

Personal statements: the lowdown from Corpus students

What are your top tips for personal statements?

The first thing I did before starting mine was to read a few (there are loads online) just to get an idea of the sorts of things people talk about in them and ways to structure it. I personally would focus on one or two key areas of interest in your subject and really explain why those things interest you rather than listing off a load of different aspects of the subject that you've heard about, as it would highlight more interest in the subject. I'm a Psychology student for example and was really interested in the use of facial scanning technology and how we could train people to be better at recognising faces, so I made that a key aspect of my personal statement. I would also suggest not to worry too much about extra-curricular activities as I found that you can go more in depth about the actual subject with some more interesting things to write about. - Beth, Psychology

The main idea is really just to show that you are genuinely interested in the subject, and keen to learn more. The tutors don't expect you to know everything from the outset, the main skill is just a willingness to learn and explore ideas in depth. If you study the subject at A-Level or equivalent, find which parts really interest you and try to research further into them, and think critically. If you don't, think about what drew you to the subject, and find something there that interests you. - Rhiannon, Law

It sounds simple and obvious, but don't lie! Only mention books you've actually read, as it will soon become very obvious if you haven't. Otherwise, just show that you are interested and enthusiastic to learn more about your subject - the tutors are looking for people they would like to teach. - Imogen, Materials Science

Make sure that, whatever you talk about, you somehow link it to your subject or why you'd be a good candidate. There's no point just saying 'I did DofE' but not explaining how it informed your thinking or something. For instance, I like singing and applied for Classics, so I talked about singing in Latin in church! That way you avoid talking about irrelevant stuff, but also can convey something of your character and interests, which is really important. Remember that the people interviewing you are going to be teaching you for the next three or four (or more!) years, so it helps if you come across as interesting and likeable. The best way to do this is usually to be yourself! If you read it back and it sounds like someone else has written it, you should probably change something. - Augy, Classics

Does it matter how original the first sentence on your statement is?

I would focus more on the entirety of the personal statement. I know that my teachers also put an emphasis on being individual and standing out but I think how the statement comes across overall is much more important than the first line being particularly impressive. I think something that is fitting with the rest of the statement is more important than being something completely unique, interesting etc.! Beth - Psychology

The first sentence of your personal statement won't be considered in isolation, so the most important thing is to make sure that it flows well with the rest of what you are saying. I think what people mean when they say it must be original is that you shouldn't use a quote, which is certainly something I was told when I was writing mine: mainly because the tutors don't want to see someone else's thoughts, they want yours! - Rhiannon, Law

I'd agree and also add that you shouldn't waste valuable words having something fancy just to 'catch the tutors' eye' or something, just dive straight into why you love the subject etc. If it's something you've written, and it sounds like something you would have written, then it's probably original enough. - Augy, Classics