

NEW EDITION FOR 2026 ENTRY

#BETTERUNICHOICES

HOW TO WRITE YOUR UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT

BY JONATHAN TINNACHER



How to write your UCAS Personal Statement

2026 Edition

By Jonathan Tinnacher

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Introduction

Hi everyone! I'm Jonathan and I've worked in university student recruitment and admissions for well over 25 years.

I've read countless Personal Statements, delivered sessions up and down the UK for students on how to write them, and have even trained teachers and advisers on how to help their students.

I now run a website, newsletter and podcast called Better Uni Choices.

This short guide is specifically written for you if you are about to embark on UCAS, and in particular on writing your UCAS Personal Statement.

It is fully updated from the previous versions. For 2026 entry, the Personal Statement is changing from a single unformatted box, to three clear questions.

So what's coming up?

First we'll look at the UCAS process as a whole. Then we'll look at when your Personal Statement might be used, and how it can impact university decisions.

We'll discuss the practical basics of the statement, what's allowed, and what are the limitations. Then we'll look at what goes in it; starting with a series of questions that you can ask yourself, to effectively brainstorm all your ideas.

We'll look at the new three question format, and help you work out what you should put in each section.

I'll share with you a couple of really helpful models for writing reflectively and take you through the process of writing and editing your first draft. We'll then look at some ideas on getting help and feedback on your statement.

I'll discuss how to write a Personal Statement for two different subjects, and have a quick look at how to use AI usefully and appropriately.

And we'll finish with some top tips that I've collected over the years from countless colleagues from different universities.

Each chapter will take between three and six minutes to read, and while I hope most of you will find all of them useful, feel free to skip chapters one and ten if you think they aren't necessary for you.

I am well aware that it won't just be applicants reading this.

I hope that this guide can be useful to parents who are supporting their sons and daughters with their applications.

And I hope that teachers and university advisers will also find it useful, particularly if you are new to the job and are looking for ways to help your students.

1: A quick guide to the UCAS process

This chapter gives a brief outline of the whole UCAS process, so that you know where the Personal Statement fits in. If you already know the UCAS process, feel free to skip to chapter 2.

UCAS

UCAS stands for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, who organise the process of applying to universities in the UK.

This covers almost all undergraduate degree courses that you might be considering, with the exception of some of the music and drama courses available at conservatoires.

You'll set up an account at www.ucas.com. If your school is a UCAS centre, they'll give you a buzzword that links your application to the school.

With this account you'll submit your application and will be able to return to check your progress.

Choosing five courses

You'll need to do lots of research to find the right course.

You'll find information on the UCAS website about courses, entry requirements and finance. You can check out the university websites themselves, visit universities on open days, and find countless different guides and league tables online.

Ultimately you'll need to come up with five initial course choices. These should all be courses that you want to study, and that you would accept an offer for. They should include some ambitious choices, some realistic choices, and some safe options.

Your application

In your application you'll fill in the qualifications you have done and the qualifications that you are currently doing.

You'll add your Personal Statement, which as we'll find out, is based around three questions:

- Why do you want to study this course or subject?
- How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
- What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

You'll then complete a few other boxes about nationality, English language level, additional circumstances, support needs etc. and once you are happy, you'll pay the application fee and press 'send'.

When you press send, the application goes to your school.

They will check the application and add a reference with predicted grades for the courses that you are currently taking. Once ready, they also press 'send'.

Application deadlines

For entry 2026 there is an early deadline of 15 October 2025 for applications to Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science courses, or to Oxford and Cambridge.

The main deadline is 14 January 2026 for all other courses.

Applications beyond this time may be considered, but some courses could be unavailable.

Your school will, of course, set earlier deadlines than these, as they need to check and add information to your application before it is sent to UCAS.

University decisions

Once the application is submitted, UCAS shares it with the universities, who then have their decisions to make (by 13 May in most cases).

They may make a decision purely on the basis of your application, or they may have admissions tests, selection events, auditions, portfolio reviews or interviews.

They will then either make an offer to you, or will reject your application. An offer can be:

- *Conditional* on you achieving certain grades or qualifications, or
- *Unconditional*, meaning you already have the qualifications they want!

All university decisions will be made available in UCAS Track. Once you have all the decisions, it's your turn to make your choice.

Your decisions

You can make one *Firm* choice, which should be your first choice. You can also make one *Insurance* choice, in case you miss the grades for your *Firm* choice.

If your *Firm* choice is an *Unconditional* offer, you won't need an *Insurance* choice, and your place will be confirmed immediately.

If you have accepted *Conditional* offers, you will then wait for results day to see if you meet the conditions and will be placed at your *Firm* or *Insurance* choice.

If you are not accepted by either choice, you will be entered into *Clearing*; a process by which you can access courses with vacancies.

There are a few further complications; admissions tests, English language requirements, UCAS Extra etc, but for an overview, this is all you need to know in order to get started on your Personal Statement.

2: When and how will your statement be used?

Does your statement even matter?

Every applicant, every year puts blood, sweat and tears into their Personal Statement, creating several drafts, getting a whole bunch of opinions, and redrafting several more times before finally they click the ‘send’ button. And yet no-one really seems to know definitively how important it is.

Well, the bad news is it’s almost impossible to say definitively how important the statement will be for you. There are hundreds of universities, and thousands of admissions tutors.

Most universities don’t have a clear policy about the role of Personal Statements, and so even within the same university, different courses will use the statement

differently. Even where a university does have a policy, these will be interpreted differently by different staff.

Some courses have even made it publicly known that they don't use Personal Statements in the selection process. But the chances of that being true of all of your applications are slim to none.

And yet, it actually doesn't really matter that you don't know exactly how important it will be in your specific situation, because bluntly, you need to give it your best shot anyway.

The more important thing is to understand *when* your Personal Statement might be read, and *how* it could impact on the university decision.

At the first pass

Most Personal Statements will be read at the first pass; that is, whenever the first person looks at the form. They will see the whole form, which includes: your grades achieved, the courses you are studying now (with predicted grades), the Personal Statement, and the Reference.

They will be looking to determine: Is the student taking the right subjects? Are grades and predicted grades OK? Are there any mitigating circumstances that I need to know about? And does their Personal Statement show the right motivation and skills to undertake the course?

If the answer to all of these is yes, they will most likely put the application to the next stage. This could be making an offer, or inviting you for an interview, audition or admissions test.

But... there are also several other important occasions when your Personal Statement could come into play.

Before or during an interview

If your course requires an interview or audition it is pretty much guaranteed that the interviewer will have a copy of your Personal Statement to use at the interview.

They might ask you about something in the statement just to ease you into the interview.

They may pick on something in your statement to test you and see how you react when challenged about something you have written. They want to hear your views, opinions and knowledge beyond the short piece of content that made it into the final statement.

Or, they could pick up on one of your interests so that they can use this to tell you more about their department or university, thus making you more likely to choose them!

In each case, you can see how important it is to have things in your statement that you are happy to talk about!

After the interview and all selection tests have been done

There will come a point in the selection process where the university has all the information it is going to get: grades, predicted grades, references, admissions test results, portfolios, interview results etc. and is now making a final decision on you.

In a situation where several candidates are very closely balanced, a well written Personal Statement could well be the thing that pushes one candidate through.

In this instance, the admissions tutors could be looking very closely at a small number of statements, and comparing them against each other.

At Confirmation (after the university receives your final school results)

If you meet the conditions of your offer, then you are guaranteed your place, and no-one will look again at the Personal Statement. If, however, you miss your conditions by one or two grades, then the university may well look again at your application.

If they have lots of ‘near miss’ students with the same grades, and only a handful of places available, they may look again at each Personal Statement to decide who gets those final few offers.

In Clearing

If the worst happens, and you are left without a place, your Personal Statement will be made available to any university you apply to during Clearing. It will be read quickly, and a decision will likely be made quickly. In some cases the Personal Statement will matter.

3: UCAS Personal Statement basics

From 2026 entry, the Personal Statement will consist of three questions:

- Why do you want to study this course or subject?
- How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
- What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

In total, your statement can be no longer than 4,000 characters.

For each question, you must use at least 350 characters.

Beyond this, you may split the character count across the sections however you like.

A character is basically a letter, but includes punctuation and spaces. That's likely to be around 650 words or so.

Any formatting you include in your draft will be removed.

You can't use bold, underlining or italics, and you can't use bullet points. You also can't use emojis, which is probably for the best!

To make it readable you should write in clear paragraphs, each identified with a new line.

You will only be able to submit one Personal Statement. This will be attached to all the courses that you are applying for. So, don't mention any specific universities by name.

If you are applying to a range of courses that are very similar to each other then you will be able to focus strongly on that specific subject.

If you are applying to courses that are quite different, it will be difficult for you to focus on the subject, and so you will need to be more generic in your approach.

UCAS runs all Personal Statements through plagiarism checks, and highlights potential cases directly to universities. Plagiarism means copying, and is viewed very seriously by universities. So don't copy ideas or sentences from the internet, or from your friends, as these will get picked up.

Whatever you do, don't pay someone else to write your statement for you as they will almost certainly use stock phrases that will be caught.

Finally, the purpose of the questions are to enable you show the admissions tutor that you have the motivation, knowledge and skills to succeed on their course.

4,000 characters isn't a lot, so use as many of those characters as you can.

4: Preparing your content

The new format for 2026 definitely makes the task of writing your Personal Statement much easier. There are three nice clear questions, giving you a very clear steer on what information they are looking for.

Never-the-less, very few people will have the clarity of thought to simply sit down and write their answers in one go.

You will want to be thorough in your preparation, considering everything that you *could* use, carefully selecting the best examples, and using them in the most appropriate section.

Without preparation, I promise you, you'll find yourself going in circles, trying to decide which of your experiences fits where.

My suggestion is to ask yourself eight simple questions.

These are questions that you really ought to be able to answer without too much thought. If you can't answer them, you may need to do a little more research before you continue.

So, right now, have a go at answering each of the eight questions. For each question write down your answers honestly in plain language.

It doesn't matter whether you use a notebook, a laptop, or your phone; so long as you have it written down.

Take your time, and write as much as you can. You can use full sentences *or* short bullet-point lists; whatever works for you.

This is just for you, to help you organise your thoughts, but if you do it well, you really will have *everything* you need to write the first draft of your Personal Statement!

Q1. Why do you want to do the course?

For some of you, you simply want to do more of the subject that you've most enjoyed before. Write down what you enjoy about it, what you want to study more of, and why.

For others, you will be applying for something that you haven't studied before. Your motivation is not about continuing, but changing. Can you articulate why? Is it about the career you want to go into? If so, what is it about that career that attracts you? What have you seen or experienced that tells you that this is for you?

Perhaps there is a personal story behind your choice, an experience you have had, something that happened that was the catalyst for your choice.

Try writing it down, making the clear connection between what happened and the choice you are now making.

Q2. What skills does the course require?

Some course pages will have highly detailed information about this, telling you very clearly what they are looking for, while others will be very vague.

Where the information is vague, you'll have to have a deeper look at the course and try to work out for yourself which skills will be useful.

For example, courses with lots of hours of teaching and practice might particularly value time management, whereas those with few classes and lots of self-directed study will value drive and self-motivation.

Courses with lots of essays to write will clearly want great essay writing skills, while those which will involve preparing reports or presentations based on data will want to see sharp analytical and numeracy skills.

Write down these skills, and keep them in mind as you work through the remaining questions.

As a starting point, here are nine universal transferable skills you might want to consider.

How many of these might be important for your course?
Are there any important skills that are not on this list?

- Analytical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Resilience
- Self-motivation
- Curiosity
- Technological literacy
- Dependability
- Empathy
- Leadership

Q3. What have you most enjoyed studying at school?

Start with your favourite subject: What has been the best, most interesting bit? Why did you find it interesting? Did it challenge your way of thinking, or help you see things in a different light?

Then consider, is there a connection between your enjoyment of the subject and the choices you are now making?

Next consider, are there any specific skills or attributes that you are demonstrating while studying the things you most enjoy? Write down these skills.

Do this with two or three subjects. You will hopefully find several areas that you can write enthusiastically about, and work out the connections between your current studies and your course choice.

Q4. What super-curricular activities have you done?

Super-curricular activities are things you do outside of your school studies that relate to the subject that you are applying for.

They could be as simple as reading more about your subject, such as books, journals and newspapers that are relevant to the course you are applying for.

Perhaps you listen to podcasts, watch TED talks, or have watched the Springboard Subject Spotlights. If they are relevant to your course, write them down.

Include university lectures, webinars and taster days. They don't need to have been at the university you want to apply to, they just need to be relevant to your subject.

Perhaps you've entered maths, coding, poetry or essay competitions. Write them down.

As you write down the activities, jot down what you enjoyed about them. How did they make you feel? What did you find particularly interesting? Was there anything that challenged you, or made you want to find out more?

Q5. What extra-curricular activities have you done?

Extra-curricular activities are organised activities that you do outside of your school classes, and could be sporting, creative or community-based. So what have you been involved in?

Almost any organised activity has the potential to show that you've developed a wide range of skills, including those you identified under Q2.

So write each activity down, including what was most challenging and what relevant skills they demonstrate.

Q6. What work experience have you done?

For some courses work experience is unnecessary and not relevant. But for others, in particular in medicine, health, social care and education, work experience will be a critical part of your application.

This includes formal work experience or part-time jobs. You can include work shadowing, even if unpaid, and voluntary experience.

Write down what you learned about the sector or the job you experienced, but also what you learned about yourself and your skills.

Even if the work experience was not directly relevant to your course, you may be able to draw out relevant learnings and skills from your experience that you can apply to your application.

Q7. What challenges have you overcome?

Another way of putting this is what are your most proud achievements? Very often these will come from overcoming a particular challenge.

So what was that challenge, and how did you overcome it?

Achievement in the face of adversity can be very powerful indeed, and can be used to demonstrate a wide range of skills.

Q8. What are your hobbies?

By hobbies I mean all those things you do in your own free time; things that you choose to do, for no other reason than that you enjoy them.

Most hobbies are not going to make the final cut of your statement, but it's worth writing them all down, along with the relevant skills that they demonstrate.

5: What goes where?

In order to work out which content goes in which section, you'll need to have listed out your *possible* content. And so, you need to have had a go at answering the eight questions in the previous chapter.

If you haven't yet done this, go back and do this before proceeding. Trust me, you won't regret it!

If you have done the exercise reasonably well, you now have several pages, and perhaps ten or twenty ideas about yourself, your skills, your experiences, and your chosen course.

You've done most of the hard work.

The next thing to do is to determine what content goes where, so let's get stuck into what you should be including under each question.

1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?

The purpose of your answer is to provide evidence of your motivation to study the course you've applied for.

At its very simplest, you could approach it with a statement that essentially says: *Because of a, I'd like to study b.*

So, for example:

Because I love watching Formula 1, I'd like to study motorsport engineering.

It's OK, but I'm sure you can see yourself that it's overly simple. It doesn't really explain your motivation. After all, we all enjoy watching a multitude of things on TV. It doesn't mean we actually want to study them for three years.

So, let's take it a step further: *Because of a, I did b. And because of b I'd like to do c. And with c, I hope to do d.*

Using the same example, this might be something like:

I've loved watching F1 since a young age, and in my sixth form I took the opportunity to go on the F1 engineering experience in London. I loved learning about the role of aerodynamics, engine power and strategy in racing, and decided that I'd like to pursue a degree in motorsport. My ultimate aim is to be an engineer for an F1 team, and taking a degree in motorsport engineering would be the perfect first step.

And really, your answer to question one needn't be any more complicated than that!

So, have a look back at what you wrote for your initial brainstorming Q1, and then have a look at which of the other activities you've written down provide the best evidence to support it. This could be your studies, your super-curricular or extra-curricular activities, your work experience, your challenges or your hobbies.

Note down which activities you are going to use for this section.

This will probably be the shortest of your three sections, so keep it succinct so you leave plenty of room for questions two and three.

2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Whether you are applying for a highly academic course or a very practical course, the tutors want to see that you enjoy your studies and work hard. So tell them what you have enjoyed about your current studies, what you found challenging and what you want to learn more about.

Write about the courses you are doing that are most closely relevant to the course you are applying for.

If your course is an academic course, this will probably be the longest answer of the three questions and you'll want two or three significant examples to use.

For the most competitive courses, include super-curricular activities that you have done which show how you have explored the subject beyond the school curriculum. And try to link these to your school studies. For example:

We studied x at school and I was curious to know more about it. I did y (insert reading, podcast, taster course), and learned all about z, which made me even more interested in studying the topic at university.

So right now, look back at your answers to the brainstorming Q3 and Q4. Note down which examples you are going to use to answer this question.

You should probably look to include around three examples in this section, and possibly more if the course is both academic and competitive.

At this stage you don't need to write these into full sentences and paragraphs, just decide which examples you will use.

3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

If you are applying for academic courses, this may be a fairly short section. If there are relevant super-curricular activities that you haven't mentioned under question 2, you could include them here. Or if there are relevant skills you have demonstrated through other activities you can mention them.

However, for practical, professional courses (in particular health or education courses), this is likely to be the longest section, as your experience outside of education will be of significant interest to the admissions tutor.

In this section, you are going to be writing about your extra-curricular activities, and work experience (though there may also be some super-curricular that are relevant too). And you are going to show how these experiences demonstrate the skills that the course needs.

Virtually every course will tell you that you don't need to have directly relevant work experience. That's because for studies like medicine, it's very difficult for some students to get such experience.

But when it comes down to it, the more relevant the experience is to your chosen course, the better, simply because it will have given you more insight into the profession.

So include the most relevant work, voluntary or shadowing experience here, plus the most relevant extra-curricular activities, achievements and hobbies. And include how each experience has given you knowledge, skills and insight into the course or profession you are applying for.

For now, have a look at your notes for Q2, Q5 and Q6 (and maybe even Q7 and Q8), and write down which examples you are going to use, and what insights or skills have they given you. Again, full sentences are not required yet!

What if you don't know where to put a particular experience?

Ever since these new questions were published, advisers have been looking for more clarity on what type of experience goes where. Should super-curricular research and reading count as study (question two) or are they outside your studies (question three)? Or could they even be part of your motivation to study the subject (and so go in question one)?

The reality is that it really doesn't matter; the answers you give will be looked at as a whole, so don't be overly concerned about which examples go where.

Just answer each question using the best, most relevant examples that you have.

6: The power of reflective writing

So, you now have lots of content, and you've decided which examples you are going to use for each question.

There is just one more area to focus on before you start writing the statement in full, and that's how to write reflectively.

The trap that many students fall into at this stage is that they simply describe what they have done, and make the assumption that the reader automatically understands why it is important and relevant.

A typical example of this would be the paragraph below, which you might write about some marketing work experience done in year 11:

In year 11, I had the opportunity to undertake a work placement in the marketing department of a small tech

start-up. During my time with them I helped out with data entry, I worked on an event that they were organising and I put together some email campaigns.

It's OK, but there is no reflection, and no attempt to make it relevant to the application that is being submitted.

Put simply, reflective writing addresses this by giving you a structure which involves you analysing the experience, considering what impact it had on you, and making clear what you plan to do next with what you have learned.

So what might this look like? Well, a super-simple structure you could use is simply known as *What? So what? Now what?* (Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper, 2001).

- **What?** First you describe the activity, or experience.
- **So what?** Next you link the experience to the course that you are applying to.
- **Now what?** Finally, you describe what action you took, or are taking, as a result.

What might our marketing work experience look like using this model?

(What?) In year 11, I had the opportunity to undertake a work placement in the marketing department of a small tech start-up, during which I helped with data entry, events organisation, and putting together email promotional campaigns.

(So what?) Through this, I developed my IT skills, my writing skills, and learnt about how CRM systems work.

(Now what?) My experience made me want to learn more, and so I asked my manager what they would suggest in terms of learning more about marketing. They recommended reading Simon Sinek's "Start with Why?" which I loved, and which has reinforced my desire to learn more and more about marketing.

See the improvement? Already it is so much clearer why the placement was relevant, both to your motivation, and in

demonstrating skills and knowledge that are relevant to the course.

A slightly more complex method can be found in *Learning by Doing*, by Graham Gibbs (1988).

It is a terrific model for reflection and reflective writing. It goes something like this:

- **Description:** What happened?
- **Feelings:** What were your reactions and feelings?
- **Evaluation:** Was it a good or bad experience?
- **Analysis:** What sense can you make of the situation? What was really going on? (You can bring in ideas from outside of the specific situation to help you).
- **Conclusion:** What can you conclude from the analysis about your situation?
- **Action plan:** What would you do differently next time, or what are you going to do now on the basis of what you have learnt?

Using this structure, the same experience above could be described in the following way:

(Description) In year 11, I had the opportunity to undertake a work placement in the marketing department of a small tech start-up, during which I helped with data entry, events organisation, and putting together email promotional campaigns.

(Feelings) I loved my time working there, and

(Evaluation) I learnt so many great new skills (IT, writing, time management, and how CRM systems work).

(Analysis) The experience really helped me understand my own strengths and gave me insights into marketing that I had never considered before.

(Conclusion) I realised that marketing was the career for me, and that I wanted to learn more.

(Action Plan) I asked my manager what they would suggest in terms of learning more about marketing. They recommended reading Simon Sinek's "Start with Why?"

which I loved, and which has reinforced my desire to learn more and more about marketing.

Now we have a really interesting paragraph about work experience that shows reflection, motivation, skills, learning and action.

You may not necessarily follow exactly this model, or order your thoughts in exactly this way, but it is important that you make a clear attempt to reflect on each and every example you use in your statement.

7: Your first draft

You now have a list of ideas and activities to use under each section of the Personal Statement. You also have a couple of reflective writing frameworks that you can use, and a clear suggestion on how to answer question one in a compelling way.

So, right now, have a go at answering question one: *Why do you want to study this course or subject?*

Use your brainstorming notes, plus the format I suggested in Chapter 5, *or* one of the reflective writing frameworks from Chapter 6.

Then move onto questions two and three: *How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject* and *What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?*

Once again, take the examples and activities you've noted down, and write about them using one or other of the reflective writing frameworks.

When writing your first draft, don't worry too much about whether you are writing too much or too little, nor about whether each paragraph is perfect. The important thing is to get some full sentences and paragraphs written down for each of the ideas you have chosen to use.

Once you have a full first draft, take a well deserved break.

8: Your first edit

So you now have a first draft of your statement. That's awesome, and it's now time to refine and polish it.

Is it too long or too short?

First up, do a character count. Not including the question titles, are you over or under the 4,000 character limit?

If you are *over* the limit, you'll need to decide whether to make your text more concise, or to cut something out.

I'd suggest one attempt at making the text more concise, tightly editing each sentence, taking out any words that don't add meaning. If that isn't enough, then choose the weakest activity or example, and simply delete it.

If you are more than around 400 characters *under* the limit, then you may not have said enough. So either add a

new example, or take the best examples you have and add more detail, evaluation and analysis. Try using the second model in the reflective writing chapter to work out what you can add.

Do you have the right balance of content?

By *right balance* I mean, have you included examples that will be of most interest to the admissions selector? Essentially, do the experiences you have included align with the course you are applying for?

If you are applying for a very academic course, such as History or English, then most of your statement should be about your academic studies, and question two will probably have the longest answer.

If you are applying for a practical or professional course, then most of your statement should be about practical experience and your understanding of the profession, so you will probably have a longer answer for question three.

Is the statement readable?

Thirdly, you want to check if each sentence flows naturally and makes sense. This is really difficult to do when editing your own work, and the easiest way to do it is to read your statement out loud. Not in your head, but actually out loud. Find a quiet, private space for this and read every single word.

You'll actually hear when it doesn't flow properly, and you'll be able to change it right there and then.

Is the grammar and spelling OK?

Finally, I suggest just use the grammar and spell-checker on whichever software you are using. Make sure the checker is set to UK English, and alter anything that the software is telling you isn't quite right.

Once again, take a well deserved break!

9: Getting help and support

You now have a draft of your Personal Statement that you are happy with, and you are now going to want to share it with people who can help you make it even better.

I'd suggest you get feedback in this order:

1. A trusted friend or family member
2. A subject expert (probably a teacher)
3. Your university counsellor (or other UCAS expert).

Why? Well, your friends and family know you. They know your motivation to study the course, and they'll have a good idea of what you've done, both in and outside of school, to support your decision and to prepare for the course. They might be able to remind you of something important that you've forgotten.

Next, a subject expert/teacher can then help you refine your statement to focus on what's most important for the specific subject you're applying to. They can make sure you have demonstrated the most important skills and attributes. Most likely they'll have done this before and will have a good idea of what you should write!

Finally, the UCAS counsellor can help you fully refine the structure, work out which examples to use under which section, keep the statement well-rounded, and really polish the final writing.

Once you have had the sign-off and approval from your counsellor, don't show it to friends and family and change it all over again (unless you genuinely think your friends and family have greater knowledge and expertise than the counsellor).

How to ask for feedback

Firstly, don't ask for feedback from anyone unless you have checked the spelling and grammar. Otherwise your trusted supporter will simply correct the spelling and grammar and you'll have missed the opportunity for proper feedback about the content.

Secondly, be clear what feedback you are looking for. The simplest way I know of asking for feedback is simply to ask *How can I make this better?* This makes it clear to them that you are interested in improving your statement, and that you are not just looking for their approval. It encourages them to give you positive suggestions, rather than just saying what is good about it, and what is bad.

10: Writing a statement for two different subjects

How to write a statement that covers two different courses might just be the single most asked question in university admissions history.

If this applies to you, then the answer depends on why you want to do this. For each of these scenarios, I would give different advice.

Unrelated subjects

Perhaps you plan to apply for two different unrelated subjects, like Engineering and Economics. I would simply advise against this. You will not be able to find a way to write an effective Personal Statement for both, and you will compromise your application for each of your chosen subjects.

I'd suggest more research on each course, and more reflection on what you are looking for in your studies. Then choose either one or the other, or find a course that enables you to do both together.

Related subjects and joint combinations

In the second scenario, you are applying for closely related subjects, perhaps like Economics and Management. You might be choosing some joint honours degrees and some single honours.

In this case I'd argue that you can write a Personal Statement that will cover your interest in both.

Most admissions tutors will be used to seeing mention of interest in two related subjects together, and will understand that you may be applying for subtly different options at different universities.

The exception is if you are applying to the most competitive universities, by which I mean Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial, UCL, LSE etc. In these cases, a Personal Statement that is too broad may hinder your application. Instead, choose your top subject at your top choice and focus your statement on that. Then make sure all your other choices fit and are broadly aligned with that top choice.

Fall-back options for competitive courses

In the third scenario you are applying for a highly competitive course, such as Medicine, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Social Work, Primary Teaching etc. and you need a fall-back.

So, for example, if you are applying for Medicine, have Biomedical Sciences as your fall-back. If applying to Primary Teaching, have Psychology as your fall back.

If your fall back is not highly competitive, then the admissions tutors will be OK with the fact that the Personal

Statement is written for something else. Biomedical Sciences admissions staff at most universities will be very happy to take an application from someone who is close to being qualified for Medicine.

What you must not do is have another high-demand subject as your fall-back, such as having Physiotherapy as a fall-back to Medicine.

This also applies to a fall-back choice which is at a highly competitive university. They will look for students who are 100% focused on their subject, so your Personal Statement for another course is not likely to cut it with them.

There is a final option, which is that some courses who know that they are regularly a fall-back for high demand subjects may allow you to submit a second Personal Statement to them specifically for their course. You may be able to find this mentioned on their website, or you may need to send them an email to find out.

11: Using AI

I've written a few times about using AI to help you write your Personal Statement, but this year's changes have a significant impact on my advice in this area.

Why? Because AI gets its information and ideas from the internet, and right now, the internet has no idea what a Personal Statement looks like using the new questions, let alone what makes a *good* Personal Statement.

As we've discovered, though, the essence of the statement hasn't really changed, and so AI can still be useful for two areas in particular.

I've suggested my eight questions for you, to help you get ideas about your own experiences that you can include. But AI could potentially help you recall other relevant things.

So, you could use it just like an adviser with a prompt like:

You are advising me on applying to university. I would like to apply for x at university, and I need help with starting my UCAS Personal Statement. Can you tell me what sort of things I should include?

This sort of prompt could well help jog your memory, and help you decide which examples you have that are most relevant to the subject.

AI can also be very good at spotting weaknesses, and giving suggestions for improvements. A useful prompt that you can use once you have written your first draft is this.

I've now drafted a UCAS Personal Statement, which I will copy into the next message. Can you tell me how I can make it better? I am particularly interested in the content and the writing style. So that I can learn, can you give me at least five things about it that are good, and at least five areas where I can improve it.

What you mustn't do is ask AI to write it for you, or copy and paste text directly from AI into your statement.

So... if you are planning to use AI to help you, I'd suggest:

Don't just ask short questions. Be specific about what role you want the AI to take (e.g. an advisor), and what you want to get out of the discussion. Give it the background to your questions, so it knows who you are, and why you are asking for help.

Don't blindly follow its advice and suggestions. Look at the response critically. Is the response reliable, when compared to more formal sources such as UCAS? And how could you change the prompt to get a better response?

And don't copy AI's terrible clichés. Most AI has a habit of using horrible phrases like: *fuelled my desire to explore...* or *I did a deep dive...*

As well as being overused, they are a clear tell-tale sign to any admissions tutor that you have used AI in the wrong way.

12: Top Personal Statement tips

Just in case you want a few final tips before you start your first draft, here are some thoughts that I have picked up from a whole bunch of admissions selectors and other experts over the years. In no particular order...

#1 Avoid using quotes

Loads of students try to use quotes in their statement. Whether it's a ubiquitous quote from a famous sportsperson, a classic quote from a well respected author, or an obscure comment from an indie singer, the advice of most experts is just don't. It will most likely sound clichéd, unoriginal, or if the quote is seriously obscure, just weird.

If you really must use a quote, run it past a friend or teacher and watch their face as they read it.

You'll know straight away whether it is a good idea!

#2 Don't even think about using jokes or humour

Humour is just about the most difficult thing for anyone to get into any piece of writing, simply because humour varies so wildly across people, backgrounds, ages and cultures. The chances of you writing something that will be received as funny by each of the admissions selectors is slim to none.

#3 Be honest, straightforward and truthful

Be truthful about your inspirations, your achievements and your aspirations. Most admissions selectors know fine when they read BS, and they don't like it.

This doesn't mean that you write about all your weaknesses or uncertainties; this should be a positive, uplifting piece of writing about your strengths, your achievements, your learnings and your aspirations.

But it should not be made up, and it should not exaggerate; you and your real story are plenty to write about.

#4 Use simple, easy-to-read language

The most common problem I have when reading Personal Statements is that so many contain convoluted sentences and complex words that are clearly not normal vocabulary. Don't do this. Just write in plain, easy-to-read English.

Sure, you may use some large words if they are part of the technical or academic language of the subject you're discussing, but otherwise just keep it simple.

#5 However, do use language that inspires!

My old English teacher wanted the words “*nice*” and “*good*” banned from the English language because they are so boring. I can guarantee that you know so many words that are more inspiring and interesting than these, so go ahead and use them.

Just don't go so far that it's not your voice any more!

#6 Ask the question “So what?”

For each example you write, ask yourself “*So what?*”. Have you told the reader exactly why this example is relevant to your application for their course? If it’s not clear why the example is relevant, then make it clear, or cut it out.

Or to put it another way, demonstrate reflective thinking in everything you write.

#7 Don’t copy or use an essay mill

Don’t copy anything that your friends have written, or that you found on the internet, and definitely don’t pay someone off some dodgy website to write your statement for you.

You are likely to be caught out by the plagiarism software, and even if you aren’t it is likely that the statement you have copied or paid for will not be as good as your own.

#8 Read it out loud

Once you think your statement is finished, try reading it out loud. When you read it, does it sound right? Does it sound like your voice, telling your story?

If so, you are almost certainly on the right track.

If not, you will immediately know, and it's a sign that you are trying to be something you're not. So go back, rewrite the sections that don't sound right, and make sure the statement is authentically you!

#9 Proofread before asking for feedback

Don't ask for feedback from anyone unless you have checked the spelling and grammar. Otherwise your trusted supporter will simply correct the spelling and grammar and you'll have missed the opportunity for proper feedback about the content.

#10 Remember, it's YOUR Personal Statement

Finally the most important tip of all: Remember that it's *your* Personal Statement.

Make it personal and own it.

This means that ultimately it's your decision what to put in, and what to leave out. It's your motivation you are demonstrating. And it's your skill and experience that you are showing off.

No one else can do this for you.

So own the process, from start to finish. Use every resource that is available. Take responsibility for how you approach the writing process, what you write, how you get feedback, and when you do the work.

You'll have to take the consequences of the outcome, so take ownership of the task.

Before you go...

If you've found this guide helpful, please tell your friends, family members, teachers and advisers all about it!

I'd also love to hear your feedback so that I can keep improving my work.

Just send an email to jonathan@betterunichoices.com, and let me know, quite simply, how can I make this better!

And finally, if you are interested in everything to do with choosing courses, choosing universities and making amazing applications, check out betterunichoices.com.