



Personal Statement Guide

Top Tips / Where to begin / What to include / What to avoid



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What to Include

Why You Want to Study This Particular Course

- > How you first became interested in this field: e.g. at secondary school or during a particular module in your undergraduate degree
- > How you have learned about it: e.g. through lectures, tutorials, projects, work experience, final year project, conversations with academic staff
- > Specific areas of the course you are particularly interested in
- > How work experience or coop placement has inspired you to learn more about the subject

Why You Want to Study at This Institution

- > The reputation of the particular course
- > The academics there who are well-known in the field you're interested in - mention if you've read any of their work
- > Academic staff teaching on the course that you're keen to study with
- > How the institution offers the right course content and structure for you: e.g. modules, projects, placements
- > How the institution would provide a contrast to where you did your undergraduate degree: e.g. larger, more specialised
- > Facilities and resources that the institution offers e.g. research equipment, libraries

Why They Should Select You

- > How your skills, abilities and interests make you a suitable candidate
- > Your academic strengths and interests
- > High grades you've received for specific modules, essays, projects
- > Academic prizes or bursaries you've received e.g. scholarships, president's letter
- > Specific work experience that you've done that has prepared you for the course
- > Research activities you've been involved in: e.g. working alongside academic staff during the vacation, your FYP or any other research
- > Any extra-curricular activities which demonstrate an interest in the area you plan to study

Specific Skills You Have That Relate to the Course

- > IT skills and knowledge of particular software packages
- > An understanding of relevant scientific techniques
- > A high level of competence in particular languages

How the Course Relates to Your Future Career Plans

- > How the course will give you the necessary skills to prepare you for a specific career: e.g. Banking, Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Engineering, Advertising, etc.
- > How you are considering an academic career and that this is the first step to realising this ambition

Suggested Format

Write the personal statement in essay format and group into sections to ensure a coherent flow with no repetition. Structure what you want to include in an order that's most relevant to what the institutions are looking for. Below is a sample outline that could be followed when writing your statement.

It's a good idea to revisit your statement 24 hours after you think it's finished. You'll be surprised what fresh eyes can pick up on. Try to rewrite the draft and tidy it up as much as you can. Direct sentences and clean structure is key.

Introduction

A general introduction to yourself and why you have chosen this course/profession/university.

Main Body

Section 1 – Your academic qualifications, relevant subjects/projects studied. How your previous studies or work experience can transfer to this new area of study

Section 2 – Personal qualities and achievements that make you suitable (including evidence of how you have developed them)

Section 3 – Any work experience you have completed, outlining what you learnt from the experience and the relevance to the course. How the course will give you the necessary skills to prepare you for a specific career: e.g. Banking, Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Engineering, Advertising, etc.

Summary

Sum up your overall suitability for the course and show clearly that you know what you want to get out of it

What to Avoid

Over-used Clichés

Avoid 'from a young age', 'since I was a child', 'I've always been fascinated by', 'I have a thirst for knowledge', 'the world we live in today'...etc.

Stating the Obvious

Take this sentence: 'In my work experience I learned to communicate effectively with clients, which is an important skill in accountancy.'

Flattery

Some statements have a tendency towards flattery, with sentences like 'it would be an honour to be offered a place at your world-renowned university'.

Sweeping Statements or Unproven Claims

i.e.: 'I genuinely believe I'm a highly motivated person' or 'My achievements are vast'. Instead give specific examples that provide concrete evidence

Stilted Vocabulary

Frequent use of words or phrases like 'fuelled my desire', 'I was enthralled by' or 'that world-renowned author Jane Austen' can make you sound a bit fake (or like you've been over-using the thesaurus). If you wouldn't say something in a day-to-day discussion, don't say it in your statement.

Negative Comments or Excuses

It can be difficult to 'sell yourself' in your personal statement, but don't talk about why you haven't done something, or why you failed a subject. Focus on the positives.

Irrelevant Personal Facts

Apply the 'so what?' rule. Does it make a useful contribution and help explain why you should be given a place on the course? If not, scrap it.

Dot the i's & Cross the t's

Postgraduate course directors will not look favourably on applications with poor spelling or grammar. Be sure to check your application thoroughly prior to submission. Keep a copy of what you have written as it will probably be referred to during the interview (if applicable).

"Do not submit your application until it's as polished and well-researched as it can possibly be," advises Sarah Moore, Course Coordinator for Creative Writing and Dean of Teaching and Learning in UL, "it should have something of you in it, but treat it as thoroughly professional application".

Get your final draft checked by friends, academics or a careers adviser. If you are a current UL student you can book an appointment via UL Careers Connect: <https://careersconnect.ul.ie/home.html>

Discipline-Specific Tips

Science & Engineering

- Outline why you think you are suited to a career in this area and why you want to study this area at Grad Dip or Masters level
- Outline what you have done to engage with the subject area and explain what you have learned from this experience
- Give details of relevant undergraduate coursework that you believe covers relevant background material for this course
- Outline how this experience will benefit you on your chosen programme
- Include details of any extra-curricular activities, relevant to your chosen course, that you take part in and how this experience will benefit you on your chosen programme
- Demonstrate why you are passionate about your chosen area and outline any experiences you have with the subject
- What started your interest in this area and how has it developed
- Describe your role in any project related to your chosen discipline and what you learned about the area from that experience

Business Applications

- Outline what specifically attracts you to the discipline involved. E.g., perhaps you studied HR as part of your undergraduate studies and now you want to deepen your knowledge.
- Are there features of the programme that you particularly attracted to? E.g., the programme may have an international field trip or a dissertation alternative
- Outline any particular subjects that you did well in and enjoyed, in the context of the programme you are applying for

Business Applications ...continued

- If your academic performance was strong, then highlight this not only in terms of your overall award but with highlights from your transcript
- If your academic performance was not as strong as you would like, highlight particular areas that you did well in. E.g., you may have scored well in quantitative subjects or qualitative subjects
- Link your undergraduate studies to the programme you are interested in :
 - Are you an engineer that has strong mathematical skills that wants to get into finance or business analytics?
 - Are you an Arts graduate with economics in your degree?
 - Can you outline how your studies could make you a strong project manager?
 - Or, do you want to a general business postgraduate programme to transition into business?
- Outline how have you developed an interest in the course you are applying for
 - Perhaps you did an internship or work experience that attracted you to the business discipline you are interested in studying
 - Highlight what you have learned, how this has reinforced your interest in the area and allowed you to develop relevant skills
- What skills and attributes do you bring to the table?
 - Are you a people person? Do you work well in teams? Are you a strong communicator? Are you a problem solver? Do you have strong leadership capabilities? Give examples!
- What are your future career plans after completing the course?
 - Nobody needs a detailed plan for the next 10 years, but where do you want the programme to take you? How motivated are you?



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