

## WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Your personal statement is an opportunity for you to demonstrate why you think you would be a good student for the programme you are applying to, what you can contribute to University and College life outside of the lecture theatre and why the University should select your application over other equally excellent candidates.

Whilst there is no template we can give you for your personal statement – it should be personal to you - we do recommend that you answer three main questions in your personal statement in the following order and priority:

### 1) Why do you want to study this subject?

This section could start with a short sentence and needs to capture the reason why you are interested in studying on the course you are applying for. Some of the most effective personal statements start simply, for example, "I want to study History because...". With this opening statement you are trying to communicate to the admissions tutor your enthusiasm for the course. You might then want to think about covering these questions and areas:

- Your knowledge of the subject area
- What does the course entail?
- Why does it interest you?
- What interests you the most?
- Where could studying the course lead?

### 2) What makes you someone particularly suitable to study the subject?

Once you have outlined your reasons for being interested in the course you are applying to, you need to demonstrate why you would be a good student. In this section you are trying to convey your inclination and ability to study on the course. You need to be able to show the admissions tutor that you have the right background in terms of academic ability, have the right interest or inclination and that you know what the course you want to study involves. For example, if you want to be a primary school teacher but have never worked with children of that age the admissions tutor will wonder what your inclination to study to be a teacher is! Ask yourself why *you* want to study Education. If you cannot answer then you need to rethink. Try to avoid listing what you have done at GCSE and A Level; an admissions tutor will already know what is on the syllabus. Books and topics that you were made to study are not impressive if you cannot show you have also studied your own interests. Instead, show your passion for the subject by giving detailed examples from:

- Your academic studies
- Any voluntary work
- Your hobbies and interests
- Further reading or additional knowledge gained from books, newspapers, TV programmes or anything similar
- Experiences in your year out (if applicable)
- Any relevant work experience (e.g. medicine, physiotherapy)
- Particular project work in your studies

### 3) How will you contribute to the course and the university community and what makes you an interesting and unique individual?

Finally, you should write about what makes you an interesting and unique person; all those extra things you have done or experienced which will bring something extra to the community of the University. It doesn't matter what you've done but you need to reflect and write about the skills and lessons you have learned. To study at Durham you need to be an academically able and enthusiastic learner, but we also want to know that you will develop beyond your academic studies. You may want to cover:

- What do you enjoy doing outside of school or college
- Your hobbies and leisure activities
- Sports you participate in
- Other sorts of extra-curricular activities
- Significant responsibilities you hold, at home or in clubs or societies
- Special achievements
- Useful skills/experience gained from a job, if you have had one

Remember to draft and re-draft your personal statement. Watch out for spelling mistakes (spellcheckers are not a guarantee) and missing or repeated words: doing this shows your commitment to the application and attention to detail. It can help to have someone else to look over your statement, to provide another opinion and to look for anything you may have missed.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q. What is an Admissions Tutor?**

Admissions Tutors are experts in their field and will be actively involved in teaching in the department to which you are applying. Tutors will have had many years' experience of teaching and research in their chosen field. They will be supported by both members of staff from their department and our central Admissions Team in making their decisions. They have passion for their subject and they are looking for others who share this passion.

### **Q. How can I write a personal statement about the programme I want to study when I want to apply to two (or more!) different sorts of course?**

It's possible, but harder, to write a statement that covers more than one different subject area. Your personal statement needs to convince an admissions tutor that you are amongst the strongest applicants to their programme and trying to do that for different courses in one personal statement can be difficult. You can submit a substitute personal statement for a course you have applied for at Durham University. This substitute personal statement will be used *instead* of the personal statement which you submitted in your UCAS application. If you wish to submit more than one substitute personal statement, you are advised to contact us to discuss this.

For more information on substitute personal statements, please go to:

[www.durham.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/personalstatement/substitute](http://www.durham.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/personalstatement/substitute)

### **Q. Durham states that admissions decisions are partly based on the contribution that a student can make to University life, including the College community, whereas another university I am applying to is only interested in my academic work. How can I write a personal statement to suit both universities?**

You can submit a substitute personal statement for a course you have applied for at Durham University. This substitute personal statement will be used *instead* of the personal statement which you submitted in your UCAS application. Using this facility you can adopt the approach favoured by another university in your UCAS application and tailor your substitute personal statement to Durham University's interests.

If you wish to submit more than one substitute personal statement, you are advised to contact us to discuss this.

For more information on substitute personal statements and to upload one, please go to:  
[www.durham.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/personalstatement/substitute](http://www.durham.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/personalstatement/substitute)

**Q. If I tailor my personal statement to appeal to the college I want to go to, will that increase my chances of being accepted to study the subject I want to?**

Your personal statement will be considered by the Academic Department before being passed to 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. Therefore, constructing the statement in line with what the department you are applying to looks for should be your priority in order to secure an offer from the University. If an Academic Department decides to make you an offer, you will be guaranteed an offer of membership in a college. However, it may not be your first choice.

**Q. I think I have achieved some truly great things in my life; should I not make sure these achievements make up the bulk of my personal statement?**

Anything that makes you a unique and interesting individual is important but always remember that an admissions tutor is primarily interested in your interest in and aptitude for the course you want to study.

**Q. I'm not interesting or unique!**

Yes you are! Everyone has special skills, experiences or achievements to mention. We don't have any set ideas for what we are looking for, we just want to know what makes you, you.

**Q. Do I need to use long words and elaborate language to impress the Admissions Tutor?**

No! An Admissions Tutor will be impressed by the use of good English; a personal statement needs to be well written, in straightforward English, and laid out carefully. If you try too hard to impress with clever language you will normally make your statement harder to read and your reasons for wanting to study a particular programme less clear.