How To Write a Personal Statement for Postgraduate Study

What is a Personal Statement?

A personal statement is a piece of writing you will be asked to submit as part of your application for postgraduate study. No two application forms for postgraduate study are the same and this especially relates to the personal statement section.

What to look out for

- While most forms will ask for a personal statement, you need to read carefully what information you are being asked for and respond directly to the question(s). Details of these questions will appear either in the personal statement heading section or in the notes of guidance which accompany the postgraduate application form.

Before you write your personal statement

- Don't use the same statement for all applications. Each statement will need a slightly different emphasis depending on the university you are applying to. You need to research the university and course area in detail.

Writing style for a personal statement

- When writing your personal statement, make sure it follows a structure, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, rather like writing an essay. Use headings if it helps. Accuracy is important, as is keeping to the prescribed word limit or allocated paper space.

What to include in the Personal Statement

Use the following questions to help you shape your statement:

Why do you want to study at this university?

- Is the department well known for its expertise in this course area? Have you any other reasons for choosing this particular university?

Why do you want to study this programme?

- Is the programme noted for a particular emphasis, speciality or orientation? When did you become interested in this field and what have you learnt about it? What insights have you gained? How have you learnt about this field; through classes, seminars, work or conversations with academic staff?
Is your previous degree relevant to the course?
• What have you learned in your university studies so far that would transfer to this course? If appropriate write about any projects, dissertations or extended essays you’ve done if they are relevant or demonstrate relevant skills. Make sure you know what the programme you’re applying for comprises.

Detail any other relevant experience you have
• Make sure you’ve researched what is required for the area of study and detail any relevant experience you have: work experience, voluntary or paid; being a member of a society, such as the debating society; any papers you’ve written; skills you have gained. Apply the relevance of this experience to the chosen study programme. Mention any awards, scholarships or prizes you have won, and any travel and study abroad.

How else can you contribute to the course?
• What personal skills can you offer? Ability to work on own and also in a team? If you’re stuck for ideas refer to our Skills checklist and our worksheets.

What are your career / academic objectives?
• You may not have a very clear focus on what you want to do afterwards, but you should have some ideas. A clear direction will strengthen your commitment to do well in your studies and selectors will know this. Your desire to become a lawyer (for example) should follow logically from the specific experience in your statement. Explain how this particular course will help you in your chosen career.