

# Checklist for great personal statement marking



## ☐ Has the student written the statement for the right audience?

The statement will be read by a member of the university admissions team or an academic in the subject, either way, it's an expert who knows the subject. You might find it helps to re-name the personal statement 'a statement of academic suitability for a particular course', because, well, that's what it is.

## ☐ Is the opening appropriate?

No quotes, no catchy first lines, no trying to sum up a subject in one line: "Law is one of the most important subjects", "Chemistry is all around us". The reader knows their subject (see point 1). "Since I was a child" is another clanger—use more mature reasons (see next point).

## ☐ Has the student included a clear reason for choosing this subject?

Admissions tutors want to see reasons which demonstrate a knowledge of the subject, not exaggerated or emotive claims. Ideally these are linked to their current study programme or their wider reading.

## ☐ Has the student included the subject they are applying for?

Sometimes it's hard to tell what subject a student is even applying for. This should be clear immediately to the reader.

## ☐ Has the student included a section analysing relevant academic research or evidence of independent reading around their subject?

Our research showed that admissions tutors were particularly impressed by evidence of independent reading, or the ability to analyse some research, (or work experience as required by certain courses). This tended to be the part that teachers wanted removed— "It sounds too much like an essay". Referencing research or experience makes a personal statement sound like an essay, and that's why admissions tutors like it.

## ☐ Are any course-related activities linked to the subject they are applying for?

Students should avoid simply listing activities and opportunities that demonstrate their suitability for the course; you need to see detail as to what the student got out of these experiences. It is better to have less activities listed, but with more explanation as to what a student got out of it.

## ☐ Has the student included the word 'insight' and outlined it?

There is nothing wrong with the word insight itself however, often a student says that they have gained great insight from an activity or work experience, but then fails to explain what that insight was.

## ☐ Has the student ensured that their extra-curricular activities do not exceed 25-30% of the statement?

Research has shown that admissions tutors are not impressed by excessive details on extracurricular activities. Just a brief summary is required.

## ☐ Is there an appropriate conclusion?

Keep the ending simple. It doesn't matter if students don't have a clear career path, and they certainly don't need to fabricate one. Nor does it need to be attention-grabbing or witty; "last year I read a law statement that ended "I rest my case". I rest mine".

## ☐ Has the student maintained clear and appropriate language throughout?

Obviously correct grammar and spelling are important. But the whole feel of a piece should be reflective and clear to read, forceful or emotive wording doesn't trump ideas supported by evidence. The Campaign for Plain English has an A-Z list of alternative words that I often wish a student had consulted when reading a particularly flowery statement.

# Making Applications Better

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