

Manchester Live: Writing an effective personal statement webinar (transcript)

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Hello, everyone. I think it's good to just kick us off now. First of all, just to introduce myself, my name is Huw, I'm part of the Student Recruitment and Widening Participation team at the University of Manchester. So I'm here to talk to you today about writing an effective personal statement. I've been at Manchester for the last 10 years. I was a student at Manchester and never left, basically, so I've really enjoyed my time here.

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And as part of my role in Manchester, I did admissions for quite a while. So I've read somewhere between 12,000 and 15,000 personal statements. So I think after reading all of those, I would like to give a few hints and tips about the kinds of things I would have been looking for when working admissions, and the kinds of things that my colleagues at Manchester, as well as at other universities, across the UK, would be looking for as well. So, before I get started, could I ask you all to - you should find the little symbol that says, raise your hand. I just want to check to see if everyone can hear me. So, if you can hear me, could you just raise your hand?

1:08

Fantastic. Thank you very much, everyone. So, we always live in fear of technical issues, with this kind of thing. So, that's a good start. First of all, I'd like to also say, if you have any questions throughout this presentation, then we have a team of my colleagues, Katie, Chris, Maddy, and Laura, who will be able to help answer those. So, feel free to submit those, and they'll be able to get back to you about any questions that you might have about anything that I've talked about as part of this presentation. You'll also receive a link to this presentation in the e-mail following on from this session, so you'll be able to review anything that you might have seen in case you've forgotten anything. So, anyway, to start us off, I'm going to talk about a few things over the next 35 minutes.

2:00

I'm going to talk a little bit about the application formal process. Because, obviously the personal statement is a large part of what we're going to be considering as part of the overall application. We're focusing primarily, however, on the personal statement. So, hints and tips, the same kind of things that you can kind of consider. And then, finally, talk about the academic reference. So, the reference that your teachers, tutors, guidance counsellors will be providing, that will support your personal statement.

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So in terms of the overall application process for UCAS, some of you will be much more familiar with this than others. But just to kind of give a very brief overview, it's an online form through which you have up to five choices, or four choices if applying for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science. And you can apply for either Oxford or Cambridge as part of the application, as well. A choice either means a university, or a course, or it could be a combination. So as an example, I've already mentioned, I was a student at Manchester. I studied economics. That was my course. And I applied to two different economics courses at Manchester, and then three other courses at different institutions. So that was my five choices overall. There's a cost for either one choice, or multiple choices, and there are several sections that you'll complete, based on your previous qualifications that you've studied. So in the UK, that could be GCSEs, it could be Year 10 qualifications in India. Whatever it happened to be, you'll include that, as well as what you are studying now.

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As well as a personal statement, and then the reference, which is provided separately by someone that you nominate to be a reference, normally a teacher, tutor, or guidance counsellor.

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In terms of the key dates, though, it's a very cyclical process. It's very time-table driven. So in terms of, the dates are on the screen. These are for 2020 entry. So there'll be very similar for any of you that are interested in 2021. So the start of the APPLY process starts in May, so it has already launched. So the ability to be able to start putting together your application, and being able to use a search tool. That's usually beginning in May. From September onwards, applications will be sent through to UCAS, and then there are two main deadlines that we'll be looking at.

4:22

So we've got the medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and Oxbridge deadline that's in October. And then, we have the on-time or equal consideration deadline, that's on January 15th. So it's very important to try and stick to these deadlines as well. Obviously, there's sometimes a bit of flexibility, but it is very important to try to aim to meet this deadline, particularly the January or the October deadlines in particular. There is a deadline in terms of those students making a choice, so where you're making your firm choice, that's where you're choosing to go to, as well as your insurance choice. So where you will have as a backup. This year, it's been delayed slightly. So it will be in June to give students a little bit more flexibility in making their choices. But normally this will be earlier in May. So I think it's currently planned for the 6th May in 2021, but it's just worth confirming that with UCAS, when you're finally applying so you can just get the exact dates once they've finally being confirmed.

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So just to cover the equal consideration deadline, very quickly. So it isn't first come first serve. We will consider all applications that will be submitted by those very particular days. But it is good to get it out of the way.

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So it's good to focus on putting together your personal statement, as well as the rest of your application, a little bit earlier on in the cycle. Just so that you can focus on your qualifications and into your studies, because primarily we'll making a conditional offer at Manchester, so therefore, you'll need to achieve the grades that we're asking for. So, it's much better for you to focus on achieving those grades, and although we do make more offers than we have places, some courses will be more competitive than others. So, it's worth just finding out about what causes are looking for, the kind of grades that we're asking for as part of your researching process. This will also cover the kind of things that we would like to see in terms of the personal statement. So I'll cover this in quite general terms, and some of the specific examples that we'll have as part of this presentation as well, but it is just worth checking the way that your application will be considered for each University, and for each course that you're applying for.

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In terms of the submission process, I'm not gonna go into this in too much detail, but when it goes through to UCAS, it's then sent through to the five different choices courses and universities that you're applying to. Each of those will consider it separately. We don't see where else you apply to. We will only consider it on the merits for the course and university that you've applied for. So it's really important that your application seems like it's really applicable to any of the choices that you're making.

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But here we go. This is really what you came here to listen to you today. So hopefully this will help clear up some of the myths, help you understand what you might be starting to put together, and what you should start to include as part of your personal statement. So normally, I'm used to doing these in face-to-face workshops. So I've got a little bit of a quiz to start off. So hopefully it'll just give you an understanding of some of the myths that have popped up, and people think about when it comes to

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The personal statement. So the first one of these is: there is no maximum length to a personal statement. So what do you think? True or false?

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It's always a little bit disconcerting when it's a virtual event. I can't see anyone's faces nodding or shaking their head. So I'm just hoping that you'll get these right. So for the first one, starting off with question one, it is false.

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So, writing a personal statement, it's very much an iterative process. You'll be creating multiple versions and drafting it over time. So your first version is almost always too long, because you're trying to talk about all the things that you've done. So the reason that it is kind of quite concise, so it has got a 47 line limit or 4000 characters, is so that you really have to think about what adds the most value. So that you really have to make it quite concise. Kind of really focusing on what we're looking for as part of the application process for a university. Second question here is: a personal statement can be written in paragraphs, so true or false.

8:32

Let's give you a couple of seconds.

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And that's true. As someone who's read a lot of applications in the past, I would really recommend that you do use a paragraph structure. I completely appreciate, as we've seen on the previous slide, that there is a line limit, so that does take away some of the space that you've got to talk about things. But we do use the structure of the personal statement to be able to pick out really relevant pieces of information. So the easier you structure it, and the easier is that you make your personal statement for us to be able to find the most relevant piece of information, the stronger your application will be. So we would recommend that you use the paragraph structure.

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UCAS, Apply software has spelling and grammar checks. True or false?

9:24

So this one is false.

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So UCAS, the system, UCAS APPLY, the system through which you'll be submitting your application. It doesn't have a huge amount of formatting abilities. So it doesn't have a huge amount of spell checking and things like that. So we always recommend using another system such as something like Microsoft Word or another word processing software. Just check over it before you paste it into APPLY. But when you do paste it, just to make sure that nothing's being cut off, and that you have kept to the character and space limits that they've set as part of the application. Also, it's really worthwhile getting a second pair of eyes. Getting someone else to check over your application as well. We've got a few examples of personal statements towards the end of this presentation. Some snippets from personal

statements of small sections. And as part of those, you'll see errors that came through. So they were correct words, but they didn't make sense in the context.

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So, especially once you've done a couple of drafts, it's really important that you get someone else to check it, because you'll miss some of the small errors that will slip through the process. And because it is a big part of what we're considering as part of the application. It's really important that you have got this attention to detail and that you aren't making simple mistakes, like spelling or grammar errors that could be resolved by using something like Microsoft or any other system to word process the personal statement that you've created.

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Only a couple more questions now. So you can write a different personal statement for each of your choices. True or False?

11:00

And that's false, so that'll be different to the structure of how supporting statements and essays work in other countries. But in the UK, when you're applying for UCAS, you only have one personal statements and it's used for all your choices. So you have to be really careful in what you're talking about, especially if you're applying for different kinds of courses, or different kinds of universities. One thing the personal statement makes you do is really focus on the course that you're applying for. So making sure that you've kind of really focused on the area of study that you're going for, because the more things you try to include - the more subject areas, the more different disciplines - the weaker your application becomes. So, for example, I have done lots of personal statement drop-ins, where people have come to speak to me before. And they show me a personal statement that's tried to talk about doing dentistry and doing geography, and you can't do those two things together.

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And so, it just makes the application weaker because one department would think that you aren't interested in that course. The other Department would think you weren't interested in that course. So it doesn't open your options, it just means that it is an overall weaker statement. So if you are applying for slightly different courses, make sure you focus on where there is common focus, whether it's a common interest, and go from there.

12:17

And then a couple of questions. You can use bold, italics, underlined characters?

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So this is false, as I kind of implied earlier on. So this is the reason why the paragraph structure is really important. Because if you've put in a lovely quote, filled with italics, and it's really clear on your Word document, that doesn't come through for us. When we see the application it is just plain text. So we really rely on the structure of your personal statement to allow us to pick out the most relevant piece of information. Make sure that you don't rely on formatting to get your points across and to get all the really interesting things that you've done across as well.

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Then, nearly last but not least, I think. So you should keep a copy of your personal statement. So, true or false?

13:01

So this is probably more of an understandable one, but it would be true. However, the reason that we ask you to keep a hold of your personal statement is that we will often base the questions that we ask in interviews, whether these are face-to-face or Skype interviews, or

using any other means, we will often ask you about what you included in your personal statements. And it will often be the basis for the questions that we ask, at least for some of them. So it's really important that you can review it in advance of any interviews that you might have. Just to remind yourself of the events that you attend. Or that book that you read. Because it's our way of just checking, and finding out what you thought of things, and what you've reflected on based on your previous experiences. So just read over it in advance of any part of the application process that will be a conversation with the University.

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So that was all the questions I had for you. So hopefully we can expand on a few of these points now.

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So to give you a bit of background, every university will have some sort of admissions criteria. So basically, this is a list of things that we're considering potential applicants and students against. So at the University of Manchester, will have four things that we're particularly looking for. But this will be very similar to other institutions. So we're all looking for similar things. We might just focus slightly more on some rather than others. But overall, we're trying to see understanding. And this is kind of being able to show your research, to show that you know what to expect. To show that you have got an understanding of the course that you're applying for, what it will be like, what you can get out of it, what your opportunities will be, what you'll be studying.

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We're not expecting you to know the detail of every single module on every single part of the course, but we would expect you to have, in broad strokes, an idea of what you'd be studying, what to expect, and that what you have done in the past is a good preparation for that. We'd also like to see your potential. So we'll be using this, and I'll talk in the next slide about what evidence we use to consider this, but in terms of what we're trying to see is potentially, will you succeed in this course? Is this the right course for you? Will this course meet your needs and requirements? Will you do well based on what you've done previously, and your work experience, or particular qualifications and subjects that you've studied in the past? We're looking to see what you want to do in the future.

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We want to see that you're independent. That partly means that this is your choice in terms of course. So, this is something that you want to do. University study in the UK, and in many different institutions as well, and countries, is very self-motivated. You have to be driven to do the course that you're applying for. And so, you have to show that interest and enthusiasm and that independent nature as part of your personal statement and application. We may also want to see what you contribute, so what are you like as an individual? So, what would you give back to the course? What would you give back to the university? What are you like as a potential student academic in the future?

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In terms of the evidence, so I gave you the four points that we use as part of the admissions criteria of the University. But we actually have to use the various parts of the overall UCAS application to assess these things. So things like your predicted grades. So when you're applying to University, you will have the qualifications that you studied in the past, but also what you're studying at the moment. So whether it's a levels, whether it's the IB international baccalaureate, whether it's BTECs, whether it's year 12 qualifications in India, whatever it happens to be, you'll have a predicted grade from your school or college that will support this. So that will help us understand your potential, and your likelihood to succeed in the

course you're applying for. We will look at your past academic performance. So we'll look at GCSEs, or if you're from outside the UK, we will also look at any other qualifications you may have taken in the past. What we want to see is kind of an overall trajectory. So the direction of your academic life in the past. So how you've done in on those qualifications, how you're likely to achieve on your project to grades, and therefore, how you're likely to do at the University as well.

17:04

A big part of this is the personal statement, as that's what we're focusing on today. But this is your chance to talk about not just grades, not just qualifications, but to talk about your interests, your passions, your understanding. What makes you you, and what makes you a good candidate. So it's the only part of it that allows your voice to come through. So it's a really great way to demonstrate

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What you want to do, how this will help you and what you'd be able to get from this experience.

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Then finally we'll have the academic reference. So this will be very similar to your personal statements, but it is provided by your teacher, tutor, guidance counsellor, whoever it happens to be. This gives us an objective view. It gives us a different perspective, but you can talk to your referee and build a good relationship. So if there are things you haven't been able to talk about in your personal statement, you can speak to them, and maybe they would be able to include it as part of the reference. So the two things can really tie in quite neatly together as well.

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There may also be admissions tests and interviews. So I've already mentioned how the personal statement could be used for interviews and for some of our courses like Medicine, for example, there will be things like the UCAT - the University clinical admissions test. So there are various ways that we can assess based on the course that we're looking for. Sometimes, it will just be based on the personal statements and overall applications. Sometimes, it's a few more steps you need to go through.

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It's all about us, as a University, working out the best way to assess the candidate, and making sure that you will be a good fit, and you will succeed on the course that you're applying for.

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So, going back to the personal statement.

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It should include your academic and personal ability. So, a large part of your personal statement should be talking about what you're studying now, not giving us a syllabus or anything too detailed, but the bits that you're particularly focused on, or are interested in - all the bits that you want to expand on in future. So, we want to see you as a learner and how you want to develop yourself in your academic life at university, as well. We'd like to see a big part of your personal statement being, the reasons for choosing the course. So, kind of the why, what is the reason that this course is right for me? Why have I prepared myself, and how have I prepared myself?

19:23

So, the explanation and your story is really, really helpful, to help us understand that you are doing the right thing, this is the right course for you. We'd like to hear about further qualifications. So, if you've done anything outside what your primary qualifications are, that adds value, then it's good to be able to include these in there as well. And then you've also got things like outside interests, or hobbies, or activities that we're involved in. And then, also, things about work experience and volunteering. Some courses require these, some courses won't require it. It is all about your research process, and making sure that you've really assessed what a university is trying to look for on the whole. And then, also aspiration.

20:08

So aspiration, just thinking about what you want to do with the degree that you've done. So maybe a future career. You want to go into academia? It could be whatever you choose to do. It's good to mention this as part of your personal statement, but the only thing I'll mention here is it's balancing this as well.

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So you're applying for a course, you're applying for a degree, you're not necessarily applying for a job. So you need to balance your aspirations, with your future career path, with also your real interest in a particular subject area and that this is what you are applying for in the end.

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What I would say now, is that, it's all about what adds value. And you'll hear me say this all the way through. So what adds value and what is relevant.

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So making sure that everything that you include is telling us something about your application for this course. It's not just put in for me, for the sake of it. It's not just included to give us some context about you, but it actually supports your overall application. So making sure that, at every point you think about what you're taking from that, and what we, as a university will take from that personal statement, as well.

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In terms of how we use it. So, looking at kind of the University side of things. We will use it at a variety of different stages. So, I've obviously mentioned how we use it at interview.

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So, on the basis of many of the questions that we ask, to help to give us a bit of context in advance of that meeting, it also helps us differentiate applicants, so we can compare and contrast students and look at the different things that people have been involved in. It gives us details about your kind of academic background. So it helps us understand what you're studying, what profile of qualifications that you're taking, what subjects that you've chosen, what you're able to do, what you're chosen to do, and have gone over and above what you've been required to do.

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It helps us when we're advising students. So there are some cases where we might look at an application, and think maybe this isn't necessarily the right course for you, but there might be an alternative.

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So it might be used sometimes in that kind of case. And in some cases, for some of our courses, so, for example, medicine and dentistry, we'd also ask for additional information. So we have a non-academic information form for those courses.

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For some other courses, you might ask for additional information in different formats as well, but it's just a way of getting more specific questions and getting out the information that we really need to be able to assess the form overall, basically.

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So, the thing here is, you can't just say what you do, you have to evidence it, you really have to kind of explain what you're doing.

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So you have to kind of back up everything that you've said. So the next example that you'll see, isn't a particularly in-depth example, but it will give you a good feel for the kind of structure of what you can follow in terms of building your personal statement together.

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So we use the ABC Method at Manchester to explain this in the workshops that we deliver to perspective students. So the A is the activity. What have you done? What is the thing that you've been involved in? What is the activity: a book that you read, the event that you attended, the work experience that you were involved in? That kind of thing. But then we'd like you to expand on that with the benefit. What have you learned from it? What skills have you acquired? What has that helped you reflect on?

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And then, finally, it's about the course. How is this related to what we're applying for? How will it help me succeed at university? How is this a good preparation? An activity is OK - that tells us something about you. It gives us a bit of context.

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But a good personal statement is where someone reflects on that. An excellent personal statement is where they're making it related to the course that they're applying for. That is what admissions staff and admissions tutors are focusing on. They want to see how you are a good candidate for English, or biomedical sciences, or engineering. They want to see that from your application, not just 'I have been playing on the sports team'. You need to tell us the things that you want to get across. We're not going to assume anything on your behalf, you have to kind of express that to us.

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So as an example here, I work part-time in a clothes shop where I serve customers and order stock. Great, that's a great thing to do. You'll get lots of different benefits from that, but you need to tell us what they are. So that means I can manage my time well, good communication skills, and I can take on different levels of responsibility. OK, that's great, that helps me understand. I can see how these would be of relevance.

24:47

Therefore, during my English and drama degree, I'll be able to manage my work workload successfully. Essentially, it's thinking backwards. This degree is very independent, therefore, what skills have I got that were good preparation for that? Every degree will be different. Every course will have different skills and transferable skills that are really, really helpful for that particular degree. And that won't be the same across the board, for all subjects at university.

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So these are an example of some of the different transferable skills that courses will be focusing on. So you just saw things like time management, and self-motivation for something like English and Drama. For my course, economics, it would be things like research skills. It

would be analytical abilities, it would be problem solving and logical thinking, so they would be the kinds of things I would have needed to emphasize.

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So I could have thought about what I'd done, what work experience I'd done, what books I'd read, what events I'd attended, what I'd done in my current studies, and draw out the relevance of those and the value of those as well.

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Because, it's all about what is important to you. Every personal statement is very different, every course is very different, so it's making sure that you've really talked about how this has helped you.

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So, in terms of a structure, there's never a perfect structure for a personal statement. All of them are ever so slightly different, because they should be unique, and they should be personal. But this is usually what we'd recommend to make sure that you're covering your bases, and you're covering what we need to see from you overall. So, the first part of it should be the why. Your explanation, your story, your reasons behind picking a particular subject area or degree. So, it's really important part of that, because it helps us understand that you are dedicated, you're motivated and you're driven to succeed in the course you're applying for. The main part of it -

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So the main kind of academic evidence - will be the skills and knowledge that you have from the qualifications that you're currently studying, or anything that you've done over and above the syllabus. So some universities will call it super-curricular activities. So you're not just reading what you've been told to read. You're reading something else that's in the same subject area, but it's over and above what you're meant to learn. So that you're showing that you're going out of your way to make sure this is the right course for you. That you've got the right skills, you've got the extra things you need to do. So those extra things can be included here, as well. That main part of it should be the evidence, linking to what you're studying now, or what you're doing to build up your academic understanding of the course you're applying for.

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In terms of things like work experience, the amount of what you'll include will depend on what experience you have, and also how relevant it is to the course that you're applying for. So some will need it more than others, particularly from our vocational courses. So those, perhaps in healthcare sciences, like nursing or medicine - sorry, to keep using medicine as an example here, but that's just one thing that you could include. And then, things like extra-curricular activities.

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Other qualifications, this section will tend to be smaller because we are primarily focusing on the academic evidence, but it is a good opportunity to expand where there are things that you want to show, and to add value to your overall application.

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Then finally, you'll conclude. Probably relatively brief, just something that kind of signs off, brings together everything that you've done. So, it's a bit like an academic essay, or an experiment. You've got your hypothesis. You've got your evidence, then you've got your conclusion.

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So that's what we want to see, why: your evidence, and then, finally, some way to just bring together everything that you've talked about, and summarize it.

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Then, in terms of what makes a good personal statement, we're looking for a strong introduction and conclusion.

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So, a good start, a good end - it just makes it more powerful.

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And we'll talk a little bit about how not to start off a personal statement on the next slide.

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We want to make it original, interesting and enthusiastic. Vary the sentence structure up a bit.

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We will be reading lots of these. We might get, like, 100 a day, or something, that we will be working our way through, and considering on, an individual basis. So, making sure that it's your story. It's interesting. It's not just the same kind of way that you've written it all the way through. That's why you will redraft it over time. So, your first personal statement probably will do the job, but it's not as great as it could be. And it's just a case of polishing it and getting feedback until you get to a final personal statement that is fantastic. And probably bears not that much relation to what you first created, and that's absolutely fine. That happens to everyone. Make sure to be organized about what you're talking about. So be selective. Don't waffle on. You can change things and edit things. So that's great.

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But every part of your personal statement needs to add something, needs to tell us something, needs to help support your application so you can't waste space, you haven't got the lines, you haven't got the characters to do that, so it's all about what tells us something about you. Quotations.

30:03

I'm not a massive fan, personally. But it will come down to your personal statement, and what you think tells us something about you. But try to look at it from the other perspective. So think about what an admissions tutor or admissions member of staff would see, what else they would get. So, let's say, English literature, they might have seen thousands of the same quote over and over and over. And that makes it less unique and makes it less specific to you. But if there's something that really relates to something that you're interested in, so if there's one particular passage or sentence that really drew you into the subject, then that is part of your story. But on the whole, I would prefer things to be in your words, but it's your choice and your decision. It's all about what adds value for you.

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Hide the thesaurus. You don't need to sound smart. You are smart. The fact you've got to this stage, and you know, you're thinking about going to university means that you have got the kind of skills to back it up. You don't need to make yourself sound smart. You don't have to use language that you wouldn't typically use. You can redraft things, you can amend things, there's loads of things you can change. But, you don't have to speak in a way that you wouldn't typically speak.

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So, don't just put things in for the sake of it. We'd rather hear from you in your own voice, explaining the actual skills that you've done. And how that is really realistic, and fits into what you are like as an individual.

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I've already talked about this all the way through. So I apologize for kind of emphasizing it, but relevance is really, really key. So, the relevance of the academic courses and skills you've done - how it ties into the degree that you're applying for. And any extracurricular things. I've seen loads of personal statements that have said everything someone had done, but not related it to the course. Or that told me absolutely nothing. Somewhere in the middle is probably quite helpful.

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So a few more powerful examples of what you have been involved in that are related to the course is probably a good compromise in terms of that. And as I mentioned, in terms of the aspiration section, you're applying for course, not the career, so you're applying for an academic study of a degree subject. That's what you should be emphasizing. You you can talk about aspiration in terms of what you want to do afterwards. But that that shouldn't be the focus of your personal statement. And then I do like to say this. A personal statement is personal. It tells us about you, so it helps us understand your suitability, so your voice, your words, your explanation, your story. Because that's really key and really helps us understand

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How you would be an excellent candidate to study at Manchester or any other university.

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What you are very likely to do, and I did this myself - so it's definitely understandable - is to use cliché. To use a standard sentence to start off with, because it's so daunting getting all the words down on paper. So you'll things like, I'm applying for this course because, for as long as I can remember I have, I've always been interested in, etc. And so this was a couple of years ago.

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When 750 people used the exact same opening sentence, when hundreds of people do the exact same thing. Immediately it takes the punch out of it, it immediately takes the power out of the personal statement.

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So try not to just use a generic phrase. Try not to use a cliché. Try not to say what you think we would expect to hear. So, for example, as much as it's a really interesting subject. No one was born with an innate interest in geology. They develop that over time. It's something they've discovered and found out about and become really enthusiastic about it as well.

33:38

But you weren't born with it, and I'd much rather hear the real story than one of these generic statements that isn't about what your real experiences were. So, you can find these relatively frequently. And so it's just worth trying to redraft it, because you're likely to include something along these lines in your first draft of your personal statement. So just look back and change it and amend it to make it much more personal and give it your own touch to it as well.

34:08

And then in terms of what not to do as well. So these are all real examples of personal statements.

34:17

It's saying, how you come across. So something like '80% of success is showing up. I feel this attitude correctly demonstrates my passion for literature, where indeed you only have to turn up and read the books to fully understand the topic. Also, this year I was voted girl, because I made the most hilarious speech ever.' How do you come across? Are you coming across as a serious learner, a serious academic? Are you accidentally insulting the course and interests of the admissions tutors who are considering your application?

34:44

How will you appear? So try to look at it from the other perspective, and try to make sure that you're emphasizing the skills that are kind of most relevant, and that kind of demonstrate that most effectively.

34:56

'Ever since I watched Shaun the sheep on CBBC, I've been passionate about becoming a farmer. For me, nothing in life would be as good as a farmer's life.'

35:04

That's kinda talking a little bit about aspiration. So even if it was agricultural studies as a course, for example, this isn't demonstrating the academic evidence and the complete kind of reasoning that would be a serious application. So, how would you come across? Are you demonstrating that really well? This doesn't necessarily have the kind of power that we would hope to see.

35:27

'I am well respected by my classmates at school. I hold the position of head boy, and it's a post time performing well.' So, as I've mentioned, attention to detail is really key.

35:40

So, here, it's also about getting someone else to check it. That wouldn't have been picked up in something like Word or another word processing platform. Because it's the correct word. It doesn't make sense in this context, though, so, getting someone else to check over it is really key. Because, after 2 or 3 or 4 drafts, you probably will skip over that. You wouldn't have seen it because you're so familiar with it. So, get a friend,

36:04

Get your parents, get teachers, tutors, advisors to help guide you through what they can amend. Obviously they should all be your words, your writing, your personal statement. But you can get advice. You can get feedback. You can get a suggestion. But in the end, it's kind of your decision, but simple errors like this, there are ways to avoid making them.

36:29

As a previous economist, I should say, this one slowly kills me. 'Economics is a diverse subject, as economics can be related to anything, especially during economic crises, which forces you to think economically-' As you'll read yourself, this sentence, if you break it down logically, it says absolutely nothing. It doesn't add any value. This is the waffling. This is the lack of structure that we talked about earlier on. So, this is someone trying to fill the lines and, if you're trying to fill the lines, you have to think seriously about, what have I done to prepare myself? Am I prepared for this course? Am I a good fit? Have I got the skills needed? Because you should be able to talk about these things and draw on your particular experiences in the past to be able to bring together a personal statement. So, this might be a first draft, but it's very important that this definitely isn't what you submit.

37:24

'I have a black belt in karate. I enjoy the marital arts.' This is just to emphasize please, please, please, just get a spell check over it. Just a little bit of attention to detail really is kind of key for the personal statements.

37:41

Then, 'I'm hoping to pass my driving test. So I can drive to [insert uni name here] every day.' Please don't put the name of any universities in terms of, I want to go to X University. Because it isn't helpful if you're applying to five different universities. And they say:

37:59

I've always wanted to study at the University of Manchester.

38:02

Every other university will go, this candidate hasn't thought about our course. It's not the right thing for them. It's not what they want to do. So it's really key that you don't focus too much on that. If you've done a particular activity at a University, like widening participation activity, like one of our Access programs, or you visited it, and it's a general thing about the subject, then you can include it, that would be fine, but generally try not to. My personal bug bear in the past was, although London's an amazing place, when people used to apply to Manchester having put, 'I've always wants to study in London',

38:35

That didn't exactly help their application. So it's about thinking how that would come across to all of the five choices that you're making, because they will be considering on the basis of their own course. So it's just something to consider.

38:50

And thinking about plagiarism, I'm sure none of you listening to this presentation would want to plagiarize, or want to do it intentionally. But it's really important that you bear this in mind, and that's the reason we haven't given really extensive examples for personal statements.

39:06

So as an example, one year, 234 UCAS Personal Statements contained the following sentence:

39:14

'Ever since I accidentally burnt holes in my pyjamas after experimenting with a chemistry sets on my eighth birthday, I've always had a passion for science.'

39:23

As you will appreciate, and as we all appreciated, this did not happen to 234 people in the same year. This was a really commonly used example the year before, and people thought they would borrow it. They thought: oh, it really helps demonstrate academic interest, and enthusiasm, and kind of a background in the subject.

39:43

But it's not them. It's not their explanation. It's not their story. And for each of these candidates, it was flagged up, and that's not what we want for you to have happen.

39:54

UCAS uses a system called Copy Catch, which assesses your personal statement against every other personal statement that has ever been submitted as well as books, journal articles, websites. It's a good way of us just being able to pick up who's talked about what. So only a fraction of applications are flagged because most people don't do this, but I don't want any of

you to accidentally do this. So if you've seen an example online, don't use it completely as inspiration. Don't take sections from it. Just look at it as an example. Your personal statement is personal. It should be about you. So try not to use too many examples, talk in your own words about your own circumstances.

40:38

Moving on to references and other things to consider.

40:42

Obviously, your reference on personal statements will tie in very closely together. You may or may not see your reference. It will depend on your school's policy. You can request to see a copy from UCAS, but you wouldn't see this in advance of submitting your application.

40:56

Your teachers want to be positive. They want to help, but they also have a duty to be realistic. So, they will help guide you through and support you with your application. So, if you want them to include anything, make sure you've had that conversation with them.

41:11

Make sure that you have inform them about what you're doing, and what you want them to emphasize.

41:19

And particularly if you've let them see your personal statement before, they put together the academic reference, so that's why it's really important to stick to deadlines. That means they can help tie the two of them together. And they can fit it all to make the strongest application for you, for all the different choices, universities, and courses that you're applying for.

41:40

So, I'm getting towards the end here, so we are nearly finished. So hopefully this has helped so far. But you need to research your application. Research really comes across as part of your application. So that helps us built a picture of your understanding of the course you're going for. It helps us make sure that you know what to expect on that course, in terms of like teaching style, contact hours, and that kind of thing.

42:06

You need to set yourself clear and realistic goals. So you need to know how long this is going to take. You need to build in plenty of time. So, you don't want to be submitting it to your teachers, tutors, guidance counsellors like the week before the deadline, because they won't have time to check it, amend it and add on to the stuff in the reference, as well. So clear, realistic goals, and deadlines, and make sure that your form is accurate. It does get checked. We will verify things at interview, for example. So it's very important that the things that you've talked about are things that you've done, and things that you can talk about at interview. So the worst thing that can happen is that you completely go blank at the time that you're being asked about something that you'd included in your personal statement. So, good to keep it, good to check it and make sure that you are accurate in what you're saying. And then be available on results day. So whether you're doing A levels, whether you're taking any international qualifications, just be around to be able to speak to us and have a conversation.

43:02

So we can walk you through what your options are. Hopefully, you'll just be accepted but

43:09

If there are any uncertainties or you want to ask any questions, just make sure that you around and available to have a chat with the staff who wants to help you and to guide you through the process around coming to Manchester or any other institution.

43:25

So thank you for listening.

43:28

But I just want to talk about a few things that you can access that we've offered as part of the support that Manchester has. So we've got a couple of things that we've been running, one of which is Manchester Live. So the fact that you're here is a fantastic start.

43:45

And so this is my second webinar. So hopefully you've enjoyed it, and you've managed to get information out of it that's relevant to you. But we also have a whole series of different topics about things like the student experience, accommodation, other things about UCAS, and you can continue to find and access these through the Manchester Live website as well. So please feel free to see anything on there and sign up for them. And also, you can access previous sessions, so you can see a recording of the webinar that has been delivered.

44:19

We're also running a virtual open week for undergraduate students. So this is happening next week. So there's about 150 different sessions of different subjects. So there's talks from almost all of the courses that we have at Manchester, there are accommodation panels, there are student experience things. There's also a system called Unibuddy through which you can chat to some of our students.

44:41

So feel free to join us for the Virtual Open Week, we would really encourage you to think about signing up for the sessions, finding out more about the courses, having the opportunity to engage with students and academic staff at university. Find out a little bit more about what Manchester might have to offer you as well.

45:01

So, thank you very much for listening. I'm going to leave the chat open for a little bit longer, in case you have any last flurries of questions. And you'll also see in the chat the link directly through to the Virtual Open Week. Thanks to Maddie. But if you have any more questions, now's the time to ask. Thank you for listening, and have a great day.