

# This is your chance to shine

How to write a standout  
personal statement



University of  
East Anglia  
Norwich

# Writing a standout personal statement

Getting onto a degree is just like applying for a job: you need to stand out from the crowd. Many other candidates applying for the same course may have similar grades to you, so this is your chance to shine.

The key word is **personal**. Be yourself. Your statement is how admissions officers get to know more about you and why you deserve the place you want at the institution you love.

## Quick tip

Keep it short and snappy. With only 4,000 characters (over three sections) to play with, you need to show your ambitions, skills, experience and achievements in as few words as possible. Edit, edit, edit!

## Quick tip

One statement fits all. Avoid naming a particular university as your statement needs to work for every course and subject you apply for. Focus on common themes instead.





## Activity 1: Myth versus Reality

Test your personal statement knowledge by marking the statements below as **M (myth)** or **R (reality)**.

**M**      **R**

**1**      No one actually reads your personal statement, so it's not that important

**2**      An excellent personal statement can make up for poor grades

**3**      It's important to show your passion and clearly express what excites you about your chosen subject

**4**      You should say you've loved your chosen subject since you were a child


**5**      Including an impressive quotation helps your personal statement stand out

# Activity 2: Timeline


Write the following events into the blank timeline below.

- Making your Firm and Insurance choices
- Applicant Days
- University Research
- Student Finance
- Summer Schools
- UCAS Main Deadline
- Personal Statement
- UCAS Early Deadline

Y12 / L3 Y1			Y13 / L3 Y2									
Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun



<b>When is the internal UCAS application deadline for your sixth form/college?</b>	
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<b>What is your sixth form/college UCAS buzzword?</b>	
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# Action plan

Complete the following action plan below:



Use this document to plan your next steps, create a to do list and plan your journey to university.

Tick when complete	Action	Where am I now?	What do I need to do?
	University and course research		
	Book and attend open days		
	Super-curricular activities (online lectures, MOOCs, work experience etc.)		
	Book and attend summer schools		
	UCAS application		
	Personal statement		
	Student finance calculator/budgeting		
	Student finance application		
	Accommodation research/applying for accommodation		

# What to include

Getting the grades is one thing, but it's not all about your academic ability. Admissions officers are keeping an eye out for candidates who will contribute to university life and the community. So talk about what makes you tick, why you're passionate about your chosen subject, what your interests are, and what you hope to gain from university.



## The PEEL method

### Point

Make your point

### Evidence

Back it up with evidence and examples

### Explain

Explain how the evidence supports your point

### Link

Link it back to your course/subject

## Remember to include:

1. Academic interests
2. Motivation
3. Research and a wider understanding
4. Non-academic experience and activities
5. Ambitions
6. Your skills and experience



## Quick tip

Your statement will be reviewed as a whole, so don't worry too much about which information goes in which section. Just don't repeat information across the three sections.

# Your achievements

It's easy to forget all the things you've taken part in or achieved. So, in the run-up to applying for your degree, keep an ongoing list, including any hobbies, work experience or projects such as an EPQ. You might want to include sports competitions or clubs you belong to, musical interests, summer schools or programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. What skills did you gain? What are you proud of? Why do your experiences make you unique?

## Super-curricular

These are recent activities outside of your studies that relate to your chosen course at university.

## Extra-curricular

These are recent activities outside of your studies that don't relate to your chosen course but do show off those skills you'll need to succeed.

## Other achievements

These are non-accredited training courses or achievements that set you apart. Try to link these skills back to your chosen subject.

# Employment and work experience

Have you had a part-time job? Do you help out in a family business? Or have you taken part in work experience during the school or college holidays? Work experience demonstrates so much about you. But don't just state what you've done, say why it matters. Include what you've learned and how it relates to your chosen course. If your experience doesn't directly relate, demonstrate the important skills you gained, such as time management, professionalism, punctuality, communication and teamwork.

## Quick tip

Don't just state it, relate it. Remember, it's not just about saying what you've done but explaining how it's relevant.



## Activity 3: PEEL - Point, Evidence, Explain, Link

Transferable skills are a core set of abilities you pick up over time. Think about past activities that have helped build your confidence, improved your communication, or that demonstrate flexibility, time management, initiative or even teamwork. Then show how they'll help you on your chosen course.

	<b>Point</b> Make your point.	<b>Evidence</b> Back it up with evidence and examples.	<b>Explain and Link</b>  Explain how the evidence supports your point and link it back to your course/subject.
<b>Personal achievements and academic experience</b> Projects you have completed, things you have learned in class, or academic experiences and skills such as a case study on a particular project.			
<b>Super-curricular activities</b> Activities outside of your current studies that relate to your chosen university course: work experience, MOOCs, or wider reading.			
<b>Extra-curricular activities</b> Activities outside of your studies that don't relate to your chosen course but showcase the skills to succeed: part-time work, sports, societies, volunteering and clubs.			

# How to get started

You don't have to get this right first time, so don't put pressure on yourself at the beginning. You can always go back and make changes once your writing starts to take shape. With no words to waste, it's important to use the character count wisely.

## Activity 4: Skills, skills, skills...

**What are my skills?** Tick which skills you have.



<b>Personal skills</b> Abilities we are born with, our natural talents, or things we develop through experience (such as part-time work).		<b>Transferable skills</b> These are general skills that are important for many areas of life including your education and your career.		<b>Knowledge-based skills</b> These are skills that are specific to a subject, area, or topic.	
Independence		Communication		Programming	
Leadership		Teamwork		Playing an instrument	
Integrity		Organisation		Driving	
Patience		Numeracy		Playing a sport	
Flexibility		Literacy		Chemical analysis	
Compassion		Critical thinking		Speaking a language	
Loyalty		Reflection		Graphic design tools	
Resilience		Problem solving		First aid	
Initiative		Computer literacy		Statistical analysis	
Motivation		Attention to detail		Budgeting	



**Writing about my skills:** 

<b>Communication:</b> Examples of a time I communicated well...	<b>Problem solving:</b> Examples of a time when I have solved problems...	<b>Leadership:</b> Examples of a time when I have shown leadership...	<b>Teamwork:</b> Examples of a time when I have worked as part of a team...

**Subject-related skills:** Choose three knowledge-based skills from the list (or come up with your own ideas) and give an example of when you have used or displayed these skills.



Skill	Give an example: When have you displayed this skill?



**Quick tip**

It's better to reflect on a few key skills and experiences in your personal statement rather than trying to mention everything. Discussing three or four skills with good evidence is better than listing many without depth.

## Activity 5: Structure it

### Top tip

**Showcase your motivation:** Why this course? This is your chance to focus on your motivations and to show why you want to study this course.

**Classroom experiences:** Show how group work, presentations, or leadership roles in the classroom have helped you to develop essential skills like communication, teamwork, and problem solving.

**Engagement with the subject:** Discuss any books, documentaries, podcasts, or articles you've engaged with that relate to your subject.

**Independent learning:** If you've engaged in independent learning, such as online courses, reading, or self-study in areas related to your chosen subject, you should mention how these activities have deepened your knowledge and enthusiasm.

**Overcoming challenges:** Reflect on personal challenges or responsibilities, such as helping with family duties, managing health issues, or balancing schoolwork with other commitments.

**Hobbies and interests:** Even if you haven't engaged in formal extra-curricular activities, hobbies like reading, writing, coding, or any creative pursuits can demonstrate your passion for your subject.

**Part-time work:** If you have a part-time job, describe how this has taught you valuable skills such as time management, responsibility, and working under pressure.

**Future goals:** Connect your academic pursuits to your future career goals. Explain how the skills and knowledge you've developed through your studies align with your ambitions.



## Section 1: Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Show your passion and knowledge for your chosen subject – this will let universities know why you're a good fit.

- What excites you about the subject?
- Share relevant experiences, whether through reading, hobbies, or family influences, that have sparked your interest in the subject.
- How does the course align with your future career ambitions?



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

Talk about the skills you've developed in your education, and how they'll help you to succeed.

- How has your academic journey equipped you with the skills needed to excel in your chosen course?
- Highlight academic achievements that are relevant to the course.
- How have specific subjects or projects prepared you for the next step in your education?



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

Reflect on any other activities or personal experiences outside the classroom that make you suited to the course.

- **Super-curricular activities:** Be sure to mention activities outside of your studies that have helped you develop relevant skills, such as work experience, volunteering, or hobbies related to the course.
- **Transferable skills:** Show how experiences like part-time jobs or extra-curricular activities have developed skills such as time management, teamwork, or leadership, and how these will benefit you in your future studies.
- **Make it personal:** This section is personal to you, so be sure to choose experiences that are meaningful and demonstrate commitment to your chosen subject.



# Dos and Don'ts

## Dos

- Write clearly and apply the 'so what?' test to make sure each sentence is relevant
- Mention relevant authors or academics when you talk about research and background reading
- Read aloud, check your writing carefully and redraft until you are happy
- Ask someone you trust to check your writing for you
- Be enthusiastic about your chosen course

## Don'ts

- Talk about your current course syllabus in detail
- Plagiarise: UCAS has software that can detect any similarities
- Try to be a comedian: you should take the process seriously and avoid informal language
- Exaggerate or lie about your achievements
- Get someone to write it for you



# What next?

## The personal statement is your opportunity to:

- Show your passion, curiosity, and knowledge
- Evidence relevant skills and potential
- Communicate genuine interest and a desire to learn more
- Link your academic, extra-curricular, and other experiences to your chosen area of study

**Remember:** Research is the foundation of a strong personal statement. It's important that you research your chosen area of study before you start writing your personal statement. Start by looking at the course description; this will help you with what to include and will give you a good idea of what your chosen universities are looking for.

## Be yourself

Remember, writing a strong personal statement demonstrates your ability to structure your ideas, write well and back up your thoughts with examples – skills you'll need when you study your chosen subject at university. Getting it right will help you stand out from other candidates and have the best chance of securing your place.

**We all have something that makes us unique.  
Be true to you and present your best self.**



### Quick tip

Make a back-up copy if you're not writing in the cloud.



# What is contextual admissions?

Universities use additional information from your UCAS application to assess your potential to succeed.

You could receive a reduced offer to study, or an invitation to interview/audition. This is called Contextual Admissions

Universities will have different eligibility criteria.

## UEA eligibility

- Live in an Index of Multiple Deprivation postcode decile of 1, 2, or 3 and/or
- Eligible to receive free school meals and/or
- Care experienced and/or
- Estranged

Universities will use information from your UCAS application to make contextual offers; **there's nothing extra you need to do.**

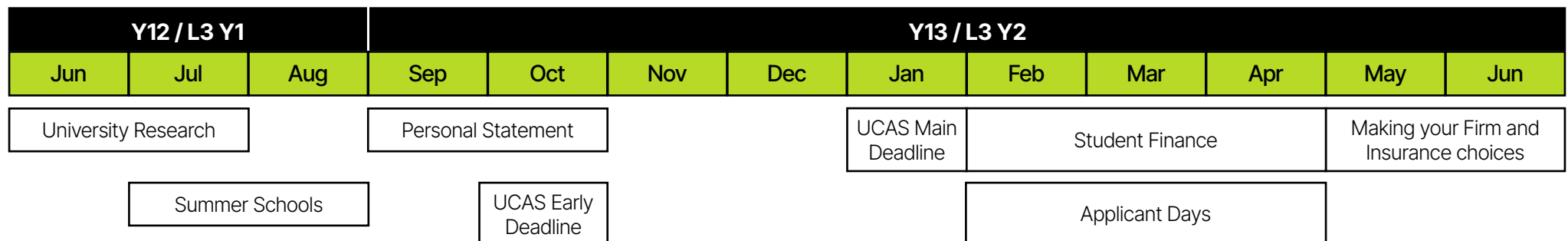


# Activity answers

## Activity 1 answers

- 1. Myth** – Your personal statement is an important part of your degree application. It is read by the institution’s admissions team, and in some cases, subject experts on your course.
- 2. Myth** – Although a personal statement cannot make up for low grades, it is used by admissions teams alongside your predicted grades to determine whether you are suitable for the course. They will look for your demonstration of skills, and in some instances, relevant work experience.
- 3. Reality** – Talking about a particular topic within your subject helps demonstrate both your subject knowledge and your passion. You could talk about a particular area you covered in class that you really enjoyed. The important thing here is to discuss where your passions lie and why you are excited about studying your chosen subject.
- 4. Myth** – A lot of students think they need to say that they’ve been interested in this area since childhood. For some students this may well be the case, however, the key thing here is that it doesn’t matter how long you’ve been interested in the subject. What is important is that you are able to demonstrate your understanding and interest in the subject.
- 5. Myth** – Using quotes in a personal statement is a topic that is often debated. Your personal statement should focus on you. You don’t have a huge word count for this so quoting another individual could take up valuable space.

## Activity 2 answers



# Good luck!

If you'd like to receive information  
about studying at UEA:

Information correct at time of publication – April 2026.