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How to write a personal statement for Oxbridge *1 day course*





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How to write a personal statement for Oxbridge

1 day course

10:00-11:15 How to answer ordinary questions in an extraordinary way

[BREAK]

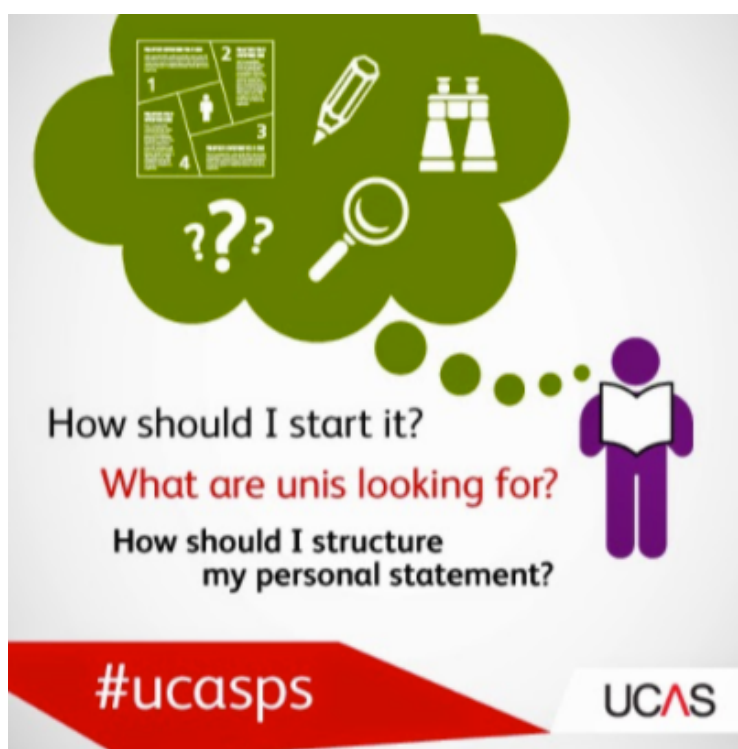
11:30-12:30 How to write succinctly to keep it short, interesting & informative

[LUNCH]

13:15-14:30 How to structure a personal statement

[BREAK]

14:45-16:00 Writing your personal statement





Introductions and ice breaker!

Introductions

Name?

Where you are applying?

What you want to study?

Why?

Icebreaker

Order them in importance for:

-> how students will tend to write a personal statement

-> how you think a stand-out personal statement would prioritise



How to answer ordinary questions in an extraordinary way Part 1

personal statement

noun

a written description of one's achievements, interests, etc., included as part of an application for a job or a place at university or college.

"write in your personal statement why you want to do the course"



Translations, word origin, and more definitions

personal statement: Oxbridge definition

noun

the only medium you have to differentiate yourself

Students spend a lot of time explaining they are good at exams; the personal statement is just another exam, make sure you are great at it!

It has questions and answers just like an exam, make sure the admissions tutors hear the answers they need to hear to make a decision.

Above all, they need to hear **passion**.

To stand out:

You need to answer standard questions in an exceptional way



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How to answer ordinary questions in an extraordinary way *Part 1*

What do you think the standard questions are?

The five whys





How to answer ordinary questions in an extraordinary way

Part 1

Example:

Why this university?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Example answer for the personal statement:



How to answer ordinary questions in an extraordinary way

Part 1

Give it a go:

Why this course?

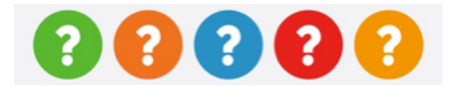
Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Example answer for the personal statement:



How to answer ordinary questions in an extraordinary way *Part 1*

Give it a go:

Why should they consider you?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Example answer for the personal statement:



How to write succinctly to keep it short, interesting & informative *Part 2*

“I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.”

- Mark Twain

Plan and check the reading age

Many students assume writing in a complicated way will suggest you are intelligent and know what you are talking about. You don't have to write in a complicated way, the younger you assume your audience is, the more powerful your message will be. Don't worry about being patronising.

Avoid repeating sentiments

Be careful using redundant phrases which repeat or only add a small amount of value. About 20% of your words will give 80% of the impact. Use powerful, specific words. Best way to make sure you don't repeat is to pick 3 main points per paragraph and stick to them.

Tell a story

Each sentence should either be making an important point or linking to what you are about to say. If a sentence doesn't contribute to the story, it shouldn't be in your statement. Story flows follow: **situation**, **solution**, **impact**. Repeat **SSI** throughout your personal statement.



How to write succinctly to keep it short, interesting & informative Part 2

I am looking forward to studying Physics at university in order to advance my understanding of the world around me; understanding the science behind everything that makes a modern technological lifestyle what it is. A practical example of the application of Physical Science is the Physics of Sailing, which I enjoy applying continuously whenever I am on the water. I have a desire to learn and a willingness to apply and pass on what I know.

I have been a prize-winner at school every year and from an early age I have read and enjoyed Science & Technology books and journals. I regularly read the publications Scientific American and New Scientist; I also actively participate in communities such as PhysicsPost. I also find books by distinguished Physicists fascinating, for example: Richard Feynmans lectures, which are very accessible and offer an insight to higher level Physics.

I have arranged and attended work experience and observation at Strathclyde University, where I enjoyed being included in a project researching the Electrodeposition of semiconductors. As a result of this I am considering an academic career or perhaps one in commercial science. Wherever I find a place after my time studying Physics I hope it will be somewhere that I can be part of the research and development of new ideas and technologies. After all, where would entertainment, communication, industry, commerce and medical science stand if there were no Physicists?

I take on Web Design work, with two projects completed this summer. I am also an RYA Dinghy & Racing Instructor and use this qualification to teach young children and adults how to sail. I am responsible for groups for a whole day; keeping them entertained independently can test patience and be quite a challenge especially when the weather is not cooperating! This occupation reinforces my people skills whilst allowing me to have fun sailing and show others how to share my enjoyment.

My CCF section takes an annual trip to the Brecon Beacons where walking, leadership, self-responsibility, more walking, self-reliance and resourcefulness are encouraged. I am now in my fourth year of CCF experience and consequently have both received and administered character-building tasks that include, but are not limited to, the cold, the wet and the miserable, suffice to say, it is great fun. I feel that the CCF has played a great part in developing me into a much more confident and able person; combined with my experience as a Sailing Instructor and House Prefect, I now feel well-prepared to integrate and participate in university life, whilst bringing my own dimension to it and all those around me.

What would you say is the reading age of this statement?

Can you see any repetition?

Do you feel like they are telling a story throughout?



How to write succinctly to keep it short, interesting & informative Part 2

Can you shorten a paragraph and make it interesting to read?

Main checks:

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you lower the reading age?

Additional checks:

Can you vary the sentence length?

Is there any further repetition or irrelevance you can remove?

Is there a shorter way of saying the sentence?

Can you end with a link to the next paragraph?

I have always been passionate about understanding the science behind how the universe works. I see Physics in action every day when I am sailing. I would seize the opportunity to study the subject I love for the next 4 years, particularly at such a prestigious university. Studying Physics would allow me to explore my passion and spread enthusiasm about an important but often dismissed subject.



How to write succinctly to keep it short, interesting & informative *Part 2*

Can you shorten one of your paragraphs from part 1?

Main checks:

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you lower the reading age?

Additional checks:

Can you vary the sentence length?

Is there any further repetition or irrelevance you can remove?

Is there a shorter way of saying the sentence?

Can you end with a link to the next paragraph you think you would write?



How to write succinctly to keep it short, interesting & informative *Part 2*

If you have time, can you shorten your other paragraph?

Main checks:

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you lower the reading age?

Additional checks:

Can you vary the sentence length?

Is there any further repetition or irrelevance you can remove?

Is there a shorter way of saying the sentence?

Can you end with a link to the next paragraph you think you would write?



How to structure a personal statement

Part 3

Dealing with the personal statement character limit.

“Regardless, the 'word' limit is 47 lines of text, or 4000 characters. This equates to (roughly) 500 words. UCAS recommend that you write out your personal statement in a word processor before copying and pasting it into the online application.”

Let's go back to the list of standard questions we made earlier!

Which ones do you still stand by?



How to structure a personal statement *Part 3*

Having spoken to over 10 admissions tutors at Oxford & Cambridge...

Why? What? How?

In effect, one big story:

Why should they listen / the situation

What will make you happy / the solution

How will you use the experience / the impact

WHY

Why you?

Why this course?

Why this university?

WHAT

What inspires you?

What do you want to do with this course?

HOW

How will you approach the course?

How will you ensure you will succeed?

I would recommend using only one anecdote per section!



How to structure a personal statement

Part 3

Write one anecdote next to each section drawing a line to the question it is most likely to answer:

WHY

Why you?

Why this course?

Why this university?

WHAT

What inspires you?

What do you want to do with this course?

HOW

How will you approach the course?

How will you ensure you will succeed?







How to structure a personal statement Part 3

Do a quick five why's for each question to get to the route

Why you?

Why this
course?





Why this
university?



How to structure a personal statement Part 3

Do a quick five why's for each question to get to the route

				
What inspires you?				
What do you want to do with this course?				
How will you approach the course?				
How will you ensure you will succeed?				



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Before check list:

1. Do you have the deep-rooted/interesting answer to each question?
(Five whys)
2. Have you picked three anecdotes to reference?
(Only three!)
3. Are you fully comfortable with every anecdote you plan to use?
(You are likely to be quizzed at interview)
4. Have you got the structure in front of you?

If so, get writing.



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

Why should they consider you?

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you keep a low reading age?

Are you using an anecdote for this answer?

Can you link to the next question?



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

Why is this course important to you?

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you keep a low reading age?

Are you using an anecdote for this answer?

Can you link to the next question?



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

Why is this type of university important to you?

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you keep a low reading age?

Are you using an anecdote for this answer?

Can you link to the next question?



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

What inspires you?

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you keep a low reading age?

Are you using an anecdote for this answer?

Can you link to the next question?



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

What do you want to do with the course?

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you keep a low reading age?

Are you using an anecdote for this answer?

Can you link to the next question?



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

How will you approach the course?

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you keep a low reading age?

Are you using an anecdote for this answer?

Can you link to the next question?



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

How will you ensure you will succeed?

What are the three main points?

Can you order in **SSI**?

Can you keep a low reading age?

Are you using an anecdote for this answer?

Can you link to the next question?



Writing your personal statement

Part 4

Getting to a first draft

If you have time, start putting it all together - you will be surprised how well it reads.



Checklist:

A check for when you continue at home

Once you have put your personal statement together, have a read and make sure you **DON'T** tick any of these points!

1. Boring opening paragraph
2. Overly brief statement or too long
3. Unnatural, verbose language
4. Poor spelling and grammar
5. Lack of structure
6. Re-listing information already provided
7. Lack of academic focus
8. Too career focused
9. Lack of passion for the subject
10. Too generic

Remember you can send over for unlimited edits right up to submission!

Just email any drafts/questions to: kathryn@learsmart.academy



Important dates:

6
SEP

Completed 2018 entry applications can be submitted to UCAS

<https://www.ucas.com/events/completed-2018-entry-applications-can-be-submitted-ucas-278686>

Key date • 6 September 2017 • Undergraduate

15
OCT

2018 entry deadline for the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and for most courses in medicine, veterinary medicine/science, and dentistry

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-deadline-universities-oxford-and-cambridge-and-most-courses-medicine-veterinary-278691>

Key date • 15 October 2017 • Undergraduate

15
JAN

2018 entry deadline for the majority of undergraduate courses

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-deadline-majority-undergraduate-courses-278696>

Key date • 15 January 2018 • Undergraduate

25
FEB

2018 entry Extra opens

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-extra-opens-278701>

Key date • 25 February 2018 • Undergraduate

24
MAR

2018 entry deadline for some art and design courses

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-deadline-some-art-and-design-courses-278706>

Key date • 24 March 2018 • Undergraduate

2
MAY

2018 entry: If you receive all decisions by 31 March, reply by 2 May

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-if-you-receive-all-decisions-31-march-reply-2-may-278711>

Key date • 2 May 2018 • Undergraduate

3
MAY

2018 entry: Uni/college decisions due on applications submitted by 15 January

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-unicollege-decisions-due-applications-submitted-15-january-278716>

Key date • 3 May 2018 • Undergraduate

7
JUN

2018 entry: If you receive all decisions by 3 May, reply by 7 June

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-if-you-receive-all-decisions-3-may-reply-7-june-278721>

Key date • 7 June 2018 • Undergraduate

21
JUN

2018 entry: If you receive all decisions by 7 June, reply by 21 June

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-if-you-receive-all-decisions-7-june-reply-21-june-278786>

Key date • 21 June 2018 • Undergraduate

30
JUN

2018 entry applications received after 30 June are entered into Clearing

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-applications-received-after-30-june-are-entered-clearing-278731>

Key date • 30 June 2018 • Undergraduate



Important dates:

4
JUL

Last date to apply in Extra for 2018 entry

<https://www.ucas.com/events/last-date-apply-extra-2018-entry-278736>

Key date • 4 July 2018 • Undergraduate

5
JUL

2018 entry Clearing opens

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-clearing-opens-278741>

Key date • 5 July 2018 • Undergraduate

5
JUL

2018 International Baccalaureate results published

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-international-baccalaureate-results-published-278746>

Key date • 5 July 2018 • Undergraduate

12
JUL

2018 entry: Uni/college decisions due on applications submitted by 30 June

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-unicollege-decisions-due-applications-submitted-30-june-278751>

Key date • 12 July 2018 • Undergraduate

19
JUL

2018 entry: If you receive all decisions by 12 July, reply by 19 July

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-if-you-receive-all-decisions-12-july-reply-19-july-278756>

Key date • 19 July 2018 • Undergraduate

16
AUG

2018 A level results day

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-level-results-day-278761>

Key date • 16 August 2018 • Undergraduate

16
AUG

2018 Adjustment opens

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-adjustment-opens-278766>

Key date • 16 August 2018 • Undergraduate

31
AUG

2018 entry: Remaining offer conditions must be met and Adjustment ends

<https://www.ucas.com/events/2018-entry-remaining-offer-conditions-must-be-met-and-adjustment-ends-278771>

Key date • 31 August 2018 • Undergraduate

20
SEP

Final deadline for 2018 entry applications

<https://www.ucas.com/events/final-deadline-2018-entry-applications-278776>

Key date • 20 September 2018 • Undergraduate

23
OCT

Last date to add 2018 entry Clearing choices and for unis/colleges to make decisions

<https://www.ucas.com/events/last-date-add-2018-entry-clearing-choices-and-uniscolleges-make-decisions-278781>

Key date • 23 October 2018 • Undergraduate