

Personal Statements **for highly selective academic courses** **& universities**

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- **Explain why you are applying for your course: with evidence**
- **Demonstrate commitment**
- **Express yourself**

10 basics

for all personal statements

1

No excuses: get your spelling, punctuation, and grammar right.

Don't lie. It's never worth it!

2

3 Avoid clichés like the plague

Grab attention with interesting, well justified evidence and clear communication: not by trying to be funny or informal.

4

5

Think of the overall tone as “professional”. It’s fine to use “I”, but don’t overuse it.

Keep it clear and succinct... and step away from the thesaurus.

6

7

This statement is not a list!

Show, don’t tell. Give every piece of content a logical reason for being there that is clear to a reader who isn’t you.

8

9

Adjectives are far less useful than examples and discussion. Don't be "fascinated", "passionate", or "intoxicated": demonstrate why you might feel this way.

Find multiple proofreaders, read your statement out loud when editing or finalising, and keep a copy of your final draft. Give yourself time to produce something you are happy with!

10

Using Extra Curricular Activities

What counts as an extra curricular activity?

- Anything which isn't connected to your course, or more broadly to academic study
 - Sports, performing arts, part time/voluntary work, and D of E are all common extra curriculars
 - For some courses, traditional extra curriculars will be more relevant to academic study than others
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Using Extra Curricular Activities

How much should I talk about my extra curricular activities?

- For Oxbridge and other highly selective courses and universities, **no more than 10-15%** of your statement should be non academic
 - Look carefully at individual universities' selection criteria: how far is it considered?
 - Keep it as relevant as possible
 - Prioritise **super curricular activities**
-

Using Extra Curricular Activities

How should I choose extra curricular activities to include?

- **Be choosy!**
 - What have you learned from doing the activity?
 - Could any of your extra curriculars be related to your course? (Don't force it...)
 - Remember: whoever reads your statement is not likely to be an expert
 - **Prioritise super curricular activities**
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Be Super-Curricular



NHS YouTube

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IN OUR TIME



IOP
Institute of Physics



BRITISH SCIENCE WEEK 2018



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



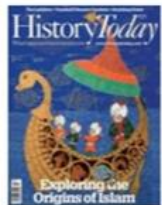
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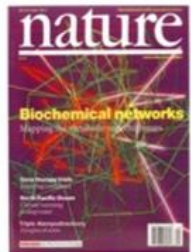
92-95 FM



National Theatre



ENGLISH HERITAGE



UCAS

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Inside the Ethics Committee



in2science^{UK}

THE SPECTATOR

The Economist

TED
IDEAS WORTH SPREADING



THE TIMES

BLACKWELL'S
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NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

BMJ
British Medical Journal

ROYAL SOCIETY



theguardian

TLS



OXFORD UNIVERSITY
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SUMMER SCHOOLS

OXFORD OPEN DAYS

OX?LORE

Super Curricular Activities

A definition

- Related (ideally) to your intended programme of study
 - Usually (but not always) academically focused
 - Goes above and beyond what you study at school, even if the subject is one of your A-Levels
 - Something from which you have learned something communicable (not necessarily a qualification)
 - Not necessarily the same as something you would put on a CV
-

Let's get planning...

- **Make sure your course choice is right for you:** this is more important for writing a good statement than your choice of university!
- **Start early:** aim to have a draft written by the end of the summer term
- Make sure you do plan... it makes it so much easier!
- Don't get hung up on the start: write that part last if you need to.

Important:

- The only things which are prescribed and non-negotiable are the universities' entry requirements (sometimes including subjects and occasionally additional things e.g. music grades, work experience)
- **Nothing else is expected.** Whatever else you can bring to the table and discuss intelligently is a bonus.

Planning at a glance

1

Why do you want to do the course/subject?

Important as a starting point, to inform the rest of your statement

2

What's your evidence?

Most important. Space to explore and discuss your super-curricular/academic activities

3

What else?

Least important, but a good place to consider and select any extra-curriculars

Planning step 1: why?

- This part focuses on the “personal”
- Ask yourself: what about this particular course attracted you to studying it? What intrigues you? How do you view its relevance to your interests?
- If you find this part difficult, consider whether you are really applying for the right course.
- Whatever you note down doesn't necessarily need to make it into your statement, but it's important for you to be able to articulate it for the sake of anything that does get included.
- If you do use this material, try to avoid being unoriginal in the way you express it.

Planning step 2: what?

- **This is the most important part of your planning, and where you will gather the information to make your statement stand out.**
- Have a “stock-take”: what can you put here already? Do you have anything to read/listen to/enter/participate in on your to do list?
- This could include school-based or non school-based activities: EPQs, further reading based off an A-Level topic, independent research, past work experience...
- Evaluate each item you list. The most important question to ask of each one is **what did I learn from this?**
- Consider how different things could be linked together: linked up personal statements are the most impressive.
- Don't panic if there is too much to include!

Planning step 3: what else?

- Refer to previous guidance on extra-curricular/non academic information: this should be your lowest priority for inclusion, especially if you are applying to Oxbridge or to a course like Medicine.
- If you are using extra-curriculars which aren't connected to your course, use this section to demonstrate more general suitability for university level study (e.g. “extra capacity” or qualities such as resilience or critical thinking).
- Remember: universities will not be an expert in this part!

10 common mistakes

to be avoided!

1 Name checking a particular course or university. Remember this is going to all five of your choices...

Dedicating a lot of space to future career plans: for the majority of courses, this isn't expected or required.

2

3 Going for quantity over quality on super curriculars. Leave room for discussion!

Taking up too much room with details of mitigating circumstances: this information should be handled by your referee in either your reference or supplementary information.

4

5

Following a template to the letter. Pay attention to the basics and write like you.

Trying too hard to make extra-curriculars relevant to the course: it isn't worth it if the shoe doesn't fit.

6

7

Trying too hard to impress. The easiest way to do this is with a genuine, well-evidenced, interesting statement.

Thinking that “flashy” or seemingly prestigious super-curriculars will be worth more. Universities are aware that everyone has access to different opportunities.

8

9

Thinking a university won't be impressed by activities you have done with or at another one. There is no snobbery about this, especially from Oxbridge!

Thinking a university which isn't Oxbridge will automatically reject what appears to be an "Oxbridge personal statement".

10

How should it start?

SPARK: a particular book/theory/experience etc which got you thinking about applying to study your course

MISSION STATEMENT: why (in no more than two sentences) you want to study your subject. (Not “I’ve always wanted to...”)

QUOTATION: select with care, make sure it is relevant to you and your course, and only use from material you have actually read.

ROUTE: if you are applying for something you don’t currently study, how your current subjects and interests led you to it

Final advice...

- Draft early and redraft freely
- The more eyes the better
- Read it out loud
- Keep a copy of your final draft
- Ask for advice whenever you need it...
but remember the first steps have to
come from you!

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Questions welcomed via email



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