

# Writing Personal Statements

When applying to postgraduate study you will often need to fill in a personal statement. These statements are to support your application or to sell yourself and are normally around a page of text. They are typically read by an Admissions Tutor for postgraduate taught course applications or the Project Supervisor for postgraduate research programmes (e.g. PhD or MRes) who will then decide on your suitability for this line of study or research.

## GETTING STARTED

A personal statement should demonstrate that the postgraduate course is right for you and that you have the skills, knowledge and attitude to achieve the course requirements. For example the instructions for the Imperial College postgraduate online application state, 'Tell us why you are interested in the subject for which you have applied. Describe your academic interests and reasons for applying to Imperial College.'

In the description of the Master's or PhD programme it will normally detail the key requirements you will need to be effective on the course, including the types of skills, experiences and technical ability that are important. You can use these as a guide to the various points that you will need to address within your personal statement.

It is worth noting that as well as showing your motivations for this particular course, the reader of your personal statement is also likely to be interested in how this course fits in with your long-term career plans.

## STRUCTURE

Your personal statement should be logically ordered and interesting, it must show why you are interested in this line of study and must demonstrate your ability to take the qualification. A possible structure that you could use is as follows:

### Current Studies

- Degree - how your studies relate to your postgraduate application. This is particularly important if you are applying for study or research that does not seem to obviously follow on from your present course
- Subject areas - mention those related to the postgraduate course that show a relevant base of knowledge
- Technical skills that you have developed that may relate to your future studies

- Related projects that you may have worked on, including group projects, labs and individual projects
- Evidence of managing your project - research skills, the application of experimental methodology etc

### Why this Master's/PhD?

- Show your motivations - what particularly appeals to you about the course or research topic?
- Link your plans for future study with your career aspirations
- Demonstrate that you are making an informed decision by referring to research that you have done into the course, studies or research area. It is essential to show that you are genuinely motivated to follow this route and have thoroughly thought it through, in order to show that you will not drop out when the going gets tough

### Past Work Experience

- An opportunity to demonstrate that you are able to adapt and 'fit in' to a range of environments and experiences
- Mention how you were successful, and any achievements that demonstrate your ability to work effectively
- Cite relevant skills that may relate to the course or your career aspirations, and achievements, perhaps in challenging situations
- If the experience is not directly related to your application then think about showing the transferable skills that you have used and developed

### Extra-curricular Activities & Interests

- You can talk about these to show your personality and demonstrate transferable skills e.g. team-work, ability to take on responsibility, communication, etc.
- Think about what to include. Is it interesting and relevant; does it add value to your overall statement?

### Why this University?

- Showing why you have selected this route of study in this particular university/department/group crucially demonstrates motivation and enthusiasm
- For postgraduate research applications in particular it is important to show that you have investigated the area in depth. Perhaps mention individual research groups, projects, particular individuals, etc. and link these in with your own research interests and activities
- If applying to a university overseas you could state what



you will gain and give culturally.

### Applications for Vocational Courses

- When applying for a vocational course e.g. law, teaching, graduate entry medicine, etc. talking convincingly from an informed perspective about your career motivations is paramount. Your personal statement should reflect this by giving this element greater emphasis

### Concluding paragraph

- Summarise your interest in the subject, your skills and experiences
- Talk about how the programme fits in with your intended career path

## TOP TIPS

In order for your personal statement to be as effective as possible you may wish to follow the following Careers Service tips.

- Avoid clichéd introductions and content e.g. “Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is...”, “I would like to thank the XXX department very much for considering my application.”
- Be unique. Try to tell the reader something that no other applicant will be able to say.
- Ensure that you have satisfied the key attributes required using strong evidence.
- Strive for depth rather than breadth. Perhaps think about one or two key themes or ideas and give detail around those.
- Be positive. Concentrate on what you have gained from your experiences and what you have achieved, even from those experiences that you may not have enjoyed at the time.
- Generic copy and paste applications demonstrate that you have minimal understanding or interest in the course. Research the course as much as possible and use specifics to ensure you show the reader your enthusiasm and how it fits in with your plans.
- Make sure you state your achievements to show your successes but be careful to keep your comments in perspective so as not to seem overly boastful.
- Proofread your statement carefully before submitting. Make sure that there are no spelling or grammar errors.
- Allocate an appropriate amount of time to write your personal statement. It often takes a lot of time to get it right so don't leave it until the last minute.

## RESEARCH STATEMENTS/PROPOSALS

With postgraduate research courses you may be asked for a research statement or proposal. What is required can vary and you will normally be given an indication of content by the institution. You may be asked to outline the context for the research topic, a short description of your proposed methodology, your expected outcomes and what the potential benefit might be from the research. It is also advisable to identify how your topic links to existing research including potential collaboration. Often used to gauge your

understanding of the research area, it can be useful to show in your research statement why this work is important, exciting and unique.

It is advisable to discuss your proposal and research ideas with your current supervisor or tutor.

## STUDYING ABROAD

The process can vary depending on where you are applying to. For example, applicants for further study in the United States of America normally must undertake tests, usually GRE or GMAT depending on the study path. Depending on where you apply it may also be necessary to undertake a language test.

Finding the right institution and course of study, taking the appropriate tests and applying can be very time consuming. It is recommended to start planning for this at least 18 months before you would be looking to start your postgraduate study.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Reference books** - ‘How to Complete an Application Form’ (Careers Group); there are useful resources in the Careers Information Library to help you with specialist applications such as medicine or law; Postgraduate Study UK files - look in the ‘Exploring Further Study’ section; GRE/GMAT books – please ask at the reception
- **Online** - Prospects - information on studying abroad and applications for different countries - [www.prospects.ac.uk/studying\\_abroad.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/studying_abroad.htm); European Commission – studying at a university in Europe - [www.europa.eu/eu-life/education-training](http://www.europa.eu/eu-life/education-training); Fulbright Commission – official information source for the UK on applying to US universities - [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)
- **Careers Consultants** - gain feedback on your application – we offer Careers Consultations daily which you can book through JobsLive via the Careers website [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers)

For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website:

[www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure)