

## HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

With many students applying to the University with very strong academic results and predictions, the personal statement is crucial in helping admissions tutors identify students with the greatest merit and potential. Investing time into making sure your personal statement is as strong as it can be is therefore time well spent.

At Durham University we particularly value personal statements that combine both an academic focus and consideration of your non-academic attributes and achievements. Other universities may be more interested purely in your academic achievements and potential. We are interested in recruiting students able to develop both academically and personally within an environment that is attractive to and supportive of an increasingly diverse and international student population.

### Who Reads your Personal Statement

Your personal statement is likely to be the only opportunity you have to directly influence the admissions tutor on the course you want to study. Admissions tutors are experts in their field and will be actively involved in both the research and teaching that takes place in the department to which you are applying. At Durham ensuring that we admit the very best students is one of the most important things that we do, so we ask our academic staff to make admissions decisions; they will not be made by staff not actively involved in teaching. It is therefore vitally important that you make this statement as effective as possible.

Your personal statement will be considered by both the Academic Department and the College you are applying to. However, it is the Department's decision that dictates whether or not students will be made an offer to study at the University. The College only decides upon membership in their particular college; if an Academic Department decides to make you an offer, you will be guaranteed an offer of membership in a college, although it may not be your first choice. Therefore, constructing the statement in line with what the department looks for should be your priority in order to secure an offer from the University.

Finally, don't forget that everyone has special skills, experiences or achievements to mention. Admissions tutors will judge every application on its own merits; they will be looking for reasons to accept you, not reject you.

### The Substitute Personal Statement

We understand that submitting one personal statement in the UCAS application can create problems for some applicants, such as those who want to apply to slightly different courses or want to apply to universities that have different preferences for the academic and non-academic content of a personal statement. You can now submit a 'substitute personal statement' directly to us by uploading a Microsoft Word document which would **replace the personal statement in your UCAS application (your original personal statement will not be read)** to Durham. Our admissions tutors are required to use this substitute personal statement in place of the original statement submitted with your UCAS application. However, there is no requirement for an applicant to submit a substitute personal statement to us, nor will providing a substitute personal statement give any automatic advantage to an applicant.

You can find out more about the Substitute Personal Statement on our website:

<http://www.durham.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/personalstatement/substitute/>

## Advice from Admissions Tutors

The following advice has been provided by Admissions Tutors from various departments. Most of the guidance is applicable to a wide variety of courses and departments, and not just to the department that provided the information.

"It is not possible to give exact criteria for being "outstanding", as not all candidates have the opportunity to do the same things. We therefore evaluate the application as a whole. Examples of the kind of things which we look for are successful participation in competitions, winning school or external prizes, a strong position in class (or nationally), strong UMS marks, or participation in subject-specific projects. This is by no means an exhaustive list."

"What we are really interested to know is whether the candidate has a fast mind, can work independently, can assimilate new concepts quickly, is good at project work, is a good communicator, has imagination and dynamism, is well organised, has maturity, etc."

"Where applications are closely balanced we would sometimes look at extra-curricular activities as a measure of successful time management and work ethic."

"What I am looking for is a sense of intellectual passion and excitement, an applicant who is clearly engaged with their subject and has gone the extra mile in learning as much as they can about it. I am also looking for someone who has developed interests and skills beyond their academic work whether it be in music or sport or any hobby that demonstrates commitment and breadth."

"Applicants seem to worry about their lack of work experience; well, it is simply not easy to arrange chemical work experience and I don't worry about that."

"The personal statement is a place to demonstrate breadth, depth and dynamism"

"I want to see a balance between academic interests and extra-curricular. Lots of academic content and little or no extra-curricular content suggest a candidate who may not contribute to University or College life, whilst lots of extra-curricular information and a lack of academic means they may not work hard enough."

"Avoid the temptation to embellish the truth, particularly in relation to further reading. It won't help in the long term and the Admissions Tutor will see right through it."

It's a good idea if students also mention any national (or even international) competitions they have been involved in. In my subject, it is particularly things like the Physics and Maths Olympiads which get us interested. Just being put in for them by the school is the mark of an excellent student.

"Don't worry if you don't have a clear career plan in mind. Most people don't at the age of 17 or 18. Enthusiasm for the proposed course of study is the most important thing at this stage"