



Fine-tuning your final draft personal statement A UCL Horizons advice sheet for Year 13 students – September 2012

Here are some things to think about when you are polishing the final version of your statement

Your use of language

- Go over the statement very carefully, looking for any spelling mistakes and grammar errors. Look out for errors that can be easily missed: using 'affect' when you should be using 'effect'; using the wrong preposition.
- If you are writing numbers, be consistent in your choices of numbers / letters. Don't write 'thirteen' and then write '16' later in the statement.
- Use apostrophes correctly! <http://theoatmeal.com/comics/apostrophe>
- If referring to books or other sources, be *consistent* in the references format. For example, don't say 'I read Stephen Hawkings'book 'A Brief History of Time' ...' and then later say 'I also read Richard Dawkins: – *The God Delusion.*'
- The UCAS form removes all formatting, so don't use bold, italic, underlining of different fonts – they won't appear in your final version.
- Don't use any informal English, contractions or abbreviations: 'yr 11' should be 'Year 11'. Etc, i.e, e.g. I'm, I've – don't use these.
- Check you are using capitals or lowercase appropriately. You capitalise proper nouns, place names, languages, nationalities, months, days of the week, important historical events, A level subjects. Don't capitalise random nouns to make them sound more important, this just looks odd, i.e: 'My Passion and Fascination for the subject stemmed from....'
- Vocabulary: you want to show that you have an excellent command of English and that you are articulate. BUT you do not want to sound pretentious. For example, I would not recommend saying 'I partook in a UCL Summer School...' Say 'I attended' or 'I took part in...'
- Punctuation is very important. Use commas and semi-colons to break up sentences. If a sentence is very long, split it into two or more sentences. One sentence should never fill an entire paragraph!
- Avoid clichés: passion / passionate, thirst for knowledge / crave / relish / delve into / ignited a burning passion for knowledge / From a young age / Ever since I was young.... And so on.

Your structure

- Your statement must have a clear structure; a beginning, middle and end. Don't wander around from topic to topic in the same paragraph – everything should be carefully planned.
- Every paragraph should be clearly focused on something specific, like A level studies / Further Reading / Work Experience.
- You need to be analytical: don't give just a passing mention to a week's work experience, or to a major academic project. If it is an impressive achievement then you should give some space to analyse it: probably a whole paragraph. It is

better to spend a lot of space really analysing one significant achievement than to run off a list of achievements without discussing them in detail.

- Cut out waffle, repetition, weaker content. Every sentence should be there for a reason, and should communicate a specific point.
- If necessary, re-order content by cutting and pasting to make the structure more coherent.
- Try to start and end with an assertive and confident sentence - something interesting, engaging and well-phrased!

Your content

- Standard Russell Group advice is to spend at least 75% of the statement discussing your academic subject, and only 25% on extra-curricular activities.
- Read over your statement: is there any weaker content that is less impressive that you could cut or edit? Is there anything impressive you have done that you have forgotten to include?
- You need to make *high quality* references to books and media that emphasize your academic curiosity. Don't say that watching 'Scrubs' made you want to study Medicine, or talk about how much you love the Harry Potter books.
- Don't write long 'shopping lists' of books you have read or work experiences you have had. It is better to reflect on one or two experiences in depth.
- Don't write unsupported claims without evidence. You need to back up what you say with something concrete. For example, don't just say you have team work skills: talk about how you demonstrated them through leading a football team, for example. Don't just say you have excellent communication skills: demonstrate them by talking about your participation in school debating or similar.
- Ideally you should try to relate extra-curricular activities, volunteering and work experience back to the degree. Often experiences can be presented in terms of 'soft skills' like time management, organisation and commitment. For example: working in a busy customer service call centre shows that you can deal with aggressive calls, calm people down and get clear info and resolve case – all great skills for an aspiring lawyer. Volunteering in an old people's home demonstrates empathy with vulnerable people – skills a medical student needs.
- If planning a gap year, account for it in your statement and describes your plans. How will your gap year make you a stronger candidate for the course?
- If you use a quote, it should be a) interesting; b) attributed - tell us who wrote or said it; and c) relevant to what you are talking about.
- If extenuating circumstances affected your academic performance (family death, caring responsibilities), then make sure your teacher explains it in the reference they write for you. You don't need to explain it in your statement; you should make the most of your word count by focusing on your academic interests.

Alison Home
Senior Outreach Officer (Horizons)
UCL Outreach
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