

What makes a good personal statement? transcript

University of Birmingham admissions tutors inform you of what makes a good personal statement on a UCAS application.

Title: **What makes a good personal statement?** (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMGmctwVzyw>)

Duration: 4.35 mins

NB: 'S' refers to the speaker order

S1 Many admissions tutors would argue that the personal statement is the most important part of the UCAS form. But it's a very difficult thing to get right. You need to make sure that your statement stands out from the crowd. So, what advice can Birmingham's academics provide about completing this section of the UCAS form?

S2 What I'm looking for in a personal statement is evidence that the writer has really thought about their choice of degree programme and has a feeling of excitement about it; a feeling of intellectual curiosity. So I don't just want a list of things that you've done or experiences that you've had but something about how they set you thinking; the questions that were raised in your mind by visiting a museum or going to Greece or Italy. If there's a book that's really inspired you, talk about places where you disagreed with it or questions that it didn't answer and how you might go about finding out the answer to those questions for yourself.

S3 When I'm looking at a personal statement, I'm looking to see your enthusiasm for the subject that you've chosen to study. So, if there's a particular area of Biology that you find very interesting, tell me about it. If you've done something interesting or different that's to do with your subject, then tell me about that. Have you been on a really interesting field course or have you been and visited a university laboratory and found that that was really interesting? Those sorts of things convey your enthusiasm for the subject.

S4 What also matters is the personal statement. We look for convincing statements, academic interest in the future, their future, the future of the world. Scientific subjects are things that are with you for life and if you do something 'sciency' like computing science, then you get a training that's always with you.

S5 The personal statement is becoming more and more important from the candidates since they have so many applicants to choose from. Again, I'm very interested in hearing about the candidate. I can see your academic performance; I don't really need to know too much about that. I assume you want to do dentistry, otherwise you wouldn't be applying to me; so talk about yourself, a little bit about the work experience that you have, the things that you do. Show me that you're a person that is concerned for society at large, not just the financial benefits that dentistry can offer.

S6 I think a good personal statement focuses on academic things and is very specific rather than general. So rather than telling us that you really love English Literature, tell us about a specific writer that you're interested in and preferably something that you've read off the A level syllabus.

S7 It's very easy to read personal statements which begin, 'Henry Ford said History is bunk', and you know that this comes from the sixth form tutor and you know that this is part of the formula. What we want to see is a genuine expression of your historical interests – and the best personal statement I read this year is a statement which began: 'I first became interested in history when I spoke to my grandfather about what he did in Burma over a glass of Scotch'. To me that was perfect.

S8 The personal statement is a vital part of the application process as well. One of the things that we often find is that students are getting ever better coaching from their school teachers as to how to write a personal statement. In languages, we often will have a quotation from a particular text that they've looked at on the curriculum, which is fine – but what really makes a personal statement stand out is possibly a reference to a work that doesn't appear on the A level syllabus; that shows a kind of independence of reading, that they've gone beyond what's purely on the curriculum alone. Also, lots of people will say 'I'm really interested in languages', full stop. What makes a personal statement stand out is the person that goes beyond that and says 'the reason why I'm interested in languages is because...' so they've given an explanation for what it is that's generated their passion and their enthusiasm.

S9 What makes a good personal statement is an honest personal statement, one that candidly tells the assessor exactly what the candidate has done in terms of work experience, and what their interests are in non-academic areas. Whatever their outside interests are, that should be in the personal statement, in a clear but honest way. We do see a lot of what one could call 'spin' and 'hype' in personal statements – but it's very often quite easy to detect.

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