducing me to French and German literature. I am looking forward to a full range of styles and periods at degree level, and to exploring language as an enhancement of literary appreciation. I am fascinated by the impact of history and social trends on the evolution of English. Employment as a Saturday Steward at my local library complements these interests.

I hope to teach and my experience here so far includes instructing Karate, coaching junior basketball at school and completing the Community Sports Leader Award. Community service as a pupil teacher in P.E. has given me deeper insight into teaching. I am captain of senior basketball, a member of the Senior Hockey team and the current holder of the Kingsbury High School Senior Mixed Doubles' Tennis Trophy. I have twice been selected to train with the Brent Basketball team for the London Youth Games.

Currently I am Head Girl and this has developed skills in leadership, delegation, organisation and communication. My place on the Senior School Council has also improved my debating. Recently I took a leading role in a school music and dance production and prior to that, I co-hosted the school fashion show. I sing with the Senior Choir and founded the Folk Group. I also provide piano accompaniment for the full school choir.

To support my A-level studies, I have attended seminars in French, German and English, including one by Germaine Greer, and poetry readings by James Fenton and Blake Morrison. I was also fortunate enough to hear a poetry reading by Bernard O'Donoghue in the Royal Festival Hall. I took a German course in Braunschweig this summer and spent time in Normandy last year. As well as these I have completed courses in Spanish and British Sign Language.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Good, relevant work experience: well worth mentioning
- ▼ Attendance at seminars and readings is obviously relevant
- ▼ Position of responsibility within school used to demonstrate personal skills

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ Not much real discussion about literature: individual writers have been mentioned only in passing
- ▼ Statement does not have a very personal "feel". It comes over as a set of disjointed paragraphs: don't forget the last part of the statement-writing process - redrafting!
- ▼ While sporting achievements should be mentioned, this part could have been made shorter to develop a more personal commentary about motivation in relation to experiences
- ▼ The relevance of the work experience needs to be explicit

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR GEOGRAPHY

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Mrs. Chrissie Tunney, Admissions Officer, Geography, University of Leeds
Mr. Paul McDermott, School of Geography, University College Northampton

Geography is a diverse subject - it has strong links to other fields of study in the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. For this reason, you will find both BA and BSc degrees in Geography. Often the same department will offer both.

WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL FEATURES OF GEOGRAPHY THAT I SHOULD BEAR IN MIND WHILE WRITING MY STATEMENT?

The subject is about the physical and human aspects of the world we live in, and how these interact with each other, so experience of places and cultures is very useful to mention.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

Be logical, but remember that from one angle this is a humanities subject - so the quality of your written English is important. A piece of coherent prose, well-structured, possibly with paragraph headings, might be very effective. Admissions Tutors in this area are interested in broader issues as well as your choice of course so balance the space allocated to reasons for choice of course, personal detail, skills and experiences.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Yes! Even though you probably won't have had any directly related work experience, Geography tutors are looking for evidence of skills you have acquired. ALL the Key Skills of numeracy, I.T. and communications are relevant for this subject, as are wider issues such as teamwork.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD INCLUDE?

In contrast to many subject areas, this is one where travel experiences are definitely of interest to the tutor, although not essential. The more observant you have been on your travels, the better, especially if you can relate this to what you already know about Geography. I.T. plays an important part in many courses: mention any I.T. skills you have. Any environmental projects you have been involved in are relevant too.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN GEOGRAPHY

"I want to know what extra activities they've done outside school, I want to know what they've done in school and achieved, and I want to know the kinds of things they've taken on. It's initiative, it's survival!"

"What you're looking for is a student who is going to graduate with a good Geography degree with transferable skills. The personal statement on the UCAS form will be clear and concise, if the pupils have had guidance from the school. The result would be a coherent report on themselves with appropriate headings, such as: achievements inside and outside school, outstanding projects, activities, hobbies and interests."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- GEOGRAPHY -

Geography has always interested me and I will enjoy studying it in greater depth. In reading Geography I hope to gain an understanding of processes within the natural world and of their implications to human society. Having greatly enjoyed my A level subjects, I have developed particular interests in aspects of Physical Geography, including Climatology and Coastal Geomorphology. I look forward to studying these topic areas, as well as others in human and economic Geography.

My desire to study Geography has been furthered by attending lectures at the local geological and astronomical societies. Additionally, television series such as 'Savage Earth', and 'Raging Planet' have broadened my knowledge of Physical Geography. In teaching myself an option within an 'A' level Physics module, I am consulting books including 'Leaving Eden: To protect and manage the Earth', 'The Inaccessible Earth', and 'An Introduction To Global Environmental Issues'. This has allowed me to gain a better understanding of the earth and atmosphere. I also found 'A Brief History Of Time' to be a very thought-provoking book. A subscription to 'New Scientist' has increased my awareness of many scientific issues. Of particular interest have been articles relating to climate change.

I am in a position of responsibility as a senior prefect at school, and this has developed my leadership and teamwork qualities. I have also been involved in assisting younger pupils who have learning and reading difficulties. Representing the school at hockey, rounders, and athletics, and participating in the 'Community Sports Leader Award' has enabled me to maintain my sporting interest. Outside school, regular swimming and badminton help to keep me fit. I am a member of 'London Zoo Lifewatch', and I look forward to visiting the Zoo's new conservation centre next year. This membership, and my attendance at a recent lecture on conservation, have strengthened my enthusiasm for Geography.

I enjoy the outdoors, and hope that studying Geography will provide me with the opportunity to travel and experience new cultures and environments. I feel that I have much to contribute to student life, and I look forward to my time at university.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Involvement with geological and astronomical societies is good to mention
- ▼ Conservation interests also very useful
- ▼ Wide sporting interests used to demonstrate personal qualities
- ▼ Clearly expressed statement in a range of Geographical areas

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ Too much on reasons for subject choice
- ▼ Longer than necessary - some of this statement doesn't convey anything useful
- ▼ Rather too many books mentioned by name without going into any informative detail
- ▼ Certain basic skills not mentioned, such as IT skills and communication: find ways of demonstrating these

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR HISTORY

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Dr. Sarah Barber, History Department, Lancaster University

Dr. Angela Brown, Department of International Studies, Nottingham Trent University

History is one of the oldest-established of the Humanities courses. There are a number of different types of history course available - some of them are quite general while some specialise in certain aspects of history. Many institutions also make history courses available as part of joint honours programmes, or multidisciplinary programmes such as International Studies. The comments below will be applicable if you are hoping to study any subject with a substantial History component.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

In common with other Humanities and Social Science courses, tutors in the History area tend to like a relatively long, well-developed piece of prose. You need to redraft it, probably several times, so that it “flows” and doesn’t just come across as a set of separate paragraphs.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Yes, if you can use this to demonstrate that you have acquired relevant skills. Skills which are particularly useful for History courses include your ability to communicate, skills of analysis and research, teamwork and organising information.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

This should be fairly substantial - at the very least, one good paragraph about this. This part of your statement should link in to your own academic interests and to your personal experience of learning so far. You need to have spent some time reflecting on the courses you are taking. You should also have done some research on History courses so that you are aware of the demands of the course and of the teaching methods.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD BEAR IN MIND?

You need to balance the academic and self-reflective parts mentioned above with some comments on your activities outside education. Try to make these relevant and to integrate them into the flow of the statement.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN HISTORY

“Part of what we’re building into the degree programme is self-reflection by the student about the processes of learning that they are going through. We want to see that at ‘A’ level as well.”

“I think they need to make it very clear that it’s not just that they’ve got an interest in the past - how do I know this?”

What History tutors thought was particularly important:

“A sense that this is an intelligent person who...would get something out of university level teaching.”

“An awareness of the skills that they have is important.”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- HISTORY -

As Virgil says, "Happy is he who is able to learn the causes of all things."

Studying a science as well as History and Classical Civilisation at A-Level has enabled me to explore a diverse range of areas while reinforcing that my one true passion is History. History has always been more than an academic subject to me which is why I read extensively, subscribe to "History Review" and am a member of "Timewatch" at School. I have enjoyed studying Russian History which I hope to continue at university. I also hope to broaden my studies which the range of options available will allow me to do.

My study of History at A-Level has enabled me to develop my analytical skills. I am an avid reader and this has helped to develop my research ability. My enthusiasm for the subject has resulted in me winning the School History prize. These attributes will, I hope, allow me to benefit from studying a History degree.

Although it is difficult to find work experience directly related to History, I feel my work experience at a strategic marketing company in London was very worthwhile. As well as being a challenging and enjoyable experience it opened my eyes to the wide spectrum of options open to historians. It also served to give me an idea of the sort of career I may be interested in.

Playing in various sports teams as well as captaining the netball team for two years has taught me the importance of organisation, self-reliance and motivating others. It has also enabled me to represent my town at the Manchester Youth Games for two years. I would relish the chance to continue playing at university and I would also be keen to continue playing Ladies' rugby. My work with the homeless at the soup kitchens in Stockport, as well as being rewarding, provided me with the opportunity to meet people and learn the valuable skills of commitment and adaptability. Hopefully these attributes have been enhanced by my completion of the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award. I feel these skills are also appropriate to studying for a History degree.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ A keen interest in the subject comes across clearly throughout
- ▼ Good work experience with positive outcomes
- ▼ Charity work shows commitment: another positive aspect of personality
- ▼ Varied sports experience, the skills gained here are pointed out
- ▼ Particular historical interest pointed out though more could be made of this?

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ The opening sentence is so 'highbrow' that it might be regarded as a bit pretentious
- ▼ The work experience is not used to demonstrate skills, which it almost certainly did help this student to acquire
- ▼ Not enough detail on the school History prize, despite the award being clearly relevant

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR LAW

This section includes advice from the following tutors:

Ms. Diane Hughes, School of Law, Manchester Metropolitan University
Ms. Aileen McColgan, Department of Law, King's College London

This section deals with LLB degrees. This is the specialist law degree which is the first step to becoming a lawyer. The LLB degree is academically demanding, and many of the courses are very heavily subscribed. These facts, and the vocational nature of the course, mean that there are certain things that you should bear in mind when applying for the course.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

Write a relatively long and well-structured piece of continuous prose. Your proficiency in the use of the English language is important on the course itself. While Admissions Tutors would not use the Personal Statement as a formal check on this, your use of language is one of the things that form an impression of you in the tutor's mind. Good presentation is of paramount importance: you need to give an impression of carefulness and attention to detail.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

If you have had work experience in a firm of lawyers, or something closely connected with the law, this is an obvious point of interest. However, don't feel at a disadvantage if you haven't done this, as such work placements are not always easy to come by. If you have any other experience which really does demonstrate relevant skills, mention it. Very mundane work placements are unlikely to be of interest to tutors in this area.

WHAT WOULD TUTORS BE LOOKING FOR IN PARTICULAR?

Good academic ability comes high on the list for many Law Admissions Tutors, though this will usually be evident from your previous exam results and your predicted grades. The Personal Statement and the Confidential Reference, however, are what tells the tutor about your personal qualities. Tutors will be looking for qualities over and above the usual "rounded character". They want to know whether you have integrity, strength of character, whether you pay attention to detail. Be sure to be able to demonstrate these qualities through things you have done. Law tutors may be more than usually attentive to inconsistencies between your Personal Statement and the reference, so don't make claims you can't substantiate!

FURTHER ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN LAW:

"Law-related work experience can indicate interest, but we don't penalise those without, as personal contacts assist such placements."

"General qualities are more important than specific things like work experience."

"The Personal Statement is used to examine attention to detail, for instance checking for any inconsistency between information provided by the applicant and the reference."

"How long applicants say they have wanted to be a lawyer is important."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- LAW -

GUILTY!!! I confess!!! I want to study Law!!!

From an early age I was attracted to law as it is such an important aspect of Society and more recently the evolution of the laws has interested me. I have taken part in exchanges, travelled internationally and this together with a Belgian mother has given me a cosmopolitan outlook and fuelled my interest in European laws. Following my GCSEs in which I gained the Latin prize I chose a mixed combination of 'A' levels. By studying Mathematics and Chemistry I have acquired the scientist's respect for logic, reason and critical analysis and from the study of German I have developed a greater sense of linguistic awareness and enhanced my oral expression and writing skills.

Spending two weeks at one of the region's largest firms of solicitors gave me an insight into property, litigation, criminal and company law. This was followed by a week's mini-pupillage at a barristers' chambers. During this week I attended the courts which dealt with small criminal matters. Having spent three weeks at Reuters before this, the work experience I gained confirmed that I wished to study Law at degree level. Reuters showed me the importance of the law in international business and I eventually hope to pursue a career in company law.

At School I am involved in Model United Nations and I have helped organise, re-establish and promote the School's debating society. I have debated in front of 4000 delegates at a conference in The Hague and this improved my debating and language skills and strengthened my knowledge of current affairs as well as developing my self-confidence. In addition to my interest in debating I am computer literate and I enjoy journalism, albeit on a small scale, as I write for the Sixth form magazine.

Swimming is my main sport for which I have received the Bronze Medallion in Life Saving. I also play netball for the School and have joined in hockey and tennis where I class myself as a willing and enthusiastic player.

In my final year at school I have been appointed a Prefect and selected as a member of the Christmas Ball Committee and the Year Book Committee.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Good short summary of reasons for studying Law
- ▼ Good indication about why this unusual 'A' level combination was studied - and this is used to demonstrate relevant skills
- ▼ Two relevant work experiences: which the applicant has commented positively upon
- ▼ Debating experience is relevant for Law courses

WEAKNESS:

- ▼ The first line could be seen as too "gimmicky" by some tutors. Certainly, the rest of the application needs to be very strong as the Admissions Tutor is likely to want to know the applicant is serious. There is very little else which is negative: this is a very strong statement, well written, with several relevant points but no "padding"

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR MATHEMATICS

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Dr. Derek Holt, Mathematics Department, University of Warwick
Dr. John Baylis, Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research, Nottingham Trent University

Mathematics courses are academically demanding. They are not vocational, although mathematical skills are useful in a very wide range of occupations. Mathematics graduates are among the most employable of all graduates, particularly in key areas. Admissions procedures vary: Maths courses which are in heavy demand might have a more formal selection process than those at other institutions: though of course, degrees with lower offers than others might be just as good!

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Yes. If you can point out any mathematical content or connection, so much the better, but remember that work experience helps to demonstrate more general skills.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

This is quite important, but particularly so for those few universities which demand exceptionally high grades to study maths. You should convince the Admissions Tutor that you have genuine enthusiasm for Mathematics itself, and you have not just applied for it because you've been studying it and it offers good job prospects. If you are applying for a highly competitive Maths course you might be well advised to devote as much as 50% of the form to your reasons for choosing this subject.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I INCLUDE?

You should mention the aspects of Maths in which you are particularly interested. Don't make this too pedestrian: you will be studying Maths at the moment, but the content of 'A' level or Higher syllabuses are not of much interest unless you've done some reading around the subject and you have some idea of where they will lead, during the degree and after.

WHAT ABOUT MY INTERESTS AND SKILLS?

These should form a part of all UCAS applications. If your form makes it seem that your only interest is in mathematics, you will appear to be a very one-dimensional character!

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSION TUTORS IN MATHEMATICS

Responses by Admissions Tutors to questions about what they thought was particularly important in a Personal Statement:

"Attitudes to and interest in Mathematics."

"Ability to work and solve problems independently."

"Something to talk about at an interview - if the student has done some research into careers, and says what shel/he learnt from the work experience."

Response to a question about what sort of comments to include on 'A' level/Higher courses:

"Exceptional interest in some aspect of the course."

"How easy or difficult they are finding it."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- MATHEMATICS -

Studying for five A-Levels means I have to be an efficient and hard worker, showing that I am able to prioritise and manage my time efficiently to get everything done. I enjoy and take pride in my work, particularly mathematics, and find learning and applying the logical methods taught very stimulating. I have enjoyed taking part in the UK Mathematical Challenge, obtaining a gold certificate every year of entry, and being invited to take part in the next round of the challenge on three occasions. With an average of over 96% in my six maths modules so far, I believe I am capable of doing well.

On top of my A-Levels I also work for Iceland Frozen Foods Plc. This has brought me into contact with a wider range of people, and I have learnt a lot of skills, both in the work place and socially with my colleagues. Having enjoyed two weeks work experience with the National Westminster Bank, I have become more interested in the mathematics behind business.

Over the past school year I have taken part in the Young Enterprise scheme, where I was the Personnel Director, and joined the Lasers club where several projects are underway. More recently I have been accepted for a Model United Nations conference in Manchester, in order to try another new experience and learn more about Human Rights.

Outside school I am involved in an online reviewing magazine called ISR, Independent Software Reviews, for which I review PC software and games. This has prompted me to learn some basic HTML for the web publishing aspect of this magazine and for the construction of the school website.

I like sport both in and out of school and I am a member of a local tennis club. I also enjoy cycling and football. I regularly help out with school open evenings and mornings, parents' evenings, and other functions. Last year I was appointed a lower sixth monitor giving me a greater responsibility within school. I am now a prefect and also part of the "First Form Friends" scheme to help first year pupils settle into the school.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Demonstrates mathematical and general ability at the beginning
- ▼ Quite a good range of other activities
- ▼ Well structured, good length
- ▼ "First Form Friends" is a positive statement with which to end

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ What skills, exactly, were learned from work experience? - too vague!
- ▼ Motivation for chosen course is not made clear. No evidence of having researched the course.
- ▼ What is the "Lasers Club"? It sounds interesting, but it's skipped over quickly

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Professor P. J. Lamey, Queen’s University Dental School, Belfast
Dr. M.Y. Morgan, Royal Free & University College Medical School, London
Ms. Fiona Sutherland, St. Bart’s & Royal London Medical School

Medicine and Dentistry courses are unique. They are academically demanding, they are vocational and they are heavily oversubscribed. These features have several implications for UCAS applicants. Firstly, the grades demanded are high. Candidates are usually shortlisted for interview on the basis of their UCAS form. The Personal Statement plays a significant part in this selection process. There are certain important points to remember about statements for these subject areas.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

You need to convince the tutor that you are motivated and that you understand the demanding nature of the training, and of your chosen profession. There should be a substantial amount about this. It should link in with your comments about your skills and your work experience.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Relevant work experience is much more important for these degrees than for most. You must explain clearly what you got from your work experience. Mention the insights it gave you into the medical world and its demands. Remember to mention the skills that work experience has given you.

WHAT ABOUT MY SKILLS AND PERSONAL QUALITIES?

Doctors and dentists work with people: colleagues as well as patients, so anything that demonstrates good teamwork is worth putting down. This could include school teams, and Duke of Edinburgh or similar awards as well as work experience. Communication skills are also of importance.

HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

As you need to say quite a lot about work experience, skills and motivation, it should not be too short. You will probably find that your statement will end up closer to 400 words than to 200, though of course it should be no longer than it needs to be to get these points across.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY

“We wish to see evidence of motivation to a medical/dental career and also of work experience.”

“We would expect some evidence of work experience or ... unlikely to be called for interview.”

“Evidence of good communication skills is useful...any evidence of teamwork is useful.”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- MEDICINE -

I have always had a keen interest in science, especially human biology and chemistry, and at the age of 14 decided to become a doctor. After attending the 'Medlink' course at Nottingham University at the beginning of the lower sixth I became serious about a career in Medicine. Since 'Medlink' I have:

- *gained work experience at my local hospital, Stepping Hill, (Stockport Acute NHS Trust) in various departments including Accident and Emergency, Paediatrics, Pathology, and Orthopaedics.*
- *spent a day at a General Practice in a deprived area of Manchester where a clinic was being conducted by the community drugs team. This sparked my interest in the subject of drug care and the control of the spread of Hepatitis B & C, HIV and other diseases spread by blood contact.*
- *attended a seminar in Manchester given by the M.R.C. addressing the technological advances and ethical dilemmas concerning animal to human transplantation.*

I have an interest in computers and the Internet. I spent two weeks with a web publishing company where I learnt HTML programming. This has led to an interest in developments in 'Telemedicine'. For the past two years I have participated in various fundraising events in aid of the 'Rainbow Trust', which cares for terminally ill children. These include helping out at several charity balls.

I was pleased to be made a prefect and am enjoying the responsibilities that come with the position. As marketing director in the school's Young Enterprise team I learned teamwork skills and gained my first experience of leadership. I play saxophone in the school Big Band and last year I acted in the autumn term drama production 'Something Dramatic'. I am also in a group that writes and produces the sixth form magazine, 'Spin'. My main music interest outside school is jazz. As a member of the Stockport Big Band 'Stagesound', I have played in local concerts including backing a production at the Palace Theatre, Manchester. I am also in a band which I founded with some friends. Sporting interests include tennis and sailing. I have enjoyed sailing holidays both in England and abroad and I have gained RYA dinghy sailing certificates up to level 3. Reading interests include modern classics and science fiction books.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ The Medlink course is used effectively to support the motivation to study medicine
- ▼ Varied, relevant work experience
- ▼ A good selection of other interests and relevant charity work

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ It could be made shorter by cutting out the more pedestrian interests and activities
- ▼ Lists lots of medical-related activities but does not state why being a doctor is so appealing (after all there are long hours, long training)

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR MODERN LANGUAGES

This section was based on advice from the following tutor:

Mr. Richard Nice, Department of Linguistic and International Studies,
University of Surrey

Modern Languages can be studied in several ways - you could, for example, study two languages jointly or choose one on its own. It is also very common these days for languages to be offered in combination with business-related subjects. Some courses are not heavily subscribed: so while your Personal Statement might not be as vital for this subject area as for others, there are certain areas that Languages Admissions Tutors would like to know about you.

HOW SHOULD I STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

Not surprisingly, language skills are highly valued in courses of this type - so you should take care that you can put together a well-constructed piece of written English. It should, therefore, be a continuous piece of writing which “flows” well, and has a logical paragraph structure.

HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

Bearing in mind the paragraph above, the Personal Statement should not be too short: though you don’t have to fill the space up with trivia!

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE AND FOREIGN TRAVEL?

Work experience is of interest, especially if you can show that it developed your communication skills. Travel in the ordinary sense is too commonplace to be very useful: but if you have spent any length of time living in another country and speaking another language, this is a useful indicator of your aptitude and your motivation regarding language study.

WHAT OTHER EXPERIENCES AND SKILLS SHOULD I MENTION?

As always, any worthwhile activity to which you have devoted a lot of time gives an insight into your character. Activities illustrating your communications skills are especially helpful: languages are means of communication, after all!

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN MODERN LANGUAGES:

“I look for evidence of real interest and commitment.”

Responses to questions about what is particularly valued:

“Anything out of the ordinary gives something to talk about.”

“A positive attitude to other cultures and a readiness to learn.”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- GERMAN AND ITALIAN -

My fascination in languages began at the age of five, when I overheard my Father speaking to his German business colleagues, on the telephone. From then on, I have always had an ambition to become fluent in another language.

I feel that learning French and German for seven years has provided me with an excellent foundation to build on. Continuing German will broaden my communication skills, and give me the chance to pursue a career in Europe, during my year abroad. My A-Level in Business Studies gave me an in-depth knowledge of various business areas, which can only increase my career opportunities.

Participating in two German Exchanges, in the North and South has allowed me to experience German life, culture and discover variations within Germany.

Academically, I was awarded the Headmaster's Commendation at the age of 14, for my dedication and efforts. Last year I became Deputy Secretary of a Young Enterprise company. I enrolled in a computer course which gave me the ability to word process and use computers more efficiently.

I am involved in several extra-curricular activities, which I hope to continue at university. I have been a dedicated and enthusiastic member of the Hockey squad and was appointed Hockey Captain of the 2nd XI Hockey Team, which is allowing me to develop my personnel and organisational skills. I am a keen player for the school tennis team. My sporting success has extended outside of School by becoming a member of the County Junior Squash Team.

My leadership skills were developed after I assisted in taking a Junior School class to the Lake District last year. Being appointed as a Prefect allowed me to communicate and assist with different age groups.

I am looking forward to furthering my language skills, and exploring different cultures during my year abroad. I am confident that the course that I have chosen will fulfil all of my expectations.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Starts with a short summary of what prompted initial interest
- ▼ This links in well to 'A' level language study and exchange visits
- ▼ Sporting activities are strong and imply dedication
- ▼ Helping with children's activities is a useful thing to mention: it says a lot about your character and demonstrates teamwork skills

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ There is a slight mistake in the first sentence: "fascination in" should be "fascination with". This will be picked up by a Languages tutor!
- ▼ There are several other spelling and grammar mistakes - be careful!
- ▼ The statement is 'over-paragraphed' and does not 'flow'

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR PHYSICAL SCIENCES

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Dr. R.G. Harris, Department of Physics, University of Birmingham
Dr. J.K. Jones, Department of Physics, University of Leeds
Dr. R. Kinsman, Department of Chemistry, University of Bath

This section covers Physics, Chemistry and related courses. These courses are quite academically demanding, but not as heavily subscribed as certain others such as medicine and dentistry. Tutors in this area would like some evidence that you have a rounded personality - that, while you are interested in physical sciences, you have other sides to your character.

HOW SHOULD I STRUCTURE THE STATEMENT?

It is best to write continuous prose, with well constructed paragraphs - although these subjects do not require as much essay writing as certain others, they are still academically demanding. Tutors would like to see evidence of your ability to structure your thinking.

HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

Among tutors of these subjects there is a preference for you to 'get to the point' - saying what you need concisely is more important here than writing a lot. So no waffle, and don't fill up the page with unnecessary information!

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

These are not vocational courses, so it is not vital. If you have relevant experience, mention it. If you have done any work which demonstrates teamwork or problem-solving ability, this is worth mentioning briefly.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

Not too much. Lots of applicants in this field go into too much detail about some aspect of science they've read about.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN PHYSICAL SCIENCES

"If they did some sort of project as part of their course, it would be of interest. What we're trying to do is find some differences between them and the bulk of candidates."

"As far as we're concerned, their academic performance is measured by their predicted results and their final results. We're interested in finding out more about them as individuals...how they're going to fit into a group."

"Work experience and general experience outside the subject is always quite useful. Any other skills outside their academic skills is a nice thing to latch on to. What we try to do is to provide an interviewer who can relate to their interests, to establish a rapport...and to see if we have a rounded individual."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- PHYSICS -

“Does God play dice?”

This strangely titled book was my initial inspiration to study Physics at degree level. Until I came across it last year, it had not occurred to me to study Physics further. On reading the book, I came across new ways of looking at physical ideas. I found the “chance” element of quantum theory, to which the title alludes, especially odd. The book was quickly followed by others in a similar vein. I decided I would like to find out more about Physics. Apart from Physics, I am studying Mathematics, which I have always found interesting and which I am working hard on as I appreciated its importance for my chosen course. I am also studying Economics. I have had a number of positions of responsibility at school, including being a Prefect for the past year and captaining the school hockey team. I won the School Prize for Mathematics in year 11. I have completed the Duke of Edinburgh Award at Bronze and Silver levels.

I have varied tastes in music. I studied piano to Grade 8, and am a member of the school orchestra. Recently I have developed an interest in Jazz and I am collecting John Coltrane recordings. I have been a member of the school Drama Club for a number of years, and have had several principal roles. While I have not had any work experience which is directly relevant to Physics, I believe that my work experience over the past two summers at a local computer suppliers’ has been invaluable in enhancing many skills which I will need during my course. My experience was mainly in administration, where I did invoicing and accounts, as well as performing more general tasks. This required a high level of organisation and I believe this has helped me in my studies. I also had the opportunity to improve my skills with various kinds of office software, which I am sure will be of benefit during my degree.

To sum up, I believe that I have not only the enthusiasm but also the skills to make the most of a degree in Physics, and I would like to use the new skills I acquire to embark on a career related to this fascinating subject.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ The applicant’s high level of written English: it gives a good impression of structured thought and of intellectual ability
- ▼ The Duke of Edinburgh Award is often highly valued by tutors as evidence of teamwork and commitment
- ▼ Musical, sporting and dramatic achievements are further evidence of a rounded character
- ▼ Work experience used as evidence of organisational skills

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ It might be considered unwise to put your interest in the subject down to a single book
- ▼ The information about the ‘A’ level courses does not add anything meaningful to the statement
- ▼ “New” interest in Jazz looks as if it was made up to impress: expect questions!

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR PSYCHOLOGY

This section includes advice from the following tutor:

Dr. M.R. Skinner, Department of Psychology, University of Warwick

Although Psychology courses bear a similar title, the actual content can vary significantly. Courses sometimes include a large amount of social psychology, whereas others will focus more significantly on cognitive and bio-psychology. This means that you need to check the course content carefully. If you wish to be a practising psychologist, find out whether the course is endorsed by the British Psychological Society. Tutors will expect you to have researched your choices thoroughly. You need to demonstrate that you are very keen to study psychology. This is a competitive area: expect high offers.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

Write continuous prose: tutors would like to see evidence of your ability to structure your thinking and that you can produce a coherent piece of writing with appropriate paragraphs. Having a clear layout might indicate care taken with your work.

WHAT AREAS SHOULD I INCLUDE IN THE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Many applicants will never have studied psychology before, so you might not have in-depth knowledge of the subject. However, you need to convince the tutor that you are keen to do this highly competitive course. Think about your reasons for choosing psychology. What aspects about psychology interest you? What relevant information have you read? Evidence of ICT is useful. Evidence of numeracy is likely to be gauged by the GCSE grades and possibly 'A' level subject(s) and grade(s).

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Psychology is not a vocational course, though you could use the degree as a basis for related work. If you have relevant experience, mention it. However, Admissions Tutors are aware that specialist work experience whilst at school is very difficult to arrange and might reflect a contact through parents more than any extra initiative exercised by students.

FURTHER ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN PSYCHOLOGY

The most important information for deciding an offer is the GCSE profile and of course the predicted grades. Most important for actual entry are the final grades. However, the Personal Statement might help in these ways:

- *at interview (unlikely for this subject: though mature students might stand more chance of being interviewed)*
- *if you miss the offer grades by a small margin. If there are still places then the reference and personal statement might be examined again. This occurs only in a small number of cases.*
- *some departments might use the Personal Statement more than others so it is very difficult to know how much it is used. One issue is certain: you need to get the grades.*

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- PSYCHOLOGY -

Having never been taught psychology, I decided to do some research into the main fields of study. I have talked in depth with an educational psychologist and read books on some of the other areas such as abnormal psychology, cognitive science and contemporary psychology. This has not only enabled me to understand more fully what psychology entails but has also confirmed my interest in the subject.

For one of my A-Level courses I study Mathematics with Statistics, which has developed my skills in logic and problem solving and I would enjoy this aspect of a Psychology degree. My two other main A-Level courses are Chemistry and Biology. They have both taught me to design experiments and have contributed to my proficiency in data interpretation and analysis. I was particularly interested in a real-life application of my biology course during the field trip to Treaddur Bay.

During my year out, I plan to spend six months helping other people in an underdeveloped country, with the GAP Activity Projects scheme. This will broaden my experiences and help me to become more independent. For the remaining time, I intend to work for an accountancy firm, both to gain experience and to raise some money for my life at university.

By participating in Model United Nations conferences, at which I was an ambassador three times, and in the school's debating society, which I have helped organise, I have learnt how to express views in a clear and precise manner. Recently I have been selected to take part in the Cambridge debating competition. Last year, I won the school travel prize by writing a project on Louis Pasteur, which enabled me to travel around France for two weeks studying his life and work. For seven years I have played hockey for my school and I now play on the second team. During this time, not only have I learnt to work well as part of a team but I have also learnt dedication. As well as playing hockey, I have also represented my school at athletics for which I am captain and have taken part in many other sports. Playing the cello to grade 5 has allowed me to participate in the first orchestra, for which I regularly take part in concerts. I also play the piano and am taking grade 5 in the winter term. During my time at school, I have helped with parents' evenings, open mornings and the school ball. Recently I was made a prefect and a House captain and I welcome the responsibility this brings.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Has obviously researched the subject properly
- ▼ Skills developed in Biology and Mathematics are relevant
- ▼ Voluntary work overseas is "broadening", and so worth mentioning
- ▼ Verbal and written communication skills are highlighted well

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ What was the initial motivation to consider Psychology? This should be stated
- ▼ Very little information about what resulted from the discussion and reading. Any particular interests regarding the content of the degree course might have been mentioned.
- ▼ The final paragraph is of little relevance

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR SOCIOLOGY AND RELATED COURSES

This section was based on advice from the following admissions tutors:

Dr. Sara Ahmed, Institute for Women’s Studies, University of Lancaster
Ms. Sandra Betts, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Wales, Bangor
Mr. Keith Williams, Department of Public Policy, University of Central England

The broad area of Sociology includes degree programmes with various titles other than Sociology itself. However, even with titles as diverse as Policing, Women’s Studies and Social Policy, these courses have much in common. They are, in different ways, about human society. There are certain features of these courses which are relevant to applicants when they are filling in their UCAS form.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY PERSONAL STATEMENT?

In common with other Humanities and Social Sciences, the ability to develop a coherent written argument is very important. You should produce a relatively long piece of continuous prose, rather than a series of disjointed paragraphs. The standard of your written English in the statement will be relevant - even if it’s not explicitly used as a selection criterion, it will help the Admissions Tutor form an opinion.

HOW MUCH OF THE PERSONAL STATEMENT SHOULD BE ABOUT MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

There is a noticeable preference in this subject area for you to expand at some length on your reasons for choosing the course. You need to convince the tutor of a genuine enthusiasm for this area of study.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

Tutors in this area stress interpersonal skills. Any work that you have done that demonstrates these skills is good, as is any work which has given you a better understanding of how society works. Voluntary work could come under this heading, so do mention this if you have done some.

WHAT OTHER POINTS ARE PARTICULARLY WORTH MAKING?

Your own experiences and interests are important to the person reading your statement. In particular, it is useful to be able to reflect on your experiences and how they have helped to shape your character and your view of society.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN SOCIOLOGY

“We think that the ability to reflect critically on how a wide range of experiences has informed one’s interest is very important.”

“...work experience, gap years, part-time work, voluntary work etcetera is invaluable in providing students with a broader understanding of the world and its problems.”

“Linking past experience with present interests is the key.”

Responses by tutors to questions about relevant skills:

“IT skills are always worth mentioning.”

“Debating skills.”

“Interpersonal skills and any experience in voluntary groups.”

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- SOCIOLOGY -

Studying 'A' level Sociology has been fascinating. My current coursework examines different notions of childbirth - the doctor's view and a range of mothers' views. I have interviewed midwives in a special natural childbirth clinic to explore their understanding of childbirth as a medical or a natural issue. The research has allowed me to read Ann Oakley's "From Here To Maternity" in which she examined the same issues. It was useful to compare my results with Oakley's larger survey.

Having nearly completed the research, I appreciate the problems in studying human behaviour. It is not easy to gain useful or valid data that can be generalised. I also hope to complete more quantitative work during my degree course which uses large-scale data sets which can be used to draw patterns from large numbers of respondents.

In addition to my studies, I have been involved in a local canoeing club. I took part in a white-water trip to North Wales which was hard but a real challenge. I hope to maintain this interest at university. I do not find the time to participate in a wide range of other sports as my time is mainly spent on studies as well as on my canoeing. However, at school I have helped run a bullying support group: this involves talking to students about their experiences.

I wish to study Sociology at university and I hope to do further research after my degree. I have visited a local health research centre to examine what sort of work they are doing. One project that looked interesting involved researching whether the use of a donated helicopter to the local health service was value for money when rushing patients to emergency treatment. The final results have yet to be published.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ This applicant's interest in Sociology is evident right from the opening line
- ▼ Relates a project already carried out to what is expected during the degree: and there is an intelligent comment on it
- ▼ Bullying support work: this is relevant to the subject of study and also gives an insight into the applicant's character
- ▼ An unusual sporting interest gives more insight into the character, particularly in terms of individuality and commitment
- ▼ The statement, though not over-long, is well structured. It concentrates on subject interest in quite a personal way
- ▼ There is no "padding" about irrelevant interests etc. - quite refreshing!

WEAKNESS:

- ▼ The beginning, though relevant, launches abruptly into a discussion of 'A' level study: it could be prefaced with an extra sentence indicating more generally why this area of study was chosen

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR SPORTS SCIENCE INCLUDING PHYSICAL EDUCATION

This section includes advice from the following tutor:

Dr. R. Penton, Sports Science with Business, Southampton Institute

Sports Science courses vary in their requirements. Some of the more popular courses will have very specific requirements regarding your own level of sporting achievement. For example, they may demand that you have competed at county or equivalent level or that you have done some coaching yourself. However, this is by no means universal. Of course, you need to be interested in sport, but don't assume that you won't get in just because you have not competed at this level yourself. Check with the departments you're interested in. The content will vary, too, but there are some things that you will find on most Sports Science courses. There is a reasonable amount of physiology and biomechanics involved, and there is usually a sociological aspect to the course too.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

There is no need to make your statement very long. Positive aspects of personality are important here, so write a concise piece of continuous writing that gives the reader an idea of your character. Redraft it till it flows - you'll come over in a much better light this way than if you write a set of disconnected paragraphs.

WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE?

The most obvious thing here is sporting interests: but don't just list your achievements. You need to be able to reflect on them, and on wider issues involving sport. Show the reader that you have an interest in sport as an area of study.

WHAT ABOUT WORK EXPERIENCE?

Remember that there are certain transferable skills which would be of interest to Admissions Tutors in the Sports Science area. Chief among these would be teamwork and interpersonal skills. A job which can demonstrate these is worth talking about, even if it isn't sport-related itself.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN SPORTS SCIENCE

An interesting response to the question "What information on a student's Personal Statement do you find particularly useful?" was:

"Career direction, relevant experience, link between course applied for and career."

A response to a question about the value of the "broader" key skills - particularly teamwork and organising information:

"Some value - not a decider"

NB Teamwork is a useful skill to be able to demonstrate.

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT

- SPORTS SCIENCE -

For my GCSE in Physical Education I researched sporting facilities for the physically disabled at a local Disability Centre. This not only allowed me to talk to a wide range of sporting people but also gave me an insight into the importance of ensuring that sporting opportunities are available to all. I have since enjoyed many aspects of my A level in Physical Education including reading articles that I managed to photocopy from a local University library. One article of particular interest was by John Williams from the Centre for Football Research at Leicester University which explored the media interpretation of football hooliganism. My enthusiasm for not only studying sport but also playing in team sports has confirmed my decision to study a degree in Sports Science.

Although I enjoy the theory involved in my A levels, I am particularly keen on the practical side. I play county level Hockey and also play netball for the school's First Team. I work at a local sports centre where I coach swimming to young children every Sunday morning. I have gained my Sports Leader's Award which involved coaching a large group of primary school children in a range of sporting challenges.

Within school I have been involved with a range of activities including mentoring a Year 7 boy who was having difficulty with his academic work. I enjoyed being able to help and I also learned how frustrating life can be if you are not achieving.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ An interest in social issues relating to sport was well illustrated
- ▼ The applicant has obviously read around the subject
- ▼ Personal sporting achievements mentioned
- ▼ Relevant work experience mentioned
- ▼ The last paragraph talks about helping a pupil who was having difficulties: it's a good, positive way to finish
- ▼ Good balance of interests between theoretical and practical aspects of sport

WEAKNESSES:

- ▼ This applicant launches into the statement rather abruptly: an introductory sentence or two would have been useful
- ▼ The two relevant children's coaching activities should have been reflected upon more, particularly in terms of what the applicant feels she has gained from these experiences
- ▼ It would be helpful to mention extra-curricular interests apart from sport. This helps to "fill out" the impression of your character