

Planning your Personal Statement

1st Paragraph 'First Impressions'

My ideas...



2nd Paragraph 'Academic'

My ideas...



3rd Paragraph 'Wider Understanding'

My ideas...



4th Paragraph 'Non Academic'

My Ideas...



5th Paragraph 'Conclusion'

My Ideas...



Things to Remember

This is your opportunity to set out exactly why you want to do the subject and what makes you passionate about it. You want to catch the reader's attention and demonstrate why you will do well in the subject

Do...

- ☺ State your interests.
- ☺ Convince them, of your passion and motivation to study your chosen subject.
- ☺ Give a strong, passionate opening.

Don't...

- ☹ Make sensationalist claims.
- ☹ State too idealistic dreams.
- ☹ Don't use clichés.

Now you are into the body of your Personal Statement, and need to maintain the reader's interest by continuing to show your desire to study the subject and to demonstrate your suitability for the course.

What do you currently enjoy in your A-level studies that feeds into why you have chosen the degree subject you have?

Do...

- ☺ Explain how your current studies will help you in your chosen degree course. Explain the general skills you feel that you have developed, and crucially, explain how these will be useful for your undergraduate studies.
- ☺ Mention if there have been any particular modules/periods/books you have enjoyed which helped you make your decision, mention them, but in doing so ensure you say why you enjoyed them and the relevance they have.

Don't...

- ☹ State grades, they are already on your application.
- ☹ List subjects, they are already on your application.

Everyone applying for the course has the basic requirements so what have you done that makes you different?

What outside reading / interests / opportunities have you undertaken in the subject?

Do...

- ☺ Talk about relevant work experience.
- ☺ Talk about wider reading.
- ☺ Explain what have you learned from additional opportunities that you have undertaken?

Don't...

- ☹ Mention everything that you read, watched, experienced – be selective!

Tips...

- ✓ Try to read around the subject – journals, magazines, newspapers, books.
- ✓ Undertake visits – talks, theatre, conventions, sites of interest.
- ✓ Explore BBC iPlayer for relevant documentaries or series.
- ✓ Listen to up to date people talk and inspire you on www.ted.com
- ✓ Be inspired by listening to world changing ideas at www.thersa.org/events

Now is the opportunity to show that you are a well-rounded individual and that you have interests beyond study too.

Talk about any (ideally relevant) work experience / voluntary work / clubs / hobbies etc?

Do...

- ☺ Focus on recent experiences (Y11/12/13)
- ☺ Talk about your extra curricular activities - what have you done, both inside and outside of school
- ☺ Explain why you did/do these things and how they developed your other skills.
- ☺ Mention any work experience, clubs, volunteering, or sports you may have taken part in.
- ☺ Explain what the opportunities have helped you develop (responsibility, time management, leadership, initiative, leadership etc.)
- ☺ If applicable, include your plans for a year out travelling or working, pointing out the relevant skills, experience and knowledge you intend to acquire during this time.

Don't...

- ☹ List all your life experiences – be selective.
- ☹ Talk about what you did when you were 5!

By now you should have presented yourself as the ideal person for the course, showing your motivation, passion, and suitability.

Talk about how you are looking forward to studying the subject at university and why you think you will be successful.

Do...

- ☺ Make it memorable - the last line usually stays with the reader.
- ☺ Be positive, short, sharp, and punchy in your conclusion.

Don't...

- ☹ Be arrogant, there is a fine line between confidence and arrogance!
- ☹ Make ridiculous, farfetched statements!

Examples of the Quality Expected in Each Paragraph

	Weak Example...	Stronger Example...
1st Paragraph 'First Impressions'	<p>"I have chosen to study Law at degree level because it allows me to develop interest in many areas and contribute to society on all levels. I am also really talented at the subject and have attained A grades in all my AS Level exams, as well as GCSE. I want to defend innocent people and allow justice for all, and being a Lawyer will enable me to do this."</p> <p><i>This is weaker as it does not give any real examples of where the person's ambition comes from or how they would be good or suited for studying Law. It uses vague statements that anyone could write about the subject, rather than showing focus and commitment to the study of it.</i></p>	<p>"I am fascinated by law both as a subject in its own right as a discipline and as an important aspect of society. A truly intriguing subject, it raises fundamental questions about how a society is organised and how order is maintained so that justice prevails and civilisations advances. I am especially enthused by the ever-changing nature of law. Law is something that constantly adapts to pressing needs of society, and I am keen to take part in such a dynamic discipline. More specifically, a study of Law will equip me with the knowledge and skill set to prepare me for career as Solicitor or Barrister. I am particularly interested in helping those who are less advantaged. I am also attracted to the idea of having to think laterally across a diverse range of areas ranging from family and criminal law to the law governing business practices."</p> <p><i>This example is stronger as there is a clear focus about the benefits studying the course will provide and drive to achieve this. It could be improved by adding in specific aspects of the course they are looking forward to rather than just the career path it opens up.</i></p>
2nd Paragraph 'Academic'	<p>"I achieved an A in my History and Politics AS Level exams. I got a D in English but this will improve with a re-sit. I like writing essays and talking about ideas, so I think I will be good at studying Law at degree level."</p> <p><i>They already can see this on the form – this is the opportunity to set out why you as an individual will be great and they should take you! It is descriptive, not evaluative.</i></p>	<p>"I believe that my A Level studies have prepared me well for a Law degree. Throughout my English Literature studies, I have developed strong communication skills both written and verbal. Furthermore, I have developed a coherent, articulate and persuasive style when debating. I have also developed strong analytical skills whilst analysing the underlying themes in the some of the works of Shakespeare. My psychology studies have given me a useful insight into the study of the human mind and behaviour, which I will be able to apply to a legal setting. In today's commercial world, much of Law is concerned with business practice and I feel that my A Level Business Studies course has given me a good insight into how different organizations operate."</p> <p><i>This example states the relevant skills from each subject, how they have been obtained and how they should enable the person to succeed on the course.</i></p>
3rd Paragraph 'Wider Understanding'	<p>"I worked in a Pharmacy during summer. It was good fun and I can imagine being a Pharmacist when I am older. I realised that I have all the required skills to be successful in this field, and I think I am very suited to this course as a result."</p>	<p>"In order to gain a valuable insight into the profession, I undertook work experience at a large Boots pharmacy. Here I learnt of the diligence required to ensure accurate dispensing of medicines and of the range of advisory services offered on topics such as smoking, diet, and immunisation. I realised the challenge in assessing the patient within a social context and offering appropriate advice in a clear and articulate manner."</p> <p><i>It is clear that the second example is stronger, as it shows the candidate was reflective while undertaking the experience and has gained insight that will benefit them on the course.</i></p>
4th Paragraph 'Non Academic'	<p>"I have been greatly involved in the extra-curricular side of Post-16 life. The Young Enterprise Scheme was very rewarding, my personal role within the team was Financial Director, and I was responsible for financial records and the sale of shares. Our company was very successful and we came third in the regional competition"</p> <p><i>This example simple lists things, rather than saying what was gained from them and relating them back to the course the candidate is applying for.</i></p>	<p>"Outside academia, I have always gained great satisfaction when contributing to the 6th form and my local community. I have helped an autistic child in Year 7 with his literacy and communication skills, an experience, which highlighted the importance of patience and empathy. I organised a pool competition to increase the social cohesiveness of the 6th form community and also participated in a fancy dress parade, dressing up as a clown, helping raise over £1000 for Macmillan Nurses. My other charity work includes working at the BHF and Oxfam."</p> <p><i>This paragraph shows the individual is a rounded individual and they highlight some of the skills they have developed from these activities. They could go further to improve this, by relating the experiences into the course for which they have applied.</i></p>
5th Paragraph 'Conclusion'	<p>"So in conclusion, I think is obvious that I am suited to a course in Medicine. I have all the skills that I need to succeed as can be seen by reading my personal statement and I have the academic ability, which is very obvious from my A Level grades."</p> <p><i>This comes across arrogantly and actually says very little.</i></p>	<p>"I firmly believe that I have the enthusiasm, stamina and qualities necessary to become a successful Doctor. I look forward to studying this rewarding subject and practicing in a profession which combines scientific learning with helping people."</p> <p><i>This is a much stronger conclusion, that sums up all messages the whole statement has been making – you are the best person for the course and they should select you. It is a little clichéd, but it is probably better to come across as such than to limp out at the end.</i></p>