UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Guide for mature learners

For applicants aged 21 and over applying to undergraduate study through UCAS.

A practical guide to planning, drafting and checking an authentic UCAS personal statement for 2026 entry onwards.



University of Wolverhampton | Schools and Colleges guidance | Updated September 2026

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THE STRONGEST STATEMENT IS NOT THE ONE WITH THE BIGGEST WORDS. IT IS THE ONE THAT IS SPECIFIC, RELEVANT, REFLECTIVE AND TRUE.

START HERE

Your UCAS personal statement helps universities understand why you want to study your chosen subject, how your learning has prepared you and what else you have done that shows you are ready. Admissions teams read all three answers together, so aim for one clear and consistent picture of you.

The current UCAS format

Requirement	What it means
Three questions	You answer three separate questions rather than writing one continuous essay.
4,000 characters in total	The limit includes spaces and is shared across all three answers.
At least 350 characters per answer	Each question must meet this minimum. You may divide the remaining characters as your evidence requires.
One statement for all choices	Keep it relevant to the subject or closely related courses. Do not name one university unless all choices are for it.
Read as a whole	Avoid repeating the same example or point across answers.

These rules apply to undergraduate UCAS applications for 2026 entry onwards. Always check UCAS and individual course pages before submitting because requirements can change.



What makes an answer convincing

Use a simple four-part pattern whenever you introduce an example:

Step	Prompt
Claim	What interest, skill or quality are you showing?
Evidence	What exactly did you study, read, make, observe or do?
Reflection	What did you learn, notice, question or improve?
Relevance	How will this help you on the course or in the subject?

Example: "My investigation into local air quality taught me to compare sources rather than accept a single headline figure. Explaining the findings to my class strengthened my confidence with data and made me keen to study how evidence informs public policy."

Your experience is an asset

You do not need to imitate a school-leaver statement. Select the parts of your education, employment, caring responsibilities, community involvement and life experience that best demonstrate your readiness. A clear answer to "why this subject, and why now?" gives the statement direction.



QUESTION 1

Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Explain the reason for applying now, the progression behind your decision and the research that makes it an informed choice. If you are changing career, show that you understand the field rather than presenting the degree as an escape from your current role.

Planning prompts

- What has prompted you to apply at this point?
- How have your interests or responsibilities developed into a course choice?
- What have you done to test or research that choice?
- How will degree-level study support your next step?

Strong content choices

Less convincing	More convincing
"I want a complete career change."	"Supporting service users with housing queries made me interested in how policy shapes access to support. Further reading and volunteering confirmed my decision to study social policy."
Criticising a current employer or career	Explain positively what you are moving towards and why.
Claiming certainty without research	Refer to credible exploration of the subject or profession and what you learned.

Drafting frame

Use this to start, then rewrite it naturally in your own words:

- My interest in … developed when …
- I explored this further by …
- This helped me understand / question / appreciate …
- I now want to study … because …



QUESTION 2

How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare?

Use your most recent and relevant learning, including Access to HE, professional training, continuing professional development (CPD), online study or earlier qualifications. It is acceptable for this answer to be shorter if your strongest evidence belongs in question 3, but it must still meet the UCAS minimum..

Planning prompts

- What formal learning have you completed recently?
- Which study habits or academic skills have you refreshed?
- What shows that you can research, write, calculate, practise or learn independently at the required level?
- If earlier results do not reflect your current capability, what recent evidence demonstrates progression?

Strong content choices

Less convincing	More convincing
"My qualifications were a long time ago."	"Completing an Access module alongside work rebuilt my confidence in academic reading and taught me to plan weekly study time."
Listing every workplace course	Select training that evidences relevant knowledge, learning habits or professional awareness.
Apologising for a non-traditional route	State what your route has taught you and the evidence that you are ready now.

Drafting frame

Use this to start, then rewrite it naturally in your own words:

- My interest in … developed when …
- I explored this further by …
- This helped me understand / question / appreciate …
- I now want to study … because …


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QUESTION 3

What else have you done to prepare outside education, and why is it useful?

This may contain some of your strongest evidence. Translate work and life experience into relevant skills and insight without turning the answer into a CV or life history.

Planning prompts

- Which responsibilities are most relevant to the course?
- What did you learn through employment, self-employment, caring, parenting, volunteering or community roles?
- How have you managed competing commitments and what realistic study habits will help?
- Which examples demonstrate communication, judgement, resilience, teamwork or reflection?
- How did the experience confirm, question or refine your course choice?

Strong content choices

Less convincing	More convincing
A chronological employment history	Choose two or three experiences that best demonstrate readiness and relevance.
"Managing a family proves I can cope."	Give a specific example of planning, prioritising or adapting, and connect it to study.
Overstating responsibility	Use precise verbs: observed, supported, coordinated, contributed, supervised or led, as appropriate.

Drafting frame

Use this to start, then rewrite it naturally in your own words:

- My interest in … developed when …
- I explored this further by …
- This helped me understand / question / appreciate …
- I now want to study … because …

ACCURACY AND AUTHENTICITY

Everything in your statement should be accurate to the best of your knowledge and written in your own voice. UCAS and universities may check information, identify similarities with other statements, or ask you to discuss your examples at interview.

The evidence check

Check	How to keep it accurate
Qualifications and study	Use the correct qualification, module, project and awarding-body names. Do not claim a result you have not yet achieved; say “predicted” or “currently studying” where appropriate.
Work and volunteering	Check organisation names, dates, role titles and what you personally did. Distinguish observing from carrying out a task.
Books, podcasts and research	Only include material you actually engaged with. Check the title, author or speaker, and be ready to explain one idea you took from it.
Skills	Replace unsupported labels such as “excellent communicator” with a brief example that demonstrates the skill.
Career claims	Avoid implying that a degree automatically guarantees entry to a profession. Check professional requirements using authoritative course and
Sensitive experiences	Share only what is relevant and what you are comfortable disclosing. Focus on insight and preparation, not unnecessary personal detail.

Using AI responsibly

AI can help you brainstorm questions, organise your own notes or check readability. It should not invent experiences, opinions or achievements, and you should not copy and submit AI-generated text as your own. UCAS requires applicants to declare that the statement has not been copied or provided by another source, including AI software.

- Do not enter confidential information, personal data about someone else or unpublished assessment work into an AI tool.
- Check every factual suggestion against an authoritative source. AI can sound confident while being wrong.
- After any editing support, read the answer aloud and rewrite anything that does not sound like you.
- Keep your notes and drafts so you can show how the statement developed and prepare for interview questions.

Your final fact check

☐ I can explain every example without notes.
☐ Names, dates, titles and qualification details are correct.
☐ I have not exaggerated my responsibilities or level of involvement.
☐ My opinions are genuinely mine and any factual claims have been checked.
☐ The wording is my own and has not been copied from examples, friends, websites or AI.

BUILD YOUR EVIDENCE BANK

Experience	What I did	What I learned	Course link
Recent study or training			
Employment or self-employment			
Caring or life responsibility			
Volunteering or independent exploration			



Addressing gaps or difficult circumstances

You do not need to account for every year of your life in the statement. If a gap or circumstance is directly relevant, explain it briefly and factually, then focus on what has changed and the evidence that you are ready now. Detailed mitigating circumstances, disability or support needs may be better shared through the appropriate part of the application or directly with the university so that support can be considered.

A practical drafting process

1. Research your courses. Note repeated themes, content, learning methods and any professional requirements.
2. Create an evidence bank. List study, projects, reading, work, volunteering, responsibilities and achievements.
3. Match evidence to the three questions. Use each strong example once.
4. Draft for meaning before counting characters. Be specific first, then edit.
5. Test relevance. After each example, ask "So what does this show about my readiness for this course?"
6. Check accuracy against records and authoritative sources.
7. Ask a trusted teacher, adviser or supporter for feedback on clarity and authenticity.
8. Proofread from the UCAS preview, check the character count and retain a final copy.

Final submission checklist

- ☐ Each answer is at least 350 characters.
- ☐ The combined total is no more than 4,000 characters including spaces.
- ☐ I have answered all three questionsdirectly.
- ☐ The statement works for every course choice.
- ☐ My strongest subject evidence is prominent.
- ☐ I explain what I learned rather than only listing activities.
- ☐ I have removed repetition, clichés and unsupported claims.
- ☐ Spelling, punctuation and course terminology are correct.
- ☐ The content is truthful, personal and written in my voice.
- ☐ I have saved a copy and can discuss every example at interview.



SOURCES AND FURTHER SUPPORT

This guide reflects UCAS guidance available in September 2026. Check the live pages before use at: ucas.com/personalstatement

UCAS subject-specific personal statement guides:

UCAS, How to write your personal statement for 2026 entry onwards:

UCAS, A guide to using AI and ChatGPT with your personal statement:

For course-specific entry requirements and advice, use the official university course page and contact the admissions team if anything is unclear.

