

Writing personal statements for postgraduate study

A personal statement is a piece of writing that you'll 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

You need to read carefully about the information you are being asked for and respond directly to the question(s). The questions will appear either in the personal statement heading section or in the guidance notes that accompany the postgraduate application form.

Before you begin writing

Avoid using the same statement for all applications. Each statement will need a slightly different emphasis and you need to research the university and course in detail.

Writing style

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

How to write a personal statement

Use the following questions to help you shape your personal statement.

Why do you want to study at the 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 have done if they are relevant or demonstrate relevant skills. Make sure you know what the programme you're applying for comprises.

Do you have any other relevant experience?

Make sure you have researched what is required for the area of study and detail any relevant experience you have.

It could be: work experience, voluntary or paid; being a member of a society, such as the debating society; any papers you have 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 independently and in a team?

What are your career/academic objectives?

You may not have a very clear focus on what you want to do after postgraduate study, 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.

Tips

- Write a personal statement for each course and university you are applying to.
- Structure your statement so it has a beginning, a middle and an end. Make reference to your undergraduate degree.
- Detail all your relevant work experience.
- Give details about your future plans. Explain how the course will benefit you.