



HOW TO **WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT:** THE BIG DOS AND DON'TS

Make your **personal
statement** stand out

Get your facts right

Top 15

for the sixth year running for **overall student satisfaction**

(English mainstream universities, NSS 2018)

Top 30

in **The Times Good University Guide 2019**

Top for Politics

and top 5 for **Social Sciences** in the most recent REF 2014.

Gold

in the **Teaching Excellence Framework 2017 (TEF)**

Three stunning campuses

in Colchester, Loughton and Southend which are close to London with **excellent transport links**.

Global community

of nearly **15,000 students** from over 140 different countries.



It's often hard to know where to start when it comes to writing your personal statement, so we got together with our Admissions Selectors (the people who make the decisions) and created this booklet full of useful tips and advice to help you.



What is a personal statement?

Your personal statement is a really important part of your application as it is your only chance to personalise it.

Your personal statement should explain why you want to study your chosen course at university. You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and convince the Admissions Selectors that you will be suitable for your chosen course.

Remember that the Admission Selector reading your statement will want to know why you chose the subject and wish to study it at a higher level.

How to get started: Planning your personal statement.

Writing about yourself is not something that you do often, so you may need to practise writing in this particular style.

If you are at school or college, check when your personal statement needs to be submitted so you can leave time to get feedback. The first step in writing your personal statement is to plan what you would like to include.

About the course

Two thirds of the personal statement should be about the course that you are applying for:

What course(s) do you want to apply for?	
When did you become interested in the course(s)?	
Are there any aspects of your current studies that relate to the course(s) that you have chosen?	
Why have you applied to study this course?	
Are there any particular parts of the subject that you enjoy?	
What have you learnt about the subject that has inspired you to take it to university-level?	
What personal qualities do you possess that make you suited to this area of study?	
What relevant experience do you have? <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ work experience■ part time work■ volunteering■ awards■ societies	
What are your future career plans? How will the knowledge and skills gained through your studies help?	

About you

The other third of the personal statement should be about you and why you think you would be a good university student. This is your opportunity to say what makes you interesting, special or unique. Everyone has aspects of their personality that make them interesting; it's just a case of putting them into words.

You should only mention things which help support your application. A long list of everything that you have done is much less impressive than picking one or two things and writing about the skills that you have gained through them. Activities undertaken recently will certainly carry more weight than those you did in junior school.

If you are planning on taking a gap year, you should mention this in your personal statement and explain what you would like to do during this time.

The list below is a good place to start when thinking about your skills but don't feel that you need to mention every example (or else you will run out of room!) Pick your strongest and most relevant examples and use these in your personal statement.

Skills	How can you demonstrate you have developed this skill?	Why might this skill be useful to have at university?
Commitment		
Communication skills		
Computer literacy		
Confidence		
Determination		
Entrepreneurial skills		
Flexibility		
Interpersonal skills		
Organisational skills		
Problem solving		
Responsibility		
Team work		
Time management		
Using initiative		
Working independently		
Working to deadlines		

Personal achievements	What have you gained from this?
e.g. raising money for charity	Determination to succeed even when faced with challenges

Positions of responsibility	What have you gained from this?
e.g. prefect	A sense of responsibility – being trusted to act as a role model for other students

Hobbies and interests	What does this involve?	What have you gained from this?
e.g. drama	Being involved in a drama club outside of school	Confidence while performing and commitment to regular rehearsals

Gap year plan	What do you hope to gain from this?
e.g. teaching English in China	I would like to teach in the future and this role will give me some valuable classroom experience

It is always a good idea to relate back to the course and the fact that you would like to progress to higher education throughout your personal statement. After all, you are writing this document to give yourself the best chance of getting offers from all your chosen courses, so you shouldn't lose sight of this! Remember that universities are mainly interested in your enthusiasm for the course you are applying for and your potential to do well. You should try to display this in your personal statement as strongly as you can.

Make sure that you don't let your personal statement fizzle out and avoid being too general:

“I am looking forward to becoming a psychologist”

Be much more specific and end on a very positive note by closing your statement with something like:

“I think working with young children is rewarding and challenging, and I am highly determined to make the most of my degree and achieve my ambition to become a developmental psychologist.”

...if you are applying for our health and social care courses

- for hints and tips on applying to these courses, including personal statement advice please visit <https://www.essex.ac.uk/departments/health-and-social-care/undergraduate>

...if you're a mature student

- Say what you've done since leaving school or college
- If you've had a variety of relevant jobs and experiences include these in the employment section of your UCAS form and talk about these experiences in your personal statement
- Demonstrate how you'll cope with the academic work
- Evaluate your experiences and match them up to the course requirements

...if you're an international student

- Say why you want to study in the United Kingdom
- Let us know if any of your previous studies have been taught in English
- Give examples of when you have used your English language skills

...don't forget

You only write one personal statement for all of your university choices so if you are applying for a joint course you need to explain why you are interested in both aspects of a joint programme.

You should not mention universities by name or show a bias towards a certain institution as your personal statement will go to all of your choices.

...a few technical details

- Don't type your statement directly into the UCAS online application form. Use Microsoft Word or another programme whilst writing. This will help with your spelling and it will also be easier to edit and email for feedback
- UCAS limits your personal statement to 47 lines (including blank lines) or 4,000 characters (including spaces), whichever you reach sooner
- When you add to your online application click 'save' regularly because it will time out after 35 minutes of inactivity

Dos and don'ts when writing your personal statement

Do

- Do brainstorm your ideas on paper before attempting to write anything.
- Do check university websites as they may provide information about what they are looking for from applicants.
- Do aim to use about five paragraphs, making sure that each flows in a logical way.
- Do expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy.
- Do ask friends and family for their feedback.
- Do ensure that you proof read your personal statement and write in standard English.
- Do be enthusiastic – you can have perfect grades, do hundreds of extra-curricular activities and be a really great person, but if Admissions Selectors feel you aren't passionate about and don't show an understanding of your chosen course, it could affect your application.

Don't

- Don't feel that you must use fancy language. If you try too hard to impress with long words that you are not confident using, the focus of your writing may be lost.
- Don't try to be funny as it is a risk: Admissions Selectors may not share your sense of humour!
- Don't lie – if you stretch the truth you may get caught out at interview when you are asked to elaborate on an interesting achievement.
- Don't write about irrelevant things.
- Don't copy someone else's personal statement or 'borrow' chunks from existing personal statements. UCAS uses similarity detection software which checks for plagiarism so make sure everything you write is completely original.
- Don't rely on a spell checker – proof read as many times as possible.
- Don't leave it to the last minute – you won't give the best impression of yourself if you scribble your statement down without thinking about what you are saying.

Examples of personal statements

These are not model answers as they all have particular strengths and weaknesses. The aim is that you become familiar with the content and look of a personal statement.

As you may have difficulty knowing where to start, many of the sample statements in the guide begin with reasons for choosing the course, then back this up with examples of current study or research the applicant has done into the course, and related careers.

Applicants then continue with extra-curricular activities, and end by summarising why their experiences and knowledge have led them to choosing their course. Although this is not a set structure for a personal statement, it may be a useful starting point when you begin drafting yours.

Accounting, Finance and Banking

I am applying for a degree in Accounting as I believe this degree will set me in good stead for my future career. In recent years I have become interested in the world of commerce and industry and I believe that studying this subject at university level will help me reach my goal of becoming an accountant. I have researched this career and believe that I have the necessary skills to succeed.

At my college, all year 12 students undertake a week's work experience in July. I arranged for mine to be at Phillips and Woodstock, a small accountancy firm in my local town. During this week I learned that there are several elements of the accountancy profession and that the career is very diverse. Phillips and Woodstock specialise in helping small businesses with their tax assessments, and as a result I have become particularly interested in the business consultancy side of accounting. The MD, Mr Phillips, was impressed with my work and commitment and has invited me to work at the firm part-time in my summer holidays. I am looking forward to the opportunity to gain more experience in my chosen career.

I am currently studying towards a BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Business. The modules I have most enjoyed are 'Managing Information' and 'Managing a Business Project or an Event'. For the latter module my project was based on a tender by a construction company where I took the role of estimator and tried to write a competitive tender proposal. This was a challenging and interesting task, and one which taught me the importance of expertise in a chosen field. However it was the unit 'Introduction to Accounting' which I most enjoyed and which, in retrospect, first sparked my interest in accounting.

I have a part-time job in a roadside restaurant near to my home. Although the job can be repetitive, it has been an important exercise in self-discipline as I start work at 7am on Saturdays! I have also met many new people and become friends with some of the regulars. I try to save the money I earn from this job: university has been my long-term goal for the last year and my savings should help with the costs of studying.

I am really looking forward to going to university: partly for the social experience, but most importantly to further my studies in accounting. I believe that university will help me achieve my aim of qualifying as an accountant and perhaps one day running my own business, like Mr Phillips, or my all-time hero, Sir Alan Sugar. I would hope, however, never to be fired!

Strengths

- The first sentence goes straight to the point. This implies decisiveness and commitment, and the personal statement is too short for a lengthy introduction.
- The student goes into a lot of detail about their work experience, which is good as it is relevant to his chosen subject and helped shape his career plans.

Weaknesses

- It is a shame that the student did not go into more detail about the 'Introduction to Accounting' module, and explain how it sparked their interest in accounting, as this would be very relevant to his university application.
- The ending would have had more impact without the closing comment. Try to avoid flippant comments or cultural references, as admissions tutors may not understand them or share your interest in them.

Actuarial Science

'Nature has established patterns originating in the return of events, but only for the most part'. It is the latter part of Gottfried von Leibniz's comment in 1703 that lays the foundations of the existence of risk.

Without risk, we would live in a dull world where all future events are predictable, and no change ever occurred. It is the ability to quantify risk that enables secure financial growth, both personal and professional, as well as the power to foresee any financial disasters that may be prevented. For this, we rely on the work of Actuaries, a career that I am determined will become my future. In my free time I decided to turn my attention to Bernstein's *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk*, which gave me an insight into the history and development of the notion of risk. However, it was the deterministic chaos theory that really interested me after reading James Gleik's *Chaos: The Amazing Science of the Unpredictable*, an active example of actuarial modelling, where the most miniscule changes in the initial conditions have the ability to cause substantial disasters in the future.

My obsession with maths was pronounced right from secondary school. I completed my GCSE Mathematics in November 2010, gaining a solid A*, before moving on to studying the edexcel Free Standing Maths Qualification; Additional Maths. In year 10, I also took part in the West Midlands Maths Challenge after being placed second in the Birmingham Maths Challenge, and used my free time to write a 1500 Word essay titled 'Should Zero Be considered a Number?' However, it is the statistics and probability area that my fascination heavily lies, evident in my result of 96 UMS points in the AQA Statistics exam. It is, primarily, the most important application of mathematical concepts to real-life situations.

In particular, I enjoy carrying out Chi-square tests to determine any association between two variables. This is because of its complicated process, and the need to identify the necessary use of Yates' correction, or the grouping of data too small, to obtain accurate results. I find a great sense of achievement on completion of these tests, as well as many other processes studied in statistics.

The fact that a large part of Actuarial Science involves analysing statistical data, needed to assess the future effects of large financial risks, is what draws me to the degree. I understand the Actuary profession is not an easy one, but one that requires dedication and motivation, something I have proven to be great qualities of mine. Since the age of 15, I have had at least one job at any time, holding two part-time jobs whilst taking my A-levels; with my results proving my handling of this to have been successful.

As a part-time receptionist for three years, from the age of 15, I have developed strong communication and interpersonal skills. This will enable me to effectively convey my knowledge of complex financial information to non-specialists, essential for someone entering the Actuarial profession.

My attraction to the degree, as well as my suitability to the career is clear. It is my desire to learn and my constant search for a challenge that draws me to this path. I thrive on spontaneity, and knowing of the diverse and wide-ranging activities an Actuary can find themselves responsible for in their day-to-day work, from analysing risk and calculating profit, to developing and overseeing new financial products, I find myself impatient to start my studies in Actuarial Science. In the meantime, I plan to spend the year keeping up to date with current world financial affairs and to take work experience where possible, so that I am thoroughly prepared to begin a successful Actuarial career path in 2014.

Actuarial Science

Strengths

- All Actuarial Science applicants need to have a good mathematical and statistical background. This applicant successfully demonstrates their awareness of this by talking about the importance of mathematics in the role of an actuary.
- It's always a good idea to talk about any additional reading you may have completed around your chosen course. This student does this well by talking about 'The Remarkable Story of Risk' and 'Chaos: The Amazing Science of the Unpredictable' which they have read in their free time.

Weaknesses

- All actuaries in the UK belong to the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries. It's a good idea to mention the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries in any Actuarial Science personal statement and to talk about your understanding of it.

American Studies

I am currently taking A-levels in History, English Language and Literature, and Geography. I enjoy all of these subjects but History has always stood out as my favourite. As part of my History AS-level studies, I undertook an American History unit. Learning about the Civil Rights Movement and the events which caused it really captured my imagination and sparked an interest in the USA, which grew after studying *The Crucible* in my English Literature course. America's rich and controversial history, and its sociology, such as the existence of an 'American Dream' are so different from our own English history and heritage; it is this contrast which fascinates me.

I have attended a number of university open days in which I listened to sample lectures and talks about American Studies. The diversity of American Studies appeals to me greatly, and the flexibility of the subject allows me to develop my existing interests in history, literature and sociology. I would also like the opportunity to study another aspect of American Studies, such as politics. British and American politics have always interested me, but A-level Politics was not available as an option at my school.

At school, I am involved in the Debating Team, and we have had several achievements. Most recently, we came second in the inter-school county finals, the topic being 'Do stop-and-search tactics erode civil liberties?'. Other topics we have debated include abortion, ID cards and the Scottish Referendum. Debating compliments my interests in history and politics and I look forward to continuing this pursuit at university.

I played hockey for my school until year 10, and I am also a Sixth Form prefect. This responsibility involves helping teachers in lessons and disciplining the younger students in corridors. I also have a weekend job waitressing in a local restaurant. My friends are very important to me, and I enjoy spending time with them.

My sister attends the University of Essex, and I have visited her twice. This has given me a flavour of student life and as a result I feel I would fit in well at university. Overall, I am looking forward to going to university and particularly to furthering my interest in American Studies.

Strengths

- This student explains how they became interested in studying American Studies very well.
- It is good to show how your A-level studies have influenced your choice of course.
- Evidence of good research (for example attending open days) is clear in this statement; this is especially important when the subject is not available at A-level.

Weaknesses

- Whilst it may be important to mention that A-level Politics was not available at her school, be careful not to imply criticism of the school!
- It isn't advisable to mention universities by name unless you are only applying to one institution. It implies a preference towards the university you are naming.
- Playing hockey in year 10 does not say much about the student now; it is best to talk about more recent hobbies.

Art History

My childhood visits to London always involved an excursion to a gallery or museum. The works of art that I saw there prompted me to ask many questions which sparked my lifelong interest in the visual arts: Why was the beautiful lady floating in a river full of flowers? Why was a whole lobster sitting on a telephone? Why did the Virgin Mary always seem to be wearing blue? As a child it was fun to try to answer the questions myself, but I only realised that art history existed as a subject in its own right when I chose to study Art at A-level. The critical and contextual studies element of the course helped me to realise many answers to my questions and showed me the varied ways in which the images which held my attention could act to document the times in which they were made. A single work could be inspired or sourced by anything and everything from literature, to history, religion, politics, or perhaps philosophies and economics; every single work of art had such diversity of meaning and a real 'history' of its own. So, the 'beautiful lady floating in a river full of flowers' seen through my eyes as a child is actually Sir John Everett Millais' own version of Shakespeare's 'Ophelia' the tragic heroine drowned as a result of her madness. More literally, it is the artist and model Lizzie Siddal, lover of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, posed in a bath in an antique dress.

On a more historical level it is a ground breaking masterpiece by a Victorian rebel determined to paint with a truth to nature for him not seen since the work of the early Italian Masters.

After my gap year, which was spent travelling in Europe and visiting my family in Spain, I have recently been working as a Saturday girl in my local John Lewis store. Although there is much routine sales work involved in the job, my keen eye for design detail, colour and an obvious flair for arrangement has already been noted. My counter supervisor often asks me to help arrange various display stands of perfumery and makeup, and also asks for my comments on the ways in which these can be made most appealing. I feel that even as a junior member of the team I am able to use my creativity to good effect, and use the skills that my love of the visual arts has helped to foster. In so doing I can work effectively and efficiently to help increase our counter sales.

I have many interests including crafting and decoupage, and lots of my spare time is occupied making cards and small gifts for sale at local craft fairs. Often I have been lucky enough to sell everything that I have produced and also to generate some additional orders! Art History appeals to me not only because I love the visual arts but also because I would like to study a subject which can dovetail with so many others. I like the idea that I will eventually have a wide ranging vocational degree in a humanities subject which offers me the broadest possible scope with which to address my future career choices.

Strengths

- Referring to works of art and her impressions of them displays a keen eye for detail and an obvious love of the arts, which is important for History of Art applicants.
- The student has effectively linked her creative skills to her experience in her part-time job.

Weaknesses

- It may have been interesting to know a little more about the connection with Europe; does the student speak Spanish, for example? Further, the gap year which is rather brushed aside could have been given more prominence.
- Describing her job role as 'Saturday girl' could be changed; professional language such as 'sales assistant' would have more impact.

Biochemistry and Biomedical Science

When I was twelve years old the car that my mother was driving was hit by lorry. Thankfully she recovered from the accident but only because she had a blood transfusion. Since that dreadful day I have aimed for a career in transfusion science because without skilled biomedical scientists, the blood transfusion service would collapse. With such a clear focus on my chosen career, I have been able to do extensive research into the skills and attributes that a biomedical scientist must possess. I am focused and determined, and am both accurate and efficient. These skills are essential because patient's lives and the treatment of illnesses depend upon me. I am also confident that my choice of A- and AS-levels, Biology, Chemistry, Psychology and Maths, will provide me with the solid foundation needed to proceed to undergraduate level.

The practical side of biology and chemistry has enabled me to gain good laboratory skills and I am eager to acquire more developed and sophisticated techniques at university. Maths has helped me to think logically and to develop my understanding of numerical information. Psychology has improved my written communication skills, which I believe to be important for any subject at university.

Throughout my school career I have enjoyed positions of considerable responsibility. I was nominated form captain four years running and elected Head Girl during my final year.

This was a demanding job as I was required to represent the school at prestigious events and do a lot of public speaking (something which used to scare me greatly). At our GCSE prize giving I received prizes for biology and maths. I was also awarded the Stubbs Cup which I am extremely proud of.

I love spending time in the country walking my greyhounds Mollie and Vinnie. I have taken Mollie to many open shows and am hoping to present her at her first championship show this Christmas. Showing and caring for dogs involves discipline and attention to detail. It is also a great way to socialise as I am constantly meeting new faces at the weekly club I attend. I can't wait to start university because I will get the opportunity to meet people from all over the world.

When I'm not walking the dog's I can be found in the gym. I like keeping fit and look forward to trying new sports and activities at university. I have also recently started working at the gym in their crèche. I enjoy working with children and have attained my first aid certificate.

I think that being a biomedical scientist will be a rewarding career because I will be doing work that will help improve people's health and cure diseases. University has been my goal for a long time now and I look forward to the challenge ahead of me.

Strengths

- This student clearly states the skills that she has gained from her A-level subjects.
- She has written an enthusiastic final sentence that will appeal to admissions tutors.

Weaknesses

- There are a couple of silly grammar mistakes (incorrect use of possessive apostrophe) that look bad.
- This student does not explain why they were awarded the Stubbs Cup. Details like this will support your application.

Biological Sciences

From an early age I have been fascinated by biology. I can clearly recall spending time in the garden with my Grandfather looking at bugs and creepy crawlies. As I grew up my affinity with the natural world developed and studying biology at university is the next step on my journey.

I have had the most amazing gap year experience protecting the Lora turtles of Costa Rica from human poachers and beach erosion. As a volunteer on the programme I was able to help with research and conservation work such as night patrolling, working in the hatcheries, collecting eggs, rescuing and tagging turtles and helping the baby turtles get to the sea! This opportunity has enabled me to grow as a person in many ways. It certainly has been the best preparation possible for university life, as I have acquired all kinds of skills that will be essential for a new life away from friends and family.

A-level Biology has certainly provided me with an excellent grounding and I am confident that I have a real aptitude for this challenging discipline. I have enjoyed all of the modules taken so far, especially ecosystems as we had to consider the dynamics of such systems and look into human activities that impact on them. I particularly like

doing practical work and look forward to being able to gain experience with more developed pieces of apparatus at university.

I have held several positions of responsibility. During my final year at school I was appointed to the position of Senior Prefect. This was a great honour and I learnt many new skills, including public speaking. At college I continued this type of responsibility by being nominated Student Voice Rep. This position required me to attend various meetings with different types of people including the Board of Governors. I was the voice for all 2,000 students at our college.

I am an eager table tennis player and regularly compete at county level. I find it to be an excellent form of exercise for the body and mind! I am keen to try out different sports when I reach university because it will be the perfect way to make new friends and stay healthy. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is also something that I am involved in and I have completed bronze, silver and gold awards. I am hoping to be involved in promoting the award scheme to young people in the future as I have really benefited from it and would like to be able to share my experience with others.

Strengths

- It can be good to talk about past experiences that have sparked interest in the subject. However be careful not to go off on a tangent and write more than is necessary!
- The gap year experience is very relevant here and the student's enthusiasm is obvious; enthusiasm for a subject is very important.

Weaknesses

- This statement has a strong beginning and middle but concludes far too abruptly; you should always finish your statement with an enthusiastic and memorable ending.
- This student ends by talking about his Duke of Edinburgh achievements, which though interesting, probably isn't the main reason why they are applying to university. It is preferable to conclude your personal statement by talking about your chosen subject and/or your eagerness to go to university.

Business and Management

I have always been a very academically determined and studious individual, hence why I knew that a degree at university would be my definite next step. I have a broad interest in many subject areas but feel drawn towards a business-orientated degree. Coming from the background of a small family business, I have been inspired by my parents and am keen to gain the essential skills to expand our growing empire! I am very aware that today's business requires not just balancing the books; it is about the investment and the management of assets, people, opportunities and risk. I am confident that studying a business degree at university level will prepare me well for my future ahead.

A-level Business Studies has definitely provided me with a solid foundation which I am eager to develop. 'Management, Culture and Communication' is the module that interested me the most this year and I have undertaken extensive further reading in my own time. When in Rome or Rio of Riyadh: Cultural Q&As for successful Business Behaviour around the World by Gwyneth Oloffson, is an excellent read. I particularly enjoyed her views on manners and gift giving across the world.

Studying A-level Psychology has also given me insight into the human influences on organisational behaviour through looking at motivational theories, such as the hierarchy of needs model proposed by Maslow. The coursework element has developed my skills in collecting and analysing data in order to establish trends and draw conclusions. A-level English Language has allowed me to develop an ability to express my ideas clearly and concisely.

I have a wide circle of friends and we often meet in our village pub to compete in the quiz. I also enjoy playing football with friends and hope to join a team when I arrive at university. Our family business is very important to me and I work most weekends at our shop, often shadowing my father at meetings with suppliers. I take work very seriously and I feel that my conscientious approach will stand me in good stead for university study.

I recently attended a two-day Challenge of Management conference at my local university. I also had the chance to go on a tour given by a current student and this made me realise that a campus-style university is definitely suited to me. I am certainly going to take advantage of all the opportunities that universities provide to widen your knowledge like clubs and societies.

Strengths

- It is good to explain why a certain book appeals to you because this demonstrates your analytical skills and shows that you read around your subject.
- Mentioning research into universities shows that you are dedicated and focused.

Weaknesses

- The Challenge of Management conference that this student attended is very relevant and should have been expanded upon; always give details about specific experiences like this.

Computer Science

I am fascinated by the way developments in computer science have changed our lives and our work. The world-wide computing industry is set to continue evolving and I am determined to be part of this. Since a very early age I enjoyed playing with computers and now that I am at college I spend a lot of time working with them. As well as Computing, I am taking A-levels in Physics and Mathematics. I believe that these disciplines compliment each other brilliantly and will prepare me well for undergraduate study.

A major recent achievement has been a GCSE physics revision site which I designed for the students at my school. I carried out a significant amount of research prior to designing the site and this was definitely a worthwhile activity. This made me realise how important communication is when producing products. My main goal is to be part of a team that creates efficient and useful software for consumers.

My interest in computing has not only been restricted to school. With the help of my Dad, I have used all of my knowledge and skill to set up my own computer-related business. This challenge has given me a totally new perspective on how IT businesses operate. I had to write a business plan

which was a totally alien experience for me, but once completed and implemented I was rewarded with the satisfaction of knowing that I had achieved something that most people would never have the chance to do, especially at my age.

Although computers are my passion I still enjoy many other activities, particularly reading. Science fiction author Theodore Sturgeon wrote, "a good science fiction story is a story about human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, that would not have happened at all without its science content"; science fiction is certainly the genre I like most probably because of the link between science and real-life.

When I'm not reading I can usually be found at the swimming pool. I have swum competitively since the age of nine. I hope to continue swimming at university and intend to start water-polo, as this is something which I tried at a recent summer school and loved.

I look forward to extending my knowledge of computers and believe that university will enhance the opportunities that I have ahead of me.

Strengths

- This personal statement opens with an excellent concise summary of what prompted initial interest in the subject.
- This student demonstrates that his interest in his chosen subject goes beyond the classroom, which proves his interest in the subject and will strengthen his application.

Weaknesses

- Quotes are good but keep them short and only use them if they are relevant to your application.
- The closing paragraph is very short and reads abruptly; remember to make use of this last chance to impress the Admissions Selector.
- This student could have provided more information on the business he has set up.

Drama

From an early age I have always been fascinated by the stage. Far from being mere entertainment, I believe that a theatrical production can convey so much information and emotion to the audience. Although my main experience in theatre to date is through acting, I am also very interested in other aspects of productions such as lighting and set design, and am keen to learn more about this in a university degree.

For my GCSE Drama final production, a group of us produced a play based on a short story by A.L. Kennedy. Because there were only six of us in the group, we shared a lot of responsibility. I played one of the main characters and was also in charge of obtaining the props we needed. These tasks were enjoyable but the most challenging part of the production was to adapt the story for the stage, and produce a script as close to the original story as possible. This was a demanding but enjoyable job and really opened my eyes to the complexity of adapting stories to the stage.

As well as Theatre Studies, my other AS-levels are in English Literature, Sociology and Biology. In English Literature we have just completed a module on plays in which we studied *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and Shakespeare's *Henry V*. I go to the theatre as often as I can,

and have seen many amateur and professional productions. My favourite playwright is Willy Russell. I think all his plays provide an interesting social commentary, and successfully blend comedy and tragedy. I have seen many musicals, but *Blood Brothers* is by far my favourite; I have now seen it four times! I am looking forward to discovering more playwrights while at university.

My interest in drama and the theatre takes up a lot of my social life. I have taken part in all my school's productions and am also involved in a local drama group 'The Bournemouth and Boscombe Light Operatic Club' - BBLOC for short. Every year we hold a major production, the most recent being *Oh What a Lovely War*. I value the experience of being part of this group as I get to work with people of all different ages. I also have a part-time job in a local Beefeater restaurant. This job has taught me the value of being able to work as part of a team, and I think helps me improve my performance within BBLOC and at school, as good teamwork is crucial to a successful production. I am looking forward to joining a drama society at university, and also possibly a film society, as the cinema and films are another of my passions. I feel I have a lot to contribute to university life and hope you will consider me for a place at your University.

Strengths

- Showing enthusiasm about joining clubs and societies at university will impress; universities like students who get involved.
- This statement shows awareness of different elements of drama beyond acting.

Weaknesses

- This statement is very narrowly focused on drama; it is good to show that you have interests outside your chosen subject area as well as showing enthusiasm for your chosen subject.
- The final sentence is addressed directly to the admissions tutor; this is not advisable. The personal statement is not a letter.

Economics

Since starting my AS-level studies in Economics, I have been eager to continue to a higher level. I am particularly interested in the behaviour of firms and organisations from an economic point of view and I have focused my coursework in this field. I regularly read newspapers and economic publications such as *The Economist* to keep up-to-date with developments in the field, and I find it easy to use my mathematical and analytical skills to apply different economic theories to a range of real-life economic situations. I also take Maths and Politics at AS-level and know that the skills I am acquiring from these will prepare me well for university-level study. I recently enjoyed the chance to put some of my business economic theory into practice when I took part in an economics and business project called Young Enterprise. With a group of peers I set up a small company and sold stationery packs to students at our school. It was an excellent experience and I was able to enhance my management, communication and teamwork skills. I also achieved a distinction in the associated exam.

I would consider myself to be a very hard worker both in and out of school. Since the age of 16 I have worked part-time at Tesco and have enjoyed positions of increasing responsibility. I now co-ordinate a small group of staff on the shopfloor and have learnt a lot about the way businesses operate in the real world. I would be keen to continue working part-time within this company while at university, as I know I would be able to manage my time successfully and would enjoy being self-sufficient. I have a real passion for all kinds of sport and regularly represent my school in various activities ranging from tennis to football. I have played tennis at county-level for two years now and am looking forward to trying new sports at university. Music is also very important to me and I am a member of the sixth form rock band 'Chaos'. I am thrilled at the prospect of facing new challenges, including working and living independently. I also believe that I will gain a highly marketable set of skills from the study of economics at university, which will prepare me well for the exciting future ahead.

Strengths

- The strong involvement in sport and music demonstrates dedication.
- This student has succeeded in conveying enthusiasm without going overboard.

Weaknesses

- Attention needs to be paid to style; the paragraphs are far too long and could be broken down into at least four separate ones.
- There are a few typing errors and missing letters in this personal statement.

English Language and Linguistics

My interest in linguistics has grown from my first year of sixth form when I took a course in English Language. During this course, I studied the work of Trudgill. I found this particularly interesting as I enjoyed looking at how and why the social class of a person affects how they speak. I also found the gender and language issues relating to how males and females approach language in a different manner very interesting. I have a general interest in sociology and look forward to combining this with my interests in linguistics.

Last summer I spent a month in Spain where I worked as a teaching assistant in a local school. Working in a foreign country allowed me to experience life where I did not completely understand the language used around me. It became clear that language is an essential tool used everyday for communication. This opportunity allowed me to see language being used in different environments and I now want to understand how languages are used and how they work.

During my time at school I have been actively involved with the netball team, working my way to becoming captain last year. Being involved in the team has allowed me to develop my communication and time-management skills, along with motivating the rest of my team. I really enjoy volunteering and once a week I help younger students to learn Spanish. After my undergraduate degree I plan

to study a PGCE as I would like to become a secondary school teacher of Spanish. I believe that volunteering will allow me to learn skills which will help me with this career path.

I have also been the Managing Director of a Young Enterprise company which won two awards for quality and best product at the local awards evening. Our company has also been selected to attend the regional awards later this month. From this interesting experience I learnt a lot about how the real world works and I worked incredibly hard to achieve my highest potential and compete successfully.

As well as these school organised activities, I also work in the local supermarket. I have to relate to the customers and assist them in a variety of ways. I feel this has boosted my confidence and improved my inter-personal skills both of which I think will help me in the transition from sixth form to university. I believe that studying linguistics at university will expand my knowledge of language, which I know will be essential in my future career. I look forward to setting myself new challenges and building upon my existing experience, which will hopefully help me to achieve my ambition of becoming a successful teacher.

Strengths

- This statement shows that the student has put thought into their long-term career goal. Although this is not essential and often not possible, it does demonstrate focused thought.
- This student draws attention to the skills she has developed through being involved in her activities (hockey, Young Enterprise, part-time job), which is effective as the skills she mentions will be useful at university.

Weaknesses

- This student has used the words 'interest'/'interesting' five times in the first paragraph. It is essential, especially for a subject like English Language, to demonstrate a wide vocabulary.
- More could have been made of her Spanish skills; it is important not to under sell yourself.

European Studies and Politics

(example of a joint degree application)

The history, politics and culture of the European Union, since its beginnings in the 1950s, has always interested me, and as a result European Studies is a natural choice of degree for me to study. I find Europe fascinating: that a group of diverse countries with their own cultures and heritage should come together and form common policies is an interesting and often controversial area, and one I would like to discover more about.

I have chosen to apply for a joint course in European Studies and Politics as I believe the two disciplines are closely interlinked. Politics plays such a major part in all our lives and the work of governments shapes both the life of the individual and a country's place on the world stage. Through my A-level History scheme I have studied British governments in the nineteenth and twentieth century and I also keep up-to-date with modern UK and foreign politics by watching the news and reading broadsheet newspapers. I am particularly drawn to European Studies and Politics as the degree would offer me the opportunity to become familiar with the political systems of several countries; I am looking forward to studying more of the history and politics of Europe, particularly in the twentieth century.

As well as History, my other two A-levels are Business Studies and German. I also have an AS-level in Performing Arts. In Business Studies my main interest is the relationship between governments and industry; how, for example, the laws passed by governments can shape the present and future industry of a country. This relationship will be the topic for my final project in Business Studies.

I have travelled to France, Spain and Germany several times, for family holidays and for exchange trips with my school. I am looking forward to the year abroad offered by the degree and would like to spend that in Germany or France.

Outside of school I play the trumpet and cornet, and am currently working toward my grade 6 exam for the trumpet. I have played in several school concerts and am a member of the Watchet Town Brass Band. I also enjoy going to the cinema and spending time with my friends.

I am looking forward to the opportunities that going to university will provide and to studying two subjects that have always fascinated me. I have a long-term goal of working abroad, possibly for the EU in Brussels, and I hope with a university education behind me, I can be successful in this mission.

Strengths

- This student conveys her passion for both European Studies and Politics very well.
- She mentions the year abroad and talks about where she might like to spend it. It is good to show that you are thinking ahead.

Weaknesses

- Silly spelling mistakes look sloppy and there's no excuse!
- It is a shame she does not go into detail about A-level German. This subject is very relevant to European Studies and some emphasis on her language skills would have strengthened her application, particularly as she is thinking about spending her year abroad in Germany.

Film Studies

Film Studies is my chosen subject at University because I have a lifelong passion for all aspects of film. Obviously I love watching and critiquing films, but I also have an interest in film production, including special effects. I enjoy seeing the new developments in CGI and other techniques such as prosthetics, sound, and camera angles. As a child I loved Disney films but as I have matured I have grown to enjoy the works of David Lynch and to appreciate European cinema. The film which has had the most impact upon me in recent years is Florian Hankel von Donnersmarck's 'The Lives of Others'. As I am also interested in modern European history I found this film compelling and raised many questions in my mind.

Much of my interest in film stems from my A-level work in Media Studies. I have written several long essays which have achieved good marks, and have taught me the importance of expressing an argument clearly, and paying attention to detail. Taking Media Studies has opened my eyes to film interpretation and the film making approach, such as the use of story boards and editing techniques. I enjoy making and producing films as much as interpreting them. My most recent piece of coursework was a short promotional film designed to encourage children to play tennis. Although the production was at times challenging, as there were

some complicated shots to film and the 'stars' of our film were all under nine years old, it was very rewarding to see the finished result and it received great praise. I really look forward to making and producing films at university.

My other A-level courses are History and Business Studies. I also took AS-level German which has helped in my appreciation of European cinema. I look forward to the opportunity to perhaps continue some aspects of these courses at University. I am also keen to get involved with the University Film Society, and also the football and tennis teams. Sport is a big part of my life, both as an active player and a spectator. I have been fortunate to be able to travel around Europe to attend tennis tournaments and have seen many of the 'greats' play: Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal to name a few. My all time idol is Pete Sampras; I admired his combination of huge talent and commitment which made him, in my opinion, one of the best tennis players of all time.

I am looking forward to the opportunities a university degree will give me, both academic and social and I feel ready for this new chapter in my life. Through my studies and my personal experiences, I am convinced that Film Studies is the right choice for my university degree.

Strengths

- The student is very focused towards film studies and uses enthusiastic, positive language when writing about the subject.
- It is good to give an example of relevant work carried out at A-level (the tennis film).
- The student is clearly looking forward to university life.

Weaknesses

- The student could have given more information in the first paragraph regarding film production and special effects: he seems to 'gloss over' these interests.
- He goes off on a tangent about his favourite tennis players: this part of the personal statement could have been shortened to make room for the point raised above.

History

I am applying to study History at university because this is a subject which has fascinated me from an early age. The study of history plays a large part in understanding who we are today, how nations are shaped, how conflicts begin and how they are resolved, and most importantly, how a country's heritage and values are created.

My GCSE and A-level syllabi have concentrated heavily on modern British history, an era which fascinates me, and which I would like to continue studying at university. In my spare time I have been reading into British immigration in the 1950s, a topic I find very interesting and a subject particularly relevant to present-day Britain. I have also been interested in military history, in particular the use of animals in warfare, especially homing pigeons and horses. This interest culminated in me going to see the play 'War Horse' by Michael Morpurgo, which left a great impression upon me.

This link between past and present is one which fascinates me. I have been to several museums and historical sites, and am a member of English Heritage. I find that visiting historical sites is a great complement to my studies. I am passionate

about preserving historical buildings as they serve to remind us of our country's past. As well as studying British history at university, I also look forward to studying the history of other countries as a comparison to our own, such as Russian or American history.

To relax from my studies I play rugby in my school team: we were recently finalists in an inter-school tournament. I also work weekends in my local Asda store, where I have recently been promoted to 'greeter'. This is a front-of-house job where I help customers with queries and make announcements over the loudspeaker system. I also watch out for suspicious activity and recently helped to catch a notorious shoplifter who was later arrested and charged. Being a greeter has improved my confidence greatly and taught me how to think on my feet and handle responsibility.

I am looking forward to going to university as it will provide me with an opportunity to be independent and to meet new people. But most importantly, I am looking forward to furthering my knowledge of history and continuing my interest in what has always been my favourite subject.

Strengths

- This student's comments about WW1 show they have an interest in history and current affairs, and can formulate their own opinions from what they have read.
- The student also shows they have given some thought to other aspects of history (Russian, American) that they might like to explore at university, which again suggests they are forward thinking and enthusiastic about studying history at university.

Weaknesses

- There is an over-use of the phrase 'I am looking forward to...'
- This personal statement is a little short and some parts could have been elaborated upon: the student could have talked about the historical buildings they have visited, for example.

Latin American Studies

My name is Katherine Jones and I am 17 years old. I am applying to study Latin American Studies at university as I am passionate about other countries and cultures and I would relish the opportunity to study the development of other cultures in more depth at university.

I have an interest in all of the developing world, but Latin America has always particularly fascinated me. It has a rich history and vibrant culture and the countries that make up Latin America are so diverse. I closely follow the news and current affairs of Latin America, such as the re-election of Michelle Bachelet in 2014, Chile's first female president and the relationship between Cuba and the United States. I am also fascinated by the region's geography and how that has affected the fortunes of its countries.

It has always been my ambition to travel to Peru to visit the ancient Inca civilisations. I intend to take a gap year before starting university and plan to travel to Chile with Teaching and Projects Abroad. I am really looking forward to this experience as a chance to see first-hand the culture of a Latin American country and an opportunity to improve

my Spanish! I also hope to travel to neighbouring countries and believe that spending my gap year in Latin America will surely enhance my study of the region at degree level.

I currently attend a large sixth form college, which is very different to the small rural school I went to previously. The college environment requires me to be more independent and motivate myself to study, and I have met hundreds of new people and made new friends. As a result I feel I will adapt to a university community well. At college I write articles for the monthly newsletter and help with campaigns such as boycotting Nestle products in the college canteen and running petitions on behalf of Amnesty International. I feel strongly about human rights abuse around the world and would like to continue my work for Amnesty while at university.

I have attended a number of university open days and feel I will adapt to university life well. I believe I have the passion and commitment to make a success of my studies at university, and I am greatly looking forward to the opportunity of studying Latin America in more depth.

Strengths

- The gap year is very relevant here and talking about her plans shows her enthusiasm for the subject. The student also expresses that the gap year will enhance her studies. In some subjects (such as Latin American Studies) taking a gap year strengthens your application.
- The student shows an interest in current affairs in Latin America and displays a lot of enthusiasm, which is good.

Weaknesses

- The first sentence, in which the student states her name and age, is irrelevant. You provide your name and age elsewhere in the UCAS Form.

Law and Human Rights

My aspiration to study law is firmly rooted in my interest in world events and with my desire to help others. Law affects our everyday lives, almost without us noticing. The news always features an aspect of law up for debate. Ethical issues are often brought to the forefront on topics such as animal testing, abortion and gay rights. I find these debates absolutely fascinating and the complexity of law continues to astound me.

I have always maintained an independent, self-motivated approach to my academic studies. Having studied a broad range of AS and A-level subjects, I feel I have acquired a strong selection of skills: from Mathematics and Philosophy I have learnt the art of questioning the world around us and developing a keen sense of intellectual curiosity; from English Language and General Studies I have understood the importance of expressing myself clearly and concisely through words; whilst from ICT I have developed a solid understanding of an area which is playing an increasingly important role in today's society.

I have spent time in the public galleries of both the local County Court and High Court. I am fascinated by the processes that take place and my long-term ambition is to play an integral role in the court room. In November I am due to shadow a district judge for a week, giving valuable insight into the day to day workings of the job. I built upon my initial interest by keenly reading *The Law Machine* by Marcel Berlins and Clare Dyer; it provided me with a firm grounding in the essential principles of the British legal system and highlighted its apparent weaknesses.

To gain a different perspective of the law I had the chance to take a work experience placement with a local solicitor's firm. My work evolved from basic administrative duties, such as filing, faxing and answering telephone calls, into accompanying solicitors to court and liaising with barristers on behalf of the firm. The opportunity to work alongside people who have dedicated their lives to the law has strengthened my decision to study this challenging discipline.

A keen passion of mine is debating and I have represented my school in various competitions. In year eleven I was a member of the winning team in the Rotary Youth Speaks final for East Anglia. Our presentation – Is it ever justifiable to execute criminals? – was given a special award of distinction. I was appointed senior prefect at my school this year and it is a position which I take great pride in. It involves helping to maintain discipline amongst the younger pupils during lunch-breaks and representing the school at various events.

In my spare time I like to swim and play netball. Although I do not play at a recognised level, I would be very keen to continue them as hobbies when I reach university. I understand the importance of having a good balance between work and play and I am confident that I would make the most of my time as a student. I believe that my ability to motivate myself is a key factor in my overall success. I am an extremely hardworking person and I am committed to reaching my goals. I believe I can contribute a genuine passion and enthusiasm for reading law and I thank you for taking the time to consider my application.

Strengths

- Work experience is something which admissions tutors notice, especially for a competitive degree such as Law.
- Debating experience is also very relevant for this subject area.

Weaknesses

- A spelling mistake in the first line will not impress. You must proof read carefully.

Liberal Arts

I am applying to study Liberal Arts at university because I have always been interested in many different subjects and reluctant to pinpoint a favourite. When I first heard that there was a degree that covered a range of different disciplines I realised that this would be the perfect option for me. During my sixth form studies I was always aware that I wanted to attend university but, unlike my friends, I found it difficult to find a university course which was not totally specialised and would allow me to continue with my wide range of interests. The huge range of disciplines available in the Liberal Arts course is a perfect fit for my wide ranging interests and thirst for many different types of knowledge, and I am convinced it is the best course choice for me.

While studying for my International Baccalaureate, the courses I enjoyed the most were English, Philosophy, French and History. These are all subjects I am interested in continuing at university, particularly English Literature. I was also fortunate to take standard level Latin which has provided a useful background for my interests in languages and philosophy.

Since I left school two years ago, I have worked in several places: in the retail sector and more recently in an art gallery owned by a family friend. Working full time has opened my eyes to the world of work and taught me skills which I believe will be invaluable at university: time management, responsibility, interacting with all walks of life and the importance of being friendly and cheerful to others. While working in the gallery I have also been given additional roles and responsibilities: such as organising exhibitions, managing the mailing list and publicising the gallery. I recently had to organise a private view for a local artist which involved printing invitations, organising the guest list and refreshments, and ensuring the evening ran smoothly. I really enjoyed this experience and I am now considering a career in gallery management or public relations.

I also enjoy reading (my favourite genres are the historical novel and autobiographies) and travelling: I am currently saving in order to spend a month travelling around Europe this summer. I am looking forward to meeting lots of different people and enjoying the cultural diversity that a university will have to offer. But more importantly, I am keen to return to academic life and will relish the challenges that a broad-ranging degree such as Liberal Arts will have to offer me.

Strengths

- This student writes confidently and fluently, and displays clear enthusiasm for the course.
- She has given details about what she has been doing since leaving school, which is essential for students who apply during their gap years.
- Her work experience is well presented and relevant.

Weaknesses

- She could have given more information about her IB studies: what exactly the courses involved, for example.
- Although this personal statement is relevant to the Liberal Arts course at Essex, it may not fit Liberal Arts degrees at other universities. It is important to ensure your personal statement is relevant to all your course choices.

Literature and Creative Writing

“Every secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works.”

This quote by Virginia Woolf summarises why I believe literature to be so fascinating and why I have chosen English Literature as the subject I wish to study at university level. Through my studies of A-level English Language and Literature, and my own discoveries of authors such as Virginia Woolf, George Eliot and Charles Dickens, I have found that authors do more than just tell a story; they also convey their own personal thoughts and opinions, and often provide a fascinating social commentary. For example, *Middlemarch* gives a snapshot of nineteenth century provincial life, while Jane Austen’s novels often reveal her own – sometimes sarcastic – views on social situations in the early nineteenth century. These are the reasons why I believe literature to be such a rich source of information and why I would really like to study English Literature in more depth at undergraduate level.

I spent my schools work experience week as an assistant in my local ‘Borders’ bookshop. I enjoyed working with the staff on book promotions and helping to organise a book signing which was

taking place the following week. I was also asked to write reviews on books I had read which were then displayed on the shelves. As I have a passion for books and reading, I really enjoyed encouraging others – particularly children – who visited the shop to read more, or to discover authors they had perhaps not previously heard of. Although I am not longer convinced that working in retail is right for me, after university I would like to pursue a career involving books and literature, such as perhaps publishing or teaching English.

As well as reading, I also enjoy getting involved in my local community in my spare time. As part of my school’s volunteering scheme, I work on Wednesday afternoons in a local charity shop. Through this work I have become friendly with some of the older ladies who work in the shop and now help them to write our village newsletter, which is distributed monthly. This is an interesting and satisfying task.

As I enjoy reading and discovering new writers and what they have to say about the world, I feel that English Literature is the right degree choice for me. I am looking forward to the opportunities I will have to discuss and write about texts, and the increased career prospects I am sure being a graduate will offer me.

Strengths

- Being able to compare and contrast texts in a concise way demonstrates passion and ability.
- It can be good to discuss books discovered outside the A-level syllabus because this shows real motivation to read.

Weaknesses

- There are several spelling and grammar mistakes. Admissions tutors will note these.
- Try to avoid comments that could be perceived as negative. For example, this student did not need to say that working in retail is no longer right for her. If you feel it is important to include such information, explain how this experience has helped you and will be valuable to your future career.

Mathematics

Mathematics is a subject that I have thoroughly enjoyed throughout my primary and secondary education. I enjoy the challenge of thinking in a logical way and am always attracted to mathematical problems, however difficult and regardless of the form in which they come. Having studied A-level Mathematics for a year, I have been able to have a taste of many different topics. Pure mathematics is my favourite area, particularly sequences and functions, and I look forward to learning more about these and other topics in much more depth. A Mathematics degree will provide me with the challenge that I am ready for.

I always work hard at school and have a good level of concentration. I am efficient and make good use of the time from free periods to complete my homework. Deadlines are always met to the best of my ability and I make a real effort to present my work clearly. As a member of my school community, I believe that I have contributed greatly. Having been appointed to the position of Head Maths Prefect, I am now responsible for the Maths Department during lunchtimes and run a weekly maths club called Pythagoras. This club is for younger years and I set logic puzzles, help with homework and hold a quiz at the end of the session. Spending time with the younger pupils has made me realise that I might like to be a teacher. My enthusiasm for the subject resulted in me winning a maths prize, which was a great honour.

Out of school I am a keen musician and play trumpet in a brass band. I have been a member for almost four years and would like to continue this interest at university. I am due to take my grade 8 exam this winter and intend to start teaching afterwards as I think this would be a valuable skill. Another passion of mine is comic art. John McLusky, who was the original artist of the James Bond 007 Strip Cartoon Series in the Daily Express, is my hero, and I enjoy visiting his exhibitions whenever I can.

I am greatly looking forward to the transition from school to university because of the independence and opportunities that university life will offer. I will get involved in many different clubs and societies and try some new sports, like karate, that I am not able to do at school. I believe that the challenge of studying and developing my mathematical knowledge to a higher level is going to be one that I will thoroughly enjoy.

Strengths

- This student demonstrates real interest for the subject. Don't sell yourself short; if you are involved in clubs at school remember to talk about these.
- The student has given thought to the future: talking about hobbies they want to continue, others they would like to take up and a possible career as a teacher. It is always good to be forward-thinking in the personal statement.

Weaknesses

- More detail could have been given on the maths prize, as this award is relevant.
- The student does not mention any of his other A-level subjects. Although not essential, an interest in other studies beyond Maths could be useful, especially if they complement your Maths studies (eg Further Maths, Physics).

Modern Languages

'If you can speak three languages, you are trilingual; if you can speak two languages, you are bilingual; if you can speak one language, you are English!'

This German joke is one which I find amusing but also slightly shocking. Learning languages has always been a passion for me and it is my ambition to be fluent in at least one other language. This is why the decision to study Modern Languages at university was an easy choice to make. The ability to speak foreign languages and the privilege of communicating with others in their own language has always fascinated me. My mother's side of the family is Welsh and one of my earliest memories was being upset that my cousins were speaking a mysterious language which I could not understand. I find it frustrating not to be able to communicate with others through a common language and I believe that by studying Modern Languages at university I will be helping to enrich my career prospects and gain invaluable skills I will use for the rest of my life.

I am currently studying for A2 Levels in French, Spanish and Art. I enjoy all my subjects, and they challenge me in different ways. I am keen to continue my studies in French and Spanish at university, and I would also like to take up a third

language such as Italian or Russian. The history and culture of Spain and France also interests me. In my AS studies, I researched the Spanish civil war and how it was reflected in pieces of art such as Picasso's Guernica. In French I also wrote an extended essay on how the region of Brittany was once a separate country with its own language and customs, and drew parallels between Brittany and Cornwall. I believe that my language studies will be enriched by also studying the history and culture of the countries where these languages are spoken and look forward to learning more about France and Spain at university.

I plan to take a gap year before starting university and have been researching into organisations which offer placements teaching English to children. I would like to go to a Latin American country, such as Chile or Brazil, so I could improve my Spanish. These plans tie in with my interest in language learning and I would like to share my passion for languages with others.

In my spare time I play the piano and read. I also have a part-time job in a local café and babysit for several families in my village. I am looking forward to university as I believe it is the next step in my life and will help me reach my linguistic goals.

Strengths

- It is good to show that thought has been given to gap year activities, as this demonstrates strong determination and good organisation skills.
- It is sensible to discuss various A-level topics if they relate closely to the course(s) being applied for.

Weaknesses

- This applicant fails to elaborate on part-time jobs and hobbies, so does not make full use of the opportunity to highlight extra skills and knowledge.
- Make sure that you know what you are talking about; Brazil is a Portuguese-speaking country!

Philosophy

Philosophy involves a critical examination of our most fundamental beliefs about truth and reality, right and wrong. It challenges many of our assumptions about what we know and how we should live. It is for these reasons that Philosophy intrigues me more than any other discipline that I have studied. My teacher told me that the best reason for studying anything is if you enjoy it. I thoroughly enjoy Philosophy and know that I will have the determination to do well at university.

A-level Philosophy has provided me with an excellent grounding on which to build. By reading Plato's Republic I have become particularly intrigued by the field of ethics, and I am especially interested in the apparent conflict between causation and free will. This issue has profound significance to society and social justice, and the ways in which we choose to reward and punish. Psychology is another favourite subject which I am taking at A-level and I am definitely acquiring transferable skills which will assist me when I reach university.

I enjoy music and gained a distinction in my grade 5 flute. I have also become involved with Worldwide Volunteers, an organisation which gives people volunteering placements across the world. So far I have done placements locally, mainly working in a care home organising activities for patients with dementia. I hope in the future to take up a volunteering placement further afield, such as in Africa. When I was a child, my family was based in several countries for my father's work, and I feel lucky to have met many people from different cultures and backgrounds. These experiences have made me very aware that cultural diversity is a fantastic thing and I am very excited about meeting new people at university.

Apart from academic study, I believe that university life will offer me a solid start in life generally and I am eager to become involved in such a large community.

Strengths

- This student has a keen enthusiasm for the subject and presents this well.
- The first paragraph is very strong. Remember that the opening few lines are the most important as they have to capture the reader's attention.

Weaknesses

- This statement is too short. It gives the impression that the student has little to say about themselves. It is important that you make the most of this chance to sell yourself.
- This student does not elaborate on their experiences whilst travelling, which is a missed opportunity to demonstrate exposure to different cultures.

Politics

I am eager to read Politics at university, particularly Comparative Politics and International Relations. I am currently studying History, Economics and English Literature at A-level. These subjects have enabled me to gain a selection of skills that I believe will prepare me well for a university degree.

I am involved with the South Suffolk Liberal Democrats and have worked on many campaigns. I worked as a volunteer delivering leaflets and newsletters. I found this highly enjoyable and my ambition to become involved in real-life politics was confirmed. This has also increased my knowledge of the British political system.

I enjoy becoming involved in debates. I have taken part in several on issues including the Scottish Referendum, capital punishment and the bedroom tax. This has developed my ability to form arguments and improved my public speaking skills. At the last general election my school held a mock election. I loved this experience and look forward to doing more things like this at university.

I was recently involved in helping to organise a visit to my school by our local Labour MP, including a question-and-answer session with the students. This was followed by a visit to the Houses of Parliament in which we met with the MP again, and were also given the chance to watch a session of Prime Minister's Question Time. This was interesting because it was at the time when many questions were being asked about the scandal surrounding expense claims submitted by MPs, and the ensuing debate was fascinating to watch.

Dancing is my passion and I have been attending ballet, tap and modern classes since I was three years old. I was recently selected to attend a summer school at the Royal Ballet School. This was an excellent experience as I was chosen to play Juliet in the final show. I also work in a gift shop on Saturdays.

My career ambition is to have a job in professional politics as an MP. I want to play a part in national policy making and legislation, as well as experiencing the pride of being a democratic representative of the people. I am excited by the prospect of becoming a student and relish the challenge ahead of me.

Strengths

- This student's interest in Politics is clearly demonstrated by their extra-curricular activities and their current political involvements.
- The student's determination and enthusiasm really show through, and it is good that they highlight skills they learned from debating, that they will no doubt use at university.

Weaknesses

- This student says that they gained a selection of skills from the A-levels that they are studying, but fails to describe and elaborate on these.
- There isn't much evidence of an interest in International Relations. Try not to focus too much on one part of a joint degree.

Psychology

From an early age I have been interested in people and the way that they behave. This keen interest has been enhanced through my study of Psychology at A-level. I enjoy the variety of psychology and am eager to gain deeper knowledge and acquire practical skills in new areas of the discipline. My favourite module so far has been Social Psychology, with particular emphasis on physical attractiveness and the formation of relationships. My final-year project, 'Do birds of a feather flock together?' tests the hypothesis that people select partners who are of a similar level of attractiveness. I really like the way that you can apply different psychological theories to real-life situations.

Although Psychology is my strongest subject, I have thoroughly enjoyed my other academic studies whilst at college and can appreciate how they will help me with my future studies. I have strengthened my assessment and evaluation skills through A-level Religious Studies, particularly the modules on philosophy and ethics. I believe that my study of ethics will be very advantageous when applied to the often problematic field of psychological research at university-level.

I have achieved my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award, am currently working towards my Silver, and am hoping to gain Gold level at university. I love planning and undertaking expeditions as they are physically demanding and require total teamwork from start to finish. I also enjoy working for the 'service' element of the award. At the moment I visit the elderly residents at the local sheltered housing association once a week. This work can be quite emotionally draining at times but incredibly rewarding.

At weekends I work in a restaurant and have recently been promoted to head waitress. This position means that I am in charge of four other waiting staff during service and am responsible for co-ordinating the weekly rota. People often comment that I possess good communication skills and that I am a real team-player. I know that these qualities will prepare me well for life at university.

I am very determined to make the most of my time at university. I am looking forward to making lots of new friends and being able to get involved in different sporting and social activities. Although I don't have any clear career plans, I know that a degree in psychology will provide me with an excellent set of transferrable skills for the future.

Strengths

- Discussing involvement in youth awards such as Duke of Edinburgh is an excellent way of illustrating teamwork skills.
- It can be effective to talk about a project you have undertaken as part of your studies, especially if it is work you are particularly interested in or proud of.

Weaknesses

- This student doesn't actually write that they would like to study Psychology at university until the very end. It is important to state in your opening paragraph what subjects you are applying for and why.
- Many students don't have 'clear career plans', but it looks better if you don't declare this in your personal statement.

Sociology

I like the way that Sociology makes you question the world around you. For example, why do some people commit more crime than others? It was this question that sparked my interest in this discipline. During my AS-level studies I have had the opportunity to become familiar with various sociologists and their perspectives. I am particularly interested in the thoughts of Emile Durkheim in relation to crime and deviance. I am quite confident that when I graduate I would like to enter the police force, as my father and grandfather have done so before me.

I have considered applying for a more focused criminology degree; however, I am attracted to the broad approach of a sociology degree and know that I will enjoy learning about all aspects of the discipline, not just crime. I also look forward to being able to acquire new skills within the area of research methods as I am able to appreciate the connection between theory and research.

I also study Drama at AS-level and this has considerably increased my confidence as an actor over the past few years. My greatest dramatic achievement to date was performing in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee earlier this year. I was selected to play the part of Atticus Finch and this was a fantastic experience. I had to work intensively with four people I didn't usually associate with outside lessons, which greatly

enhanced my communication and teamwork skills. The lengthy script that I had to commit to memory helped to further my confidence and self-belief. Another reason for enjoying this play is that it's most important theme is the moral nature of human beings – that is, whether people are essentially good or essentially evil.

I am a keen chess player and regularly compete in competitions at regional and national level. In 2013 I reached the finals of the UK Chess Challenge and that was without doubt the most pivotal moment in my chess-playing career. When I reach university I intend to get very involved in clubs and societies as I think this is an excellent way to socialise and develop your skills and hobbies.

I work at the police station at the weekends doing administrative duties. This is an excellent opportunity as although I am not able to get quite as involved as I'd like, I am able to absorb information that will prepare me well for my future career. University life will suit me well because I am a sociable person who enjoys spending time with people. I am confident that I will be able to balance my studies with a healthy social life because I am organised and good at working to a timetable. Thank you for taking the time to read my application, I hope you can see my potential.

Strengths

- There is evidence that this student has read around the subject and has researched the degree schemes available.
- The part-time job at the police station demonstrates both focus and commitment.

Weaknesses

- Each paragraph begins with 'I'; this is very repetitive and shows lack of stylistic consideration.
- The final sentence is unnecessary and could have been put to better use.

Sports and Exercise Science and Sports Therapy

I have always wanted a career in sport. Since taking A-level Sports Science my eyes have been opened to the opportunities that are available at undergraduate level. Detailed research has confirmed that a degree in Sports Science will provide me with a solid understanding of the biology, physiology and psychology required to succeed in my chosen discipline.

I am fascinated by the various methods used to assess and measure physical activity and the changes in physiology that result from exercise and training. Last summer I attended a residential sports science summer school at my local university. We had various taster sessions with academics and I thoroughly enjoyed all of them. I was particularly fascinated by the Human Performance Unit because it was jam-packed with the latest gear. We were shown how all the different apparatus worked and were allowed to carry out tests using some of the more basic pieces. I also heard talks from current students and they really made me realise that I would fit into student life easily.

Sport is obviously very important to me and I do get involved both in and out of school. I play hockey at county-level and will want to continue when I reach university. I am also eager to become involved in new sports and will enjoy helping to run clubs as I feel I have a lot of knowledge and experience to share. Football is also strong a passion of mine and I have recently been selected to assist with coaching the youth team at my town club. I am looking forward to working with children as I know that I will gain lots of new skills.

I have a part-time job as a retail assistant in a leisure wear shop. I really enjoy helping customers and advising them on the most appropriate clothing and equipment. I am also responsible for the tills at the end of the day and am often trusted to close the shop. I would consider myself to be an excellent communicator and I also possess good time-keeping skills; I hate being late for anything! I know that both these attributes will stand me in good stead for academic life.

I am so determined to become a student, studying the subject that I love. I know that I will put every effort into making the most of my time, both academically and socially.

Strengths

- It is good to mention any previous experience of visiting universities, eg summer school or A-level conference, as this demonstrates keen interest to the admissions tutor.
- This student backs up their interest in sport through a lot of extra-curricular involvement, which will be impressive to the admissions tutor.

Weaknesses

- Although this student is clearly focused on the subject and has a sporting interest which is very important for his chosen subject area, they could have expanded more on their interests outside of sports and been clearer about what their career in sport will be.
- The final statement is slightly weak and would have been more effective if the student had summed up by re-iterating the reasons why they are looking forward to going to university to study Sports Science.

What not to write: example of a personal statement with several weaknesses

For a number of years I have been keen to apply university as I believe having a degree will help me find better employment in later life. After much consideration, I have decided that Business Management is the right degree for me as I would like to learn the skills to help me become successful in business, and I am interested in finding out how businesses work. My father runs his own business and I have learned a lot from watching him work and hearing about the ups and downs of being a small businessman. I would now like to learn more about the theoretical side of business management.

I do not currently take AS-level Business Studies. This is not because of any lack of interest or motivation on my part, but because I suffered a major personality clash with the Business Studies teacher at my school. I am currently studying Maths, IT and History, I also took AS-level Further Maths but decided to not to continue it at A2 level, when I decided that although I enjoy Mathematics, I did not want to do a Maths degree at university. I enjoy all the A2 subjects I am taking as I believe they complement each other well, but they also differ. I really enjoy the class discussions, especially in History. I am quite a confident person so I like debating points and challenging the opinions of others in the class. It is a shame that there is not

a debating club at my school as I would definitely have been an active member, but I look forward to perhaps getting involved with one at university. Outside of the classroom I like to relax by playing football (I am a member of my school team and a local five-a-side team) and by boxing. I love boxing as it keeps me fit and helps me release my anger. I am also a keen supporter of Crystal Palace FC. I have supported them since I was five and have stuck with Crystal Palace through thick and thin, which I think displays my commitment and loyalty, qualities that I value very highly in a person. I also have a part-time job at my local Sainsbury's store. At times this can be very demanding as I work on the delicatessen and some customers can be very picky about how thickly you cut their ham or how well you wrap it, but I feel my part-time job has taught me valuable lessons in patience and also in dealing with members of the public.

I think my enthusiasm for going to university is perhaps displayed by the fact that I have carefully chosen which universities to apply to and researched each one thoroughly. I believe I have the motivation and commitment to be a good and successful student, and I hope that gaining a degree will help me reach my ultimate goal of running my own business.

Where did they go wrong?

This personal statement does have some good points, as the student displays their interest in Business Management and touches upon future career plans. However many parts are negative and should have been left out:

- A 'personality clash' with a teacher: NEVER mention a dislike of or lack of respect towards one of your teachers or employers.
- The part about not 'wanting' to study maths at university is negative and not relevant (also some business management degrees will have mathematical elements).
- The student has made some silly spelling and grammar mistakes.
- It's good to talk about the benefits of certain hobbies but saying that boxing helps you release your anger makes this student sound a little scary!
- The comments about the lack of a debating club are also negative. Admissions tutors might wonder why the student could not start a debating club at the school by themselves.
- There is too much detail about the part-time job in Sainsbury's and again it paints a negative picture of the student.

Overall this example shows how important it is to always be positive in the personal statement and to always portray yourself in the best possible light. Even a flippant comment or observation might give a bad impression of you, however unintentional. The best way to avoid this is to get someone else to read your personal statement carefully and for you to be prepared to take others' advice and, possibly, change what you have written.

References

Your school or college will write your reference which, along with your personal statement, admissions tutors value highly when making their decision.

Your reference may be written by more than one person, usually your Head of Sixth Form or Head of Department, in conjunction with your subject tutors. Most references will talk about you from the teacher's perspective; how you work academically, how you interact with other students and teachers, for example. Your reference will also include your teacher's predictions of your final grades.

Most references also contain the following:

- Information about your performance in individual modules (e.g. your tutor may highlight if you were one mark away from an A grade)
- Your proposed career plan, if you have one, so make sure your tutors are aware of your career ideas and any work experience you have
- Their opinion of your suitability for a particular profession (e.g. a caring nature for nursing)
- Anything that may have happened to you to affect your academic work (e.g. an ongoing illness)
- Any personal circumstances which have affected, or will affect, your performance (e.g. the illness or death of a close relative)
- Information about your special needs that you may have, such as a disability or learning difficulties and how you cope with these.

If you have any issues that you want universities to be aware of when considering your application – such as your grades being affected by illness – this should be in your reference, rather than your personal statement, so do discuss this with your tutors.

Most referees focus on your academic successes and potential at university, and how you have progressed in your subjects. A reference is almost always a positive record of your performance and academic abilities: remember your tutors want you to get a university place and are writing a reference to help you!

If you are applying as an individual or if you are a mature student then ask for a reference from someone who knows you academically. If you have not attended school or college recently then you could ask an employer, volunteering supervisor or trainer.

Essex101

To help you achieve academic excellence we have created Essex101. Whether you would like some essay-writing advice, need rescuing from revision, or want help with referencing, Essex101 has the answer.

With videos, audio clips, and interactive quizzes to inspire, challenge and support you, Essex 101 will help you reach your potential in your current studies, whilst exploring the key skills required for success at university and beyond.

For more information, please see:

www.essex.ac.uk/essex101

Information for teachers and career advisors

The University of Essex Student Recruitment Team offers talks and workshops on a range of topics related to higher education. These talks can be tailored for parents or students and include:

- Why go to university?
- Choosing a course and university
- Applying to university
- Writing a strong personal statement
- Student finance and budgeting
- Student life

We can also provide other presentations tailored to the specific needs of your school or college. If you would like a representative to deliver a talk please email us: schools-link@essex.ac.uk

Any questions?

If you have any questions about making an application to the University of Essex, please email: admit@essex.ac.uk or call 01206 873666.

