

Kit 1: Personal Statements



ACTIVITY PACK B (2014/15)

Personal Statements: Activity Pack B

Activity B: Overview

This summary provides an indication of how you might wish to organise this activity. You may, of course, wish to adapt the activities to suit your own delivery style or class size.

ACTIVITY B: Reviewing example personal statements	
Concept:	In small groups, students read and discuss the selection of fictitious personal statements with a view to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each document.
Intended outcomes:	By the end of this activity, students should have a deeper understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the need to communicate enthusiasm for, and expertise in, their chosen subject;• what information to include or exclude from their personal statement;• the importance of correct spelling, grammar and structure.
Contents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Example personal statements for the activity;• A handout for students to complete as part of the activity;• Example personal statements with prompts for the teacher.
Resources:	Students should be given copies of the example personal statements and the handout in this Activity Pack B . No further resources are required, although students may like to have pens and/or highlighter pens.
1	Arrange students into small groups (ideally, groups of 2-4). Circulate the example statements and the handout to each group.
2	Ask students to read the example personal statements. They should work together to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each personal statement. They should use the handout as a prompt, and write down their views on the handout.
3	Bring back the discussion to the whole group. You may wish to take each personal statement in turn, and ask each group to explain one strength and one weakness. The discussion may take place verbally, or you may wish to ask students to write their answers on a flip-chart, blackboard, or whiteboard at the front of the room.

Further notes:

For this activity, it is essential to emphasise to students that the personal statements are fictitious; they have been written solely for this exercise to help students identify the strengths and weaknesses of the personal statements. Consequently, all the examples include weaknesses as well as strengths, and so should not be viewed as models.

After the activity, you might like to highlight the following:

- the importance of communicating your enthusiasm for your chosen subject;
- the importance of constructing a clearly structured, succinct, and grammatically correct statement;
- the need to draft your personal statement as early as possible and to revise, revise, revise!

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Example personal statements

Example 1 (Sport)

Since I was born I have always been interested in Sport. As soon as I could walk my Mum said I was trying to kick a ball and my love of sport has only grown as I have. I was the only girl to be on our Primary School football team which gave me the confidence and determination to always do what I enjoy which is why I want to study the subject I love so much. And then at secondary school I had the chance to try a huge range of sports and thoroughly enjoy football, cricket and hockey. At my school I am the best all rounds sports woman as I train more then everyone else. I enjoy both playing sport but also taking positions of responsibility such as refereeing and umpiring. My great passion is to get more people involved in Sport so they can realise both the impact on health and wellbeing but also how it brings people together. I have shared my enthusiasm through coaching younger years at school and by completing the Community Sports Leadership Award. For the award I had to spend time volunteering and did this through running several Sports Days at local primary schools.

In addition to playing sport, I am also interested in other aspects such as sport psychology and exercise physiology, media analysis of sport and sports policy and development. The recent Olympic and Paralympics games have really helped to heighten the level of attention on sport in our society. More people have been inspired to get involved in exercise, to volunteer with there local community and the Olympians have themselves been raised up as great heroes in our society. I found the discussions surrounding the Olympics fascinating. These ranged from the worries of the practicalities and safety of running such lairge events to the impact on the economy both positive and negative. They're were also interesting debates surrounding concerns and controversies over the Paralympic athletes accused of using expensive equipment which allowed them to won, and the issues of the ticketing procedure and policy for parents and guardians accompanying wheelchair users to view the games..

I am currently studying for A-levels in Physical Education, Psychology, Biology and General Studies and also did an As-level in Chemistry but didnt do very well so I didnt continue it to A-level. Physical Education has allowed me to learn more about sport in an academic setting, investigating theories and the practices involved in sport. The variety of the course excites me and i enjoy delving deeper each day in to the reasons why people participate in sport and

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how people can develop their skills and abilities. Biology has given me a greater insight in to the physiology of our bodies and the impact physical activity has on us. Even though I wasn't the best in my class, I really enjoyed Psychology especially exploring the behaviour of people and our influences and drives. My coursework looked at conformity and whether people were influenced by others beliefs. This can be related to sports when people often stereotype certain sports with a specific gender and don't believe they can participate.

From my previous experience of organising School Sports Days, I decided to dedicate more of my time to helping others. During the summer holidays I volunteered on local day-camps for disadvantaged children where I helped to run activities. Volunteering improved both my communication skills when explaining games to the children, and ability to use my initiative to solve unexpected problems. Additionally I like exploring my creativity through learning to play guitar and have accompanied singers at performances at my School.

I would be delighted with the opportunity to study Sport at university and greatly look forward to the challenge of studying at a higher level. Through sport, music and volunteering I hope to get involved in various opportunities that university life has to offer and look forward to the whole learning experience.

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Example 2 (Biology)

Biology is central to understanding life, from the cells within our bodies to the ecosystems we live in. It is the quest for biologists to understand all of the world we live in which inspires and excites me to want to be a part of it, exploring everything from the basic processes of life to the development of cells to the building of communities of organisms. The current global problems we face are at the forefront of research and we need to find answers. These include problems of feeding a growing world population, responding to the effects of climate change and continuing to conserve the biodiversity and environments that exist today. I am a very passionate person and always strive for answers to questions. It is these problems which need answers and I hope to be able to understand more as I study at a higher level. I also hope in the future I can contribute to finding these answers through helping with research and eventually even going forward to study for a PhD in this field. I read about current research at Tinseltown University which is investigating the possibility of changing a plants leaves albedo through bio-engineering to help combat climate change. This new exciting research at Tinseltown inspires me to think and investigate other methods and intriguing research and through reading in my spare time I am showing my commitment to the cause. As I am interested in these topics I did think about studying Geography but think I would prefer Biology a little bit more.

I studied the module Ecosystems and Human Influence as part of my A-level Biology focuses on the Human Impact on our Environment which I find fascinating especially when the impact spirals in to various ecosystems and communities. I also found the topic of Succession very interesting especially when looking at an area of bare rock and imagining what will happen and change over time. I find the physiology of both animals and plants very exciting as you can find out exactly how things function and survive. I like to get down to this deep level where you can examine and determine exactly how a process exists and enables you to start seeing how things work and may develop stimulates me to find out more.

I studied Geography which allowed me to look deep in to the past to see how our environment has changed over time. I loved seeing how we can trace back the changes over time and the impact of events that we have had no control over, it inspires me to think forward to see how things may change in the future. I picked Art and whilst an Art A-level is not relevant to my chosen degree, I think it has been instrumental to developing my creativity and allowing me to think out of the box with new ideas.

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I volunteered with the charity Trees for Cities over Summer which was a valuable experience. I saw how our surroundings can impact our health and wellbeing, impact climate change and improve our surroundings especially in the context of a severely urban atmosphere. It really helped to widen my perspective, build up my confidence and communication skills when meeting new people and was a great practical way to learn new things. I was also fortunate enough to complete a Sutton Trust Summer School with the prestigious Tinseltown University. I got to sample the different courses which confirmed my passion for Biology by spending a day with the department completing a small lab experiment and attending an interesting lecture on animal biology.

I joined my local Beavers Group when I was younger and as I grew up and enjoyed the experience so much I stayed with the group and am now an Explorer Scout and Young Leader helping with the younger Beavers. I developed both my practical skills but also teamwork and problem solving skills. I discovered my passion for Orienteering through scouting and took the initiative to start an Orienteering club at School. I have also completed my Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award and am looking forward to finishing my Award this year. I am a very well rounded student and have lots of skills which would enable me to succeed at a good university like Tinseltown or somewhere similar in both my academic studies and society involvement.

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Example 3 (Business)

Business is my passion. I live, breath and eat business and have a thirst to develop my knowledge which I hope to do whilst studying Business at a higher level. Whilst I have vast practical experience of being involved in enterprise, I would like to take the opportunity to study the key business topics and build up my understanding. Business covers a huge array of topics and factors and I believe to succeed in business you need to take the time to consider your understanding of each one, from marketing and decision making, to strategy and finance. After studying a Bachelors Degree I want to complete a Masters and then have a fruitful and successful business career. I want to be able to leave my mark combining both my passion for business with love of helping others and believe having a good degree in Business will allow me to take my first steps in achieving this goal.

The first time I really thought about what was involved with businesses was when watching The Apprentice aged 12 years old. I saw the candidates all competing to show they had the best skills to avoid the iconic phrase from Lord Sugar 'You're Fired'. It was within the same year that Dragons Den was also brought to our screens which showed business from the opposite perspective with the applicants showing their enthusiasm for a product rather than pushing themselves. Whilst I understand that business can be ruthless I think these programmes add so much drama that is unnecessary and encourages people to believe that only potential harsh and arrogant people may survive in business. I tell anyone who watches these programmes to turn them off immediately. My aim is to create a business which is successful enough that I can give back to others and combine this in with the ethics of the company to inspire others. I would also be able to tell Alan Sugar that he 'is fired'. I really value the ethos of 'Innocent Smoothies' which give 10% of their profits to charity through their own Foundation, link up with other charities such as Age UK and they create their products in a sustainable manner including creating the first bottles to be made from recycled plastic.

At A-level I have studied Maths, French and Psychology. Maths has improved my numerical ability and will be highly useful in Business when doing calculations, creating formula and looking at accounts. I like how structured and clear maths can be with a defined right and wrong answer. Studying French has developed my communication skills and has allowed me to learn other cultures and traditions. As a business may have to work with those abroad, it is hugely valuable to understand difference in cultures as well as the ability to be clear and concise when communicating. Through studying French I have been on our schools French Exchange programme developing my confidence to try new things and develop my

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independence. Psychology has given me a greater insight in to how influences and exposure may have created who we are today and how we can be conditioned or rewarded to believe certain things. Psychology is often helpful with marketing and selling techniques, such as pricing at £0.99 rather than £1, and I would be interested to study the relationship between Business and Psychology further at university. It might have been good for me to have studied Business Studies but I decided against it and hope that it will not stop me from studying business at university.

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Handout: Reviewing personal statements

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Example 1 (Sport)		
Example 2 (Biology)		
Example 3 (Business)		

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Example personal statements (with prompts for teachers)

This marked-up copy of the personal statements is intended to provide prompts for teachers so that they can encourage and support in-class discussions as part of this activity.

Example 1 (Sport)

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The opening sentences could be stronger. Avoid chronological histories. Try to start with a short, punchy sentence.

This paragraph needs a tighter structure and focus. What are the main messages that the student is conveying?

We suggest that this paragraph should focus on "why you want to study this subject". Does the student achieve this effectively?

The tone needs to be confident and positive but not arrogant. Does the student achieve this?

Overall: this paragraph focuses on playing sport, rather studying Sport. Is this a good approach?

Use correct spelling, grammar and punctuation!

Perhaps the content of this paragraph should be moved to the first paragraph to explain why the student wants to study Sport.

The student mentions the Olympics and Paralympics. Perhaps she could do more to explain how these sporting events have contributed to her decision to study Sport.

Personal statements are short. Don't repeat information from your UCAS application.

Keep it positive. Focus on your strengths.

It is good that the student explains how her other subjects

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have informed her approach to studying Sport. However, this could be expressed more clearly.

This paragraph could be improved by demonstrating the student's current knowledge of Sport.

Again, consider the tone. It is good to use words that are natural to you (rather than trying to impress with complicated words), but here the tone is rather colloquial.

From my previous experience of organising School Sports Days, I decided to dedicate more of my time to helping others. During the summer holidays I volunteered on local day-camps for disadvantaged children where I helped to run activities. Volunteering improved both my communication skills when explaining games to the children, and ability to use my initiative to solve unexpected problems. Additionally I like exploring my creativity through learning to play guitar and have accompanied singers at performances at my School.

This paragraph goes some way towards answering the question: "what makes you unique?". However, this could be improved by linking the examples to studying Sport; for example, what skills or qualities has she gained from playing the guitar? How will this help her to be a better student when studying Sport at university? This needs to be explained further.

I would be delighted with the opportunity to study Sport at university and greatly look forward to the challenge of studying at a higher level. Through sport, music and volunteering I hope to get involved in various opportunities that university life has to offer and look forward to the whole learning experience.

Does this paragraph add anything new to the personal statement? Does it tell the Admissions Selector anything that is not already covered in the previous paragraphs?

(Word count including spaces: 3,920)

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This is a powerful and convincing opening. However, the sentence structure could be improved.

Overall, this first paragraph clearly explains why the student wishes to study Biology. It conveys enthusiasm and passion for the subject.

Don't mention individual institutions!

Check grammar and punctuation.

The final sentence is not necessary.

This paragraph provides more information about the particular topics that the student finds interesting. It also suggests a breadth of knowledge.

Again, the sentence structure could be improved so that the key messages can be communicated more effectively.

This paragraph demonstrates how the student's subject choices were relevant to Biology. This can be effective, but it is good to refer back to your chosen subject (unless this is obvious).

The final sentence could be reworded to be more positive.

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This paragraph answers the question: “what makes you unique?”. It also links the examples of extra-curricular activities to the student’s chosen subject.

It can be good to mention any activities that you have taken part in at universities or other higher education institutions. However, you might prefer not to mention the institutions by name.

As with the above paragraph, these are relevant examples to mention in the personal statement. However, taken together with the previous paragraph, a lot of weight is given to extra-curricular activities. As the statement is over the word limit, these paragraphs could be more succinct.

Don’t mention institutions!

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It can be a good idea to open with punchy sentences, but try to avoid clichés.

Is "vast" the correct word to use here? The evidence provided in the personal statement doesn't support this claim. Be positive, but don't exaggerate.

The focus of this paragraph is unclear. Think: what is the main message that you want to communicate in each paragraph?

This paragraph communicates some very strong opinions that will not be shared by everyone. Think about your audience: is it possible that some of your readers will not share your views? If so, what effect might this have on your application? While your personal statement should communicate who you are as an individual, in this context you might want to avoid anything that might antagonise your readers.

The paragraph explains why the student is *interested* in business, but it doesn't explain why they are interested in *studying* Business.

This paragraph provides some useful information but it could be more succinct.

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In Year 12 I completed the Young Enterprise Scheme and was the Director for our business selling upcycled goods. We worked as a team to use our creativity to not just have a successful business, but also to help achieve something special and unique using old items and creating them in to something new. I built up communication and marketing skills selling at local trade fairs and to my peers at school. I also learnt the importance of strategy and management skills through directing a team of 12 students. For the past year I have worked part-time at my local book Shop which has given me a greater insight in to how a small business works. I have worked with the Manager to create new ways of encouraging younger pupils to get involved with reading and together we came up with a Teen Book Club, a Story Time for children and their parents and an interactive Summer Challenge where children got an award if they read 6 books. I also like to go on facebook, youtube, twitter and play football.

Make sure that you are aware of the entry requirements before writing your personal statement.

If you meet (or are predicted to meet) the entry requirements, you might like to avoid including negative comments (unless you are able to provide a clear rationale for your choices).

This paragraph answers the question: “what makes you unique?”. The examples are relevant to the subject.

Consider your audience: will they want to know that you enjoy using Facebook and Twitter, or playing football? What does this add to your application? Make sure that your examples are relevant.

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