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A student's guide to psychology- based personal statements

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INTRODUCTION

Writing your personal statement for university entry is a very daunting prospect. On the UCAS website the space for your personal statement is 4000 characters and 47 lines, so you must be concise and to the point. Write your personal statement as a word document (save it lots!) and then cut and paste into the space. Although, you will want someone to proofread it and give you advice, resist the urge to give it to too many different people or you will end up with lots of opinions and conflicting advice. The best person is probably your tutor or psychology teacher. Avoid gimmicky statements or jokes as it might give the impression to the admissions tutor that you are not serious.

Think of your personal statement as four distinct paragraphs. A further advantage of this approach is that you can start with which ever paragraph you feel most confident about and then put them together later. Suggestions are given below. It is perfectly OK to use words like passion, if you mean it but don't overdo it. This is your opportunity to sell YOU so do so like your life depended on it.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO STUDY PSYCHOLOGY?

It is important to make the personal statement psychology specific, saying which aspects of psychology have been interesting, and what experience you have already sought out to prepare yourself for higher education. As an illustration, you can include:

What you love about psychology, show that you know what psychology is, and your interest goes beyond getting good grades at A level.

Try to be original in your examples, everyone loves Milgram, that will not stand out!

Say you would like a career in therapy, or a career working with prisoners etc.

What has inspired you to apply for psychology at university

It is good to talk about having worked with a youth and community group, or having visited a prison, or being a mentor for other students in their school. This is much more meaningful if this can be linked to psychology, – for example, I've read the work of e.g. Carl Rogers, and find his work on humanistic psychology very persuasive, because of its focus on x, y, z.

Make sure you have done your research about the universities you are applying to. What is it about the particular courses you like? Are you looking for a course that has particular emphasis on cognitive psychology, or on social psychology etc. and why?

Many universities now have positioned their courses to offer more weighting to a particular area – comment on this, and your choices need to be consistent across the different courses you are applying to, then that will be convincing that you really do want to study the course you have applied for.

WHAT RELEVANT TRANSFERABLE SKILLS HAVE YOUR OTHER A LEVELS GIVEN YOU?

What is your academic history, do your other subjects link to psychology such as biology or Maths? All study is relevant, think about transferable skills, like essay writing maths skills, working to deadlines, revision techniques etc. What responsibilities have you achieved such as Sport captains, Choir/orchestra, Prefect, Musician, Group leader, etc. Mention your Extended Projects, especially if you have written about something that relates to psychology.

Mention your Interests/activities/and non-academic challenges.

WHAT RELEVANT EXPERIENCE, INTEREST OR HOBBIES DO YOU HAVE?

Do not just write 'in my spare time I like to...' It must be relevant, what skills have these things given you. For example, a part time job may have increased your confidence in dealing with the general public etc. Look at the universities you are applying to and see what clubs and societies they have, if you can continue an interest at university, it tells the admissions tutor that you will fully immerse yourself in university life and are therefore less likely to drop out.

WHAT RELEVANT PERSONAL QUALITIES DO YOU HAVE WHICH WILL MAKE YOU A GOOD STUDENT?

Why might you be suitable to study your chosen course, why are you suitable for higher education? Ask your friends and relatives what they think are your best qualities, if you struggle to think of these yourself (however, a personal statement is not the place for false modesty). Think about how these qualities might help you be a better student e.g. being organised, so you won't miss deadlines etc. and remember your personal statement is your opportunity to sell yourself, **'sell yourself like you have never done before.'**

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TOPIC/ UNIVERSITY LINK	SELL YOURSELF WITH EVIDENCE
<p>Psychopathology/ Schizophrenia</p> <p>Clinical Psychology /Mental Health/ Counselling/ Abnormal Psychology/ Individual differences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You've challenged your own misconceptions around what mental illness is and how it presents itself, e.g. OCD, phobias, depression and Schizophrenia. A wider understanding of the different causes of mental health illness and how you need to use a holistic approach when diagnosing e.g. Schizophrenia The issues around defining abnormality and issue of cultural variations (Schizophrenia in Africa/depression in Japan), also the reliability and validity issues surrounding diagnosis when using two major diagnostic tools. An understanding of the different types of treatments provided by the NHS and how these impact the economy positively. In Schizophrenia, you have investigated new areas of treatment (Avatar Therapy) and how this could revolutionise treatment for patients. You demonstrated your creativity when creating neurons and through exploring artists (Bryan Charnley) in Schizophrenia.
<p>Attachment</p> <p>Child Development/ Evolutionary Psychology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An understanding of the importance of attachment and key theories to explain its formation (Bowlby Vs Learning). Through the egg project you were able to experience first-hand the strength and complexity of human emotion and how this impacts separation and maternal deprivation whilst also challenging the issues around humans 'learning' attachment. An introduction to evolutionary psychology and how human behaviour (attachment, mate preference) is driven by an innate need to reproduce and survive. You understood first-hand the problems with self-reporting when reporting your own sleep quality and applied this to major attachment research. You investigated a country of your choice and their parenting styles and compared this to western parenting.
<p>Research Methods – Gender & TV show small-scale study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You conducted your own small-scale study into gender and tv show preference so understand methodology, the impact of extraneous variables and how to reduce them. You have experienced the issues around questionnaires and PPs self-reporting, ethical considerations, analysing data, and have presented your conclusions using the structure of a journal.

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<p>Research Methods</p> <p>Reading academic journals/studying skill</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of reading formal academic journals and understanding the layout and structure into your own area of interest (RM project). • Understanding the importance of peer review, plagiarism and referencing – important when writing university assignments/ general university skill. • You have experience of presenting academic information as a visual presentation.
<p>Research Methods</p> <p>Application and links to the economy/ Economic Psychology/ Health Psychology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of how research can impact the economy positively or negatively and how this leads to health care treatments (depression, Heart attack medication ingested in the evenings, shift workers and sleep patterns). • You investigated the Behavioural Insight Team and understand how they conduct research to change the behaviour of the general public to impact the economy and public health in a positive way. • You have taken part in research into Coronavirus as a PP and seen first-hand the extent of ethical considerations and debriefing, the methodology collected and how it aims to impact society.
<p>Attachment, Approaches, Biopsychology, Schizophrenia, Aggression</p> <p>Animal Studies/ Animal Psychology/ Evolutionary Psychology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An introduction to animal psychology and the problems associated with using animals when extrapolating to humans but also an understanding of the strengths of using animals instead of humans. • You've been able to see the connections between animals and humans in various topics, e.g. aggression and how humans and animals display aggression similarly or brain scans.

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<p>Biopsychology</p> <p>Sleep and circadian rhythms / neuropsychology / language development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of biological rhythms and their strong nature-nurture links (endogenous pacemaker & exogenous zeitgeber) and have applied this to entraining newborn babies to develop a sleep-wake cycle. • You've been able to understand the impact of light on sleep and how this impacts mental health (SAD) and the effect on countries with limited light (Norway). • You've watched 'What makes us tick?' and documentaries on Siffre to understand the impact of light on our circadian rhythms, and also understand how to overcome jet lag. • An insight into neuropsychology with brain scanning techniques including post-mortems (Post-Mortem online sessions with 7.5 hours CPD). An understanding of the strengths and weakness of different brain scanning techniques. An exploration into different regions of the brain and their role in human behaviour, including a detailed exploration into the Limbic System in Aggression. • A brief insight into language development and formation through Broca and Wernicke and the impact of damage to either causing aphasia. This can be applied to a deeper understanding of how stroke victims experience contralateral side effects (one side of the body impacted only).
<p>Social Influence</p> <p>Lockdown/Social Psychology/Altruism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lockdown has helped you witness first-hand how and why humans obey and conform through Normative Social Influence and Informative Social Influence. You've been able to see the impact of leadership in promoting obedience across different countries and genders (New Zealand, Female PM Vs UK, Male PM and USA, Male P). • You've experienced the process of social change first-hand e.g. the snowball effect. • You've researched into the Behavioural Insight Team and how their research into handwashing and poster presentation aims to change human behaviour within society to promote positive change. • You're understanding the power of deindividuation, with more people now 'hiding' behind masks.

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<p>Memory</p> <p>Cognitive Psychology/ Education/ Cognitive Neurology/ Forensic Psychology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You understand how humans learn and retain information in their long term memory, and have applied it to education by understanding how pedagogical theory is based around the Working Memory Model and Schema and how methods like ‘chunking’ and ‘spaced revision’ are effective. You understand how research into memory has improved how police interview witnesses (cognitive interview, leading questions, post-event discussion) and how this impacts the economy positively. You understand the power of context-dependent learning and state-dependent learning and how this impacts your ability to recall information. You completed the Forensic Psychology MOOC on Future learn (see website for list of skills) and have watched Forensic talk online (Facebook). You have replicated various studies in Memory including Miller, Gabbert and Loftus and understand how to control experiments.
<p>Gender</p> <p>Gender studies/ Female Psychology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You understand the difficulties in trying to define gender and how this is becoming a socially sensitive area of research and have experienced first-hand the issues around operationalising gender within your own small-scale research.
<p>Approaches</p> <p>Biological/ Social/Cognitive/ Historical Psychology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have a basic understanding of how human behaviour can be explained and can explain specifically how certain behaviours or illnesses can develop, e.g. Gender Schema Theory, Social Learning Theory and Aggression, Dopamine and Schizophrenia. You understand the impact of the media on behaviour such as Gender formation and Aggression. You understand the transition and development of psychology from a philosophy to a science and can confidently debate whether psychology is a science. You may have enjoyed learning about Freud and his psychoanalytical theories and visited his house/museum in London (Camden).

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Additional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about documentaries that you've watched and what you gained from them – links between subjects or topics? Expanding your own knowledge beyond the classroom? • Have you completed any MOOCs/online courses to widen your knowledge? → This will show you're an independent learner who is motivated to learn about a subject. • Are you completing an EPQ? → Full of independent research skills, time management, reading and assessing sources, academic/formal writing, meeting deadlines. • Work experience? → What did you gain from this? Did it confirm your career choice or adjust it? • Hobbies or clubs? → Does this show you're a team player? Able to manage your workload? • School roles/job → Evidence of leadership? Responsibility over a task or project? Team player? Delegating? How do you juggle your workload?



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St Andrews House
48 Princess Road East
Leicester LE1 7DR, UK

☎ 0116 254 9568 🌐 www.bps.org.uk ✉ info@bps.org.uk

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