



## How to Write Effective Personal Statements

### What is the purpose of a personal statement?

**Planning to write your personal statement**   **Structure and content**

**Spelling, grammar and formatting**   **Avoiding plagiarism**   **Types of personal statements**   **Personal statements for job applications**

**Personal statements for university course applications**   **Personal statements for Initial Teacher Training applications**   **Further information**

This guide is for people who need to write a personal statement for a job application or for applying to a university or training course. It includes general information about all personal statements, as well as specific guidance on the expectations for teacher training applications.

The personal statement is the most important part of any application. The information you include in the statement, as well as the quality and tone of your writing, will be used to decide whether to invite you to interview.

This guide is intended to help you write a better statement, but writing effective personal statements is a skill that often takes years to develop. Each sector of employment or training has different expectations of what they expect from a personal statement, and these can also change over time. It is a skill that must be improved and maintained throughout the course of a career.

Please note: This information sheet does not cover the personal profile/objective at the top of your CV.

### What is the purpose of a personal statement?

A personal statement is a written statement about your suitability for a course or job, either voluntary or paid, submitted as part of the application process. It will often be one question or a set of questions on an application form.

The purpose of the personal statement is to convince the course provider or employer that you are the best candidate for the position or course that you are applying for. This does not mean listing every job you have had or all of the qualifications you have gained. Instead, you will need to highlight the experience and skills you have that are relevant to the position to show that you:

- understand the demands of the job or course
- have the potential to take on the associated responsibilities and challenges.

Remember that the course provider or employer reading your personal statement has never met you, so they read your statement to get a better understanding of what kind of person you are. They find this out through the examples you provide of your experience and training, the structure and quality of your statement, and through the tone of your writing.

Your statement should show that you are professional and willing to put in the time and effort to produce high quality work. It should also convey enthusiasm and a positive attitude. To ensure your statement meets these requirements, while emphasising your most relevant experience and characteristics, you will need to write in concise, high quality English.

### **Planning to write your personal statement**

Carefully read through any guidance on completing the application form as this will usually include instructions on how to fill in the personal statement. The guidance might include suggestions for what information to include as well as how long your statement should be.

Researching the employer or course provider before writing your personal statement is essential.

For schools, have a look at the school website and read the school's Ofsted report at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report> For courses, look at the course description on the provider's website and also read through the course Entry Profile listed on the UCAS [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk) or GTTR [www.gtrr.ac.uk](http://www.gtrr.ac.uk) course listings.

### **Expect to spend at least several hours or days planning, structuring and writing your statement.**

It is normal to write several drafts of your personal statement. People often get advice from a careers adviser, mentor or someone with experience of the English education system after each attempt to get tips on how to improve it.

**For course applications, research your course several months before you plan to apply.**

Start writing your statement at least several weeks before you plan on submitting it. For postgraduate Initial Teacher Training (PGCE or SCITT) courses, this means starting your statement between September and November, so you can submit it by the end of November for courses starting the following year in September. Check with the course provider if you are unsure about deadlines.

### **Online applications**

When submitting a personal statement as part of an online application, it is a good idea to write your statement in a Word document first, then copy it into the online form when you have finalised it. Many online applications have a word limit, and by writing it in Word, you can check you haven't exceeded the word limit. After copying it into the online form, check that your entire statement is included in the application form and that none of the text has been left off due to the word limit. This will not always be immediately apparent. Try editing it slightly to see if any text has disappeared at the end of your statement. If any of the text has been cut off, you will have to go back and edit your statement until it fits within the space provided.

### **Structure and content**

It is important to structure your statement so it is both well organised and interesting to the reader. A messy, unstructured statement will send the message that you are disorganised or that you were not interested in the course or job enough to invest the necessary time and effort into your application.

Every personal statement should have an introduction, body and conclusion, with the number of paragraphs depending on the amount of space provided. If the personal statement is supposed to be very short, then you might have just one or two sentences each for your introduction and conclusion, rather than full paragraphs. Make sure you stick to the allocated length or word limit.

### **The introduction must grab the reader's attention.**

It might say what inspired you to get into this particular profession or subject area, or it might highlight a particularly impressive achievement or skill you

have relevant to the role you are applying for. It should be something that makes you stand out, something interesting that the reader will remember you by.

**Provide relevant examples in the body of your statement.**

The paragraphs making up the body of your statement should provide an overview of why you are suitable for the role or course. Do not simply list all of your positive characteristics. Instead, provide examples from your experience, training, or things you have observed that will prove:

- you have the relevant skills and experience already or
- you recognise what will be required of you and that you have the potential to learn and take on these new challenges.

Have a look at the examples below:

Example 1:

Working as a Bilingual Support Assistant in a number of schools for Brent Local Authority from September 2012 to July 2013, I gained experience liaising with parents, teachers, support staff and Heads of Department. I was successful in building strong relationships with pupils, parents and colleagues in order to effectively meet pupils' needs.

Example 2:

Having observed a Year 7 Maths classroom at St Martin's Secondary School in March 2013, I have a thorough understanding of the role of teaching assistants, both in providing additional support to pupils either individually or in small groups, as well as in working closely with the classroom teacher and other classroom based support staff.

Both of these examples show that the applicant has a good understanding of the role of support staff in schools, as well as the skills to work as part of a team. In Example 1 the applicant has gained direct experience. The applicant in Example 2 has shown their awareness of the role and responsibilities through observing. A good personal statement will use examples such as these instead of using general statements such as "I am a good team player".

When providing examples of places you worked or observed, always include the full name of the school or organisation, the position you held, if applicable, and the dates you were there.

### **Think about your transferrable skills.**

It is okay if you do not have all the experience or skills requested by an employer or course provider. One way to show that you have the ability to adapt the skills you have to a new environment or role is to think about the transferrable skills you have gained through any previous jobs. Transferrable skills are skills which can be used in different settings, such as organisational, leadership or management skills.

### **Phrase your statements positively.**

Show pride in what you have achieved by not being too modest when writing about your skills and experience. Enhance your statements by including positive adjectives and adverbs. Avoid using the word 'good' too often. When writing about challenges you have faced, focus on how you have overcome them and what you have gained. Here are a few examples for phrases to use in your statements:

- I was impressed by...
- I had the opportunity to...
- I successfully managed...
- I gained invaluable experience...

Be descriptive and include details to make your statements stand out. For example:

Example 1: While at St Mary's Primary School I successfully managed the classroom and used a variety of behaviour management techniques to minimise disruptive behaviour.

Example 2: I gained invaluable experience while observing a qualified Year 6 teacher at Ridgeway Secondary School. I was impressed by the way he differentiated the lesson to ensure pupils' needs were met. In response, I used the knowledge I gained to adapt my own teaching methods while working as a supply teacher. As a result, I was better able to command the attention of the pupils and maintain good behaviour.

### **Display confidence in your own abilities and potential.**

Instead of saying 'I would', 'I should' or 'I could' try using some of the following sentences:

- I can...
- I am...
- I do...
- I am able to...
- I have experience...

### **Finish your statement with a conclusion.**

Summarise and highlight some of your key skills. Point out something about you that makes you stand out while also displaying your enthusiasm for embarking on the course or starting the new role.

### **Spelling, grammar and formatting**

It is extremely important to correct any spelling and grammatical errors before you submit your final statement. People looking at statements take spelling and grammar mistakes very seriously. These types of errors will give the impression that you do not pay attention to detail and will often result in the employer or course provider not inviting you for interview.

Check your personal statement and the rest of your application carefully to make sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors. If possible, have an adviser or someone else fluent in English check it over before you submit it. Here are some things to bear in mind:

- Use full, grammatically correct sentences (not sentence fragments)
- Use capital letters appropriately
- Use British, not American English spelling (e.g. use 'organised', not 'organized')
- Ensure you have the correct translation of course titles or organisation names
- Do not use 'etc.'

Note that on online applications italics, bold, underlining or foreign characters (such as á, ë, ñ) will not be accepted and will automatically disappear when you paste your text into the space provided.

## **Avoiding plagiarism**

It is important that the statement you write is your own, and not copied from another statement or text you have read. For GTTR and UCAS online applications each personal statement is checked using a Similarity Detection Service. This compares your statement to statements previously submitted, sample statements on websites and other publications. If you must include a quote from another text, ensure that you provide a reference within the text in order to acknowledge that these are not your own words. If you are caught plagiarising your application, the institution(s) you are applying to will be informed and in most cases your application will no longer be considered. Plagiarism is very serious, so try as much as you can to put things in your own words, rather than copying set phrases or examples, such as the ones given in this document.

## **Types of personal statements**

This information sheet covers personal statements for job applications, university courses and Initial Teacher Training applications. These personal statements each have a different purpose, and the expectations of what to include varies depending on which type of personal statement you are writing.

## **Personal statements for job applications**

For job applications you will be expected to outline why you are applying for this particular role with this particular employer. Included in the job advertisement you should find a job description, which explains the job itself, as well as a person specification, which describes the person required to carry out the job. If these documents are not provided, then request them from the employer or recruitment agency. You will need to show that you have read the job description and person specification, as well as researched the school or organisation you are applying to.

When including information about why you are suited to the role, you need to begin by reading the person specification. Your personal statement must be written in response to the criteria listed in this specification.

When structuring your statement, order your paragraphs in the same order as the points listed on the person specification. You may find it helps to include subheadings describing each point listed in the specification then write one paragraph for each of these points. Putting subheadings also makes it easier for those reading the statement to see that you have answered each point in the specification. Each paragraph should include a relevant example to show why you meet the criteria. For further advice, including example paragraphs see:

[http://www.prospects.ac.uk/job\\_application\\_forms.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/job_application_forms.htm)

### **Personal statements for undergraduate university course applications**

Undergraduate university courses are applied for online via UCAS ([www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)). Many courses, especially teacher training courses, are very competitive, so you will need to write a compelling statement to highlight why you should be given a place on the course.

It is advisable to research your chosen course and begin writing your statement several months in advance. Most people applying will do this, so starting early will give you a better chance to produce a competitive application.

Course providers will expect you to include your reasons for choosing that particular course as well as several examples showing why you are suitable for the course. You will need to begin by choosing a course on the UCAS website, clicking on the course title and reading through the course Entry Profile (most courses should have one). The Entry Profile will provide details about the course and university or college, including entry requirements and selection criteria. When writing your personal statement, think about the skills and experience you have that relates to the selection criteria.

Another way of finding out about a course provider's expectations of applicants is to visit a university Open Day or Open Evening. Contact your local universities to find out when the next one is scheduled. When you attend the event, make sure you speak to the person representing your chosen course and ask them what qualities they are looking for in applicants.

For further advice on the content of your UCAS personal statement, their website provides comprehensive advice on planning to write your statement, what to include, as well as a list of 'dos and don'ts' at

[www.ucas.ac.uk/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement)

For advice on the content of undergraduate Initial Teacher Training courses, such as the Bachelor of Education (BEd) or some BA or BSc degrees which include Qualified Teacher Status, see the section below on the 'Content of Initial Teacher Training personal statements'.

Note: You have a maximum of 4000 characters (including spaces) or 47 lines to use so you should write approximately one A4 page of a Word document single spaced with a font size of 11 or 12.

## **Personal statements for Initial Teacher Training applications**

### **BEd, BA and BSc with QTS applications**

For undergraduate teacher training programmes see the section above on university course applications as well as the section below on the 'Content of Initial Teacher Training applications'.

### **Postgraduate Initial Teacher Training applications (PGCE and SCITT)**

For Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) courses you must submit your application online via the GTTR ([www.gttr.ac.uk](http://www.gttr.ac.uk)). You will be asked to submit both a personal statement as well as a separate list of your work experience. The personal statement is the most important part of the application. Once your eligibility for the course has been confirmed, the training provider will decide whether to invite you to an interview based on your personal statement.

Note: You have a maximum of approximately 4000 characters (including spaces) or 47 lines to use so you should write approximately one A4 page of a Word document single spaced with a font size of 11 or 12.

### **School Direct Training programme (salaried / non-salaried)**

When applying for the School Direct Training programme you will need to find out more details on the names and types of schools in the partnership which offer this training and where you could potentially undertake this training. You will need to visit the lead school's website to find out more details. You can

also check on the individual school's website for information about their School Direct offering. Information on lead schools can be found at <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options/school-based-training/school-direct/applying.aspx>. Each school will indicate its application deadlines, but it is expected that School Direct places, particularly salaried places, will be in high demand. As schools will review applications as they are received, you are advised to complete and submit your application as soon as possible.

You will also be required to submit a personal statement. Your personal statement, however, should be tailored for each application, according to the individual school to which you wish to apply.

### **Content of Initial Teacher Training applications**

Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers will read your personal statement expecting to find evidence that you are:

- enthusiastic and committed to the teaching profession, the age group you have chosen to teach as well as your subject, if applicable;
- aware of the qualities that are required of a good teacher and that you have relevant experience to show that you have these qualities as well as experience observing these qualities in a qualified teacher in a UK classroom;
- familiar with the English education system with evidence of how you gained this experience;
- aware of the challenges teachers in England face and willing to take these on;
- willing to learn, adapt and develop professionally, throughout your teaching career;
- proficient in using the English language.

Example personal statements can be found on the University of Kent website at

[www.kent.ac.uk/careers/cv/pgcestatements.htm](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/cv/pgcestatements.htm)

Additional advice on what to include in your personal statement is available at

[www.gtrr.ac.uk/students/howtoapply/personalstatement](http://www.gtrr.ac.uk/students/howtoapply/personalstatement)

## How to begin writing a personal statement for Initial Teacher Training

Writing a personal statement for Initial Teacher Training can take a long time to complete, so even if you do not yet have every requirement in place, it is best to get started anyway. For example, if you have not yet done voluntary experience in a school, you can still write about your previous experience, and then add in your observations once you have visited a school.

Start by writing down the answers to the following questions, answering each as fully as you can:

1 Why do you want to teach? How do you know? What has inspired you to become a teacher?

2 What sort of teacher are you? Are there any aspects of teaching that you are particularly interested in, such as inclusion, social cohesion, working with children with special educational needs? Why would you make a good role model?

3 What age range do you want to teach? Why? How does your experience reflect this?

4 If you are interested in teaching secondary, then what evidence do you have of knowledge of your subject area? Are you familiar with the National Curriculum for your age group and/or subject?

5 What experience do you have in a school abroad (include the full name and location of where you worked)? What skills did you develop that make a good teacher? How did the teaching style or education system vary from what you have observed or experienced in the UK? How might this experience add to your ability to empathise with pupils from a variety of backgrounds in UK schools?

6 What experience do you have in a UK state school classroom (including the full name and location of the school and dates when you observed, volunteered or worked there)? Have you had the opportunity to observe a qualified classroom teacher? What did you observe? How does this vary from your experience in your home country? Can you comment specifically on any classroom management, behaviour management, teaching methods or implementation of school policies that you observed? What skills did the teacher require? Have you got any evidence to show that you also

possess these skills?

7 What other relevant experience do you have, such as in supplementary schools, familiarisation course, speaking to teachers, community work, out of school activities, tutoring? Include the full name and location of where you worked or volunteered.

Also mention any professional development courses or workshops that you have attended.

8. What other life or work experience will you bring to teaching, such as leadership skills, organisational skills, mentoring, communication or experience of your subject?

9. Have you read the National Curriculum online? Have you had any experience observing the curriculum being delivered for your age group and/or subject area? Are you aware of skills promoted across the curriculum, such as communication skills, creative thinking and improving one's own learning and performance? Have you seen this implemented in the classroom? What are your thoughts on this?

10. Have you looked at any of the resources provided for your age group or subject area? Have you observed how pupils are assessed in English schools?

Next create an outline. You will not be able to provide full answers to each and every question listed above. Your next step is to produce an outline for your statement using the answers to the above questions that you felt most able to answer.

Below is just one example of what an outline might look like. Your outline will need to reflect your own experiences and strengths, and will depend on which of the above questions you feel best able to answer fully. Do not try to include an answer to every question above.

Introduction paragraph 1

- What inspired me to become a teacher (question 1)

- Which age group I would like to teach (question 2)

Body paragraph 2

- My overseas teaching experience (question 5)
- Evidence of my ability to learn and adapt

Body paragraph 3

- UK classroom observation or voluntary experience (question 6)
- Skills I observed in the qualified teacher I observed
- Evidence from my own experience to show I have some of these skills

Body paragraph 4

- Positive observations of teaching and learning, including pupil assessment
- Experience I have assessing pupils and helping them achieve their goals

Conclusion paragraph 5

- A summary of the skills outlined in paragraphs 2-4
- Something about me that reflects my enthusiasm for teaching

**Write your first draft.** Use your answers to the questions above and structure your draft using your outline.

## **GTTR application work experience statement**

For the work experience statement you will need to list the details for any paid or unpaid work, the dates you worked, job title and place of work including the name and location of the school or organisation, both in your home country and in the UK.

NOTE: You will need at least one to three weeks work, volunteer or observation experience in a UK primary or secondary school classroom to be accepted on a course. If you have planned classroom experience coming up after you submit the application include the location and dates when you intend to observe or volunteer. The experience should be with the same subject and age range you want to teach.

### **Further Information**

The Department for Education [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk). The government department for education website includes information about the education sector and relevant government policies. They also have guidance at <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/apply-for-teacher-training/application-form-assistant>.

Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) [www.gttr.ac.uk](http://www.gttr.ac.uk). Apply online for PGCE and SCITT Initial Teacher Training courses. Information on personal statements can be found at

[www.gttr.ac.uk/students/howtoapply/personalstatement](http://www.gttr.ac.uk/students/howtoapply/personalstatement)

National Curriculum.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum2014>. Read the National Curriculum online.

Ofsted [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). To view a school's latest Ofsted report go to: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report>

Prospects [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/job\\_application\\_forms.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/job_application_forms.htm). An excellent resource for further advice on job applications.

Teachers Media [www.teachersmedia.co.uk](http://www.teachersmedia.co.uk). Watch videos of teachers in the

classroom or covering whole school issues.

Times Education Supplement [www.tes.co.uk](http://www.tes.co.uk). Read about issues in education, search job ads and look at the forums to hear teachers' views on a wide variety of subjects concerning teachers.

National College for Teaching and Leadership

<https://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/signin?indexidol=no&url=http%3A//www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index>

University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk). Apply for undergraduate university courses and find tips on what to include in the personal statement at [www.ucas.ac.uk/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement)

University of Kent [www.kent.ac.uk/careers/cv/pgcestatements.htm](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/cv/pgcestatements.htm). Find advice and examples of personal statements for PGCE applications