
A Guide for writing Personal Statements for Competitive HE Courses

What are competitive courses and why is it important to write a good personal statement?

Competitive courses are those courses where there are more applications than places. In order to receive an offer or be invited to interview, it's not just about meeting the academic entry requirements, you also need to 'stand-out' from other applicants. The personal statement is often the only way for Admissions Tutors to distinguish and choose between applicants' suitability for their course.

Your suitability for the course will be determined by your skills, knowledge, experiences and enthusiasm, based on what you write in your personal statement.

Examples of competitive courses include Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, Allied Health Professions and Teaching. The competition for courses can vary from one institution to another, and some institutions may be more competitive than others.

How to write a personal statement for competitive courses

Entry requirements

- Ensure you read all the published academic and non-academic entry requirements. Check the requirements on university websites rather than in printed prospectuses as this provides more specific and detailed information.
- Familiarise yourself with other requirements in the process such as entry tests, auditions and interviews.
- Look at a range of university websites as entry requirements may vary from one institution to another.
- Check which qualifications are accepted. If there is any doubt about your qualifications and entry requirements, contact the Admissions Tutor or central admissions team.

In your personal statement you will need to demonstrate a broad range of both research and experiences.

Research

- Make sure online research is credible. For example, watching TV programmes like *'24 hours in A&E'* and *'One born every Minute'* are not credible sources. Instead, you should research professional body websites such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council or General Pharmaceutical Council and credible careers websites such as NHS Careers, Get in to Teaching and the National Careers Service.
- Undertake super-curricular activity. This is different to extra-curricular activity and provides you with the opportunity to enhance your subject knowledge and understanding. For example, podcasts, journals, university guest lectures, webinars,

online courses and Ted Talks are all super-curricular activities. Some universities have a repository of super curricular activities listed under each subject on their website. You could also ask your tutors in school/college as they may be able to recommend subject journals to read or podcasts to listen to.

- If you are applying for a professional subject, research the professional standards/competencies for your chosen profession. These can be found on professional body websites and will show you the range of skills, competencies and values you will be expected to demonstrate when you enter your chosen profession. For health care professions for instance, you need to demonstrate an understanding of the NHS core values.

Experience

- Where relevant, seek work experience in your chosen career area. For example, in a hospital, care home, pharmacy, dental practice, hospice, school, law firm or community setting.
- Direct work experience is desirable but not always essential. If you can't gain experience in your chosen career setting, try to gain experience where you can demonstrate relevant and required transferable skills e.g. communication and team working skills developed in an alternative setting will still be considered. Explore opportunities for face-to-face and virtual work-experience or both.
- Try to think creatively. For example, for an aspiring nurse, if you can't gain ward experience, think about how else you can demonstrate empathy and care. For instance, you could volunteer at a Food Bank or Homeless Shelter.
- Extra-curricular activity such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, taking on positions of responsibility in school and participating in sports clubs can all also be used to demonstrate transferable skills and positive personal values relevant to the course/career.
- Part-time employment can also be used to demonstrate transferable skills such as customer care, teamwork, and communication. But you must make the link to the course explicit and clear.
- If you don't have direct work-experience related to your chosen courses, it is even more important that you back-up your transferable skills by demonstrating thorough research into the career or profession as outlined above in the research section.

Writing your personal statement

Once you have participated in research and gained experiences it is important to document them correctly. If you don't write about them, the Admissions Tutor will never know what you have done.

Be specific – talk about the research you have undertaken, citing websites and journals you have consulted and webinars and lectures attended. What have you read/watched/listened to and what have you learnt from it that is relevant to the course?

Provide examples – don't just say what you did (work-experience/volunteering) but explain what you learnt from it in terms of skills and knowledge. Did you learn something new about

yourself? It's ok to say that some aspects were challenging if you explain how you overcame this.

Tips

When you write your personal statement, ask yourself does it demonstrate the following three things:

1. That you have a sound understanding of this course/career. For professional courses such as nursing, you need to demonstrate understating of the day-to day duties/tasks undertaken in the chosen career.
2. Why you want to do this course and why you would you be good at it. You'll need to match your skills, qualities and understanding to the requirements of the course – evidenced through examples and experience.
3. A broad exposure to the course/career through a blend of research and practical experience.

Try to undertake a range of experiences, rather than the bare minimum, to show your firm commitment to this route. e.g., a mix of super-curricular and extra-curricular activity as well as research conducted using credible sources.

General advice for personal statements

Undertake plenty of research and gain a variety of experiences to write about.

Start with a personal statement plan.

4,000 characters maximum across the three sections.

Avoid duplication and repeating content across the three sections.

Use plain English instead of elaborate language. However you can use subject related terminology where relevant.

Be specific and provide details and examples to back-up what you write, always linking the relevance back to the course applied for.

Be enthusiastic but don't exaggerate. Highlight the positives and not any negatives.

Make sure it's original and your own work: do not copy and paste or use AI to do it for you. AI can be used to generate ideas on what to include and for checking work but not to write it for you.

Proofread carefully to check clarity and meaning and spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Get others to check and provide feedback. Redraft as many times as necessary.

Give yourself plenty of time: don't leave it until the last minute.

Useful research sources

General sources

[UCAS: Personal statement checklist for students 2026 entry](#)

[UCAS: How to write a personal statement 2026 entry](#)

[UCAS Personal Statement Builder tool – available in the UCAS Hub](#)

Produced by the Schools and Colleges Liaison Service

schools.liaison@hud.ac.uk www.hud.ac.uk

Subject specific sources

[UCAS: Personal statement subject guides](#)

[Springpod: Subject spotlights](#)

[BBC Sounds podcasts](#)

[Ted Talks](#)

[National careers Service – Explore Careers](#)

[NHS Careers](#)

[Observe GP](#)

[Get into Teaching](#)

[BBC News](#) (Education and Health sections for current issues in the sector)

Professional body websites

Many professions have a professional body, so undertake career research on their website and view the professional standards/competencies. Some examples are included below

[Nursing and Midwifery Council](#)

[British Dental Association](#)

[British Medical Association](#)

[General Pharmaceutical Council](#)

[Chartered Society of Physiotherapy](#)

[Social work England](#)

[The Law Society](#)

Virtual work experience

www.springpod.com/virtual-work-experience/search

www.speakersforschools.org/experience-2/vwex/

University specific work experience e.g.

[Brighton and Sussex Medical School Virtual WE](#)

Online courses

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). Examples of providers include:

[Future Learn](#)

[Open Learn](#)

Preparing for university interviews

[UCAS: how to prepare for a uni interview](#)

[The Student Room: How to prepare for a university interview](#)