

# The CUBE's Guide to writing a Winning Personal Statement



## Personal statement: How to get started

**When admissions and subject tutors look at your personal statement, they are asking themselves whether they want you on the course and whether they want you at the university. Your personal statement will help them make this decision.**

Start by making notes under each of the headings. Use this as a guideline you may want to change the structure, but this is a good place to start. Remember, that it is recommended that **70% of your statement is on academic interests** in the course and 30% on extra-curricular/personal interests. **You have up to 4000 characters or 47 lines of text (including spaces and blanks) which is approx. 600 words.**

### Tips:

- Open with an interesting sentence that doesn't begin with "From an early age I have always wanted to be an Architect"
- Avoid quotes unless they really mean something to you - most admission officers dislike quotes as they can sound pretentious.
- Try not to be quirky or humorous - be careful as it might set the wrong tone.
- Remember that it is not enough to say that you have a particular skill, you must provide the evidence – see section on skills.

### 1. Your motives for wanting to study the course - Start with enthusiasm!

- What inspired you? An event, a book, a teacher, work experience, an open day, placement or something else?
- How has this interest developed?
- What attracts you to the course – why? Be specific. Which topics or specialisms appeal and why?
- If you are applying for a subject you have already studied, describe what you like about it e.g. a field trip or project piece of course work you enjoyed and why.
- You can focus on a specific book, writer, theory that have had an impact on you
- If you have read beyond your current syllabus, talk about your own independent reading or personal research. What articles or websites have helped to enhance your interest in the subject?

## 2. Your Academic skills and qualities

- What skills and qualities have your subjects developed and why are they relevant for your chosen course. Give actual examples as evidence by describing a particular situation where you demonstrated them
- What other transferable study skills can you demonstrate? E.g. independent research skills, ability to meet deadlines
- Always link your skills back to the course you are applying for and think why they will help you.
- Use the description of the course in the prospectus to see what academic strengths are needed for this course and give evidence that you have these skills!
- Mention any academic prizes/accomplishments you are proud of e.g. Jack Petchy award, maths challenge etc

## 3. Work experience, part-time job or voluntary work

- Talk about **relevant** experience and **reflect** on it. What did you observe, what have you learned from it, what impressed you, what surprised you, how has it changed you, what insight did you gain?
- If the experience is not relevant to your degree, you can still mention it but talk about the skills you gained. Don't describe the activities in detail, just the skills you developed.

- Avoid bland comments like 'dealing with customers has developed my communication skills'. Instead be specific about how you developed your skills, dealt with a difficult situation, how you managed your time, why you work well in a team, what did you learn about yourself?
- If the experience has shaped your interest towards your studies and your chosen course it is worth talking about, so even if it was a trip to France which led to an interest in Modern languages, then mention it!
- If you are applying for drama, talk about the parts you have played and what you enjoyed about them, if you are applying for medicine talk about your hospital work experience and say something about a situation you were in when dealing with a patient.

#### **4. Extra-curricular interests**

- Talk about your other interests, hobbies or achievements as these demonstrate qualities, skills and knowledge.
- Show that you will be able to contribute to university life, that you will enjoy the social side of university as well
- If you have achieved something you are proud of, write about it - it makes you unique!
- Don't make a long list of hobbies, select a few and say why they have developed skills, e.g. captain of the football team has developed your leadership skills or designing your own website has introduced you to a range of multimedia applications, being on the College Council has made you more confident in delivering presentations/public speaking...

## 5. Career or Gap year plans

- If you have an idea what you would like to do with your degree, talk about your Career plans, what is your goal? How will this degree get you there?
- If you don't have any clear idea, you don't need to say. This won't disadvantage you. If you are applying for deferred entry, say why you are taking a gap year, what you hope to achieve. It doesn't need to be relevant, but admissions tutors like to hear your reason for deferring even if it only to get some experience of work and earn some money to support yourself through University.

## 6. Final Summing up

Finish with a strong ending. Remind them that you have researched thoroughly, you have all the relevant skills for the course and that this is a great opportunity for you. Make a lasting impression on them!

### Checklist:

- Are my goals well-articulated?
- Do I explain why I have selected the course and given specific examples?
- Do I demonstrate knowledge of the course content?
- Do I include enough evidence of my ability to do well on the course?
- Do I sound confident?
- Do I sound enthusiastic and keen?
- Is it interesting to read?
- Is it well written without any grammatical/spelling errors?
- Have I observed the 70/30% rule?
- Is the length less than 4000 characters including spaces?

If you can answer Yes to all of these questions, you have produced a good personal statement.

## **Your skills**

It is a good idea to mention any skills that you have gained through your work experience or extra-curricular activities and give examples of when you have used them. Your work experience or hobbies may not always seem to be directly relevant at first, but you will have used and developed important skills that will be valued by universities. You should mention skills that are related to the course, in addition to more general skills.

| <b>Skill</b>  | <b>Example</b>   |
|---|--|
| Consider specific skills relevant to your chosen degree e.g. nursing or social work<br>Compassion/empathy | <i>I volunteered in a care home over the summer where I assisted dementia patients with their daily tasks. I was able to build a rapport with many of them by being patient when listening to their stories and being kind and sensitive to their needs. I enjoyed being able to make a difference to their day.</i> |
| Communication skills  | <i>I dealt with customers face to face and over the phone when working weekends at Marks and Spencer which really improved my communication &amp; customer service skills.</i>   |
| Organisational skills & meeting deadlines   |  |
| Ability to handle pressure  |  |
| Working as part of a team   |  |
| Leadership skills   |  |
| Using IT  |  |
| Creativity  |  |
| Problem-solving   |  |
| Communicating in another Language   |  |
| Negotiation Skills  |  |
| Independent research skills   |  |
| Anything else?  |  |

## **Personal achievements and responsibilities**

*Add any details where relevant, which you could include in your statement*

- Have you been a prefect or role model?
- Have you been a member of your school council or Form Rep?
- Are you involved in peer counselling or mentoring?
- Have you completed the Duke of Edinburgh Award or NCS Challenge?
- Have you received any awards or prizes e.g. Jack Petchy, Maths Challenge?
- Have you helped to organise any events, for example a fundraising event?
- Have you taken part in school/college assemblies or helped with open days?

## **Extra-curricular activities**

*Add any details where relevant, which you could include in your statement*

- Have you had a part-time-time job and any relevant work experience?
- Do you keep up with current events and what issues interest you?
- Do you read around your subject in your spare time – how has this enhanced your knowledge and motivation to study it further?
- Do you play a musical instrument?
- Are you a member of a choir, an orchestra or a band? Are you part of a community group?
- Do you play any sports?
- Have you represented your school/college or other organisation in a sport?
- Have you represented your school/college in any other way?
- Have you been involved with any dramatic productions?
- Are you involved in any charity or volunteer work?
- Have you been on any relevant visits, for example to art galleries for art courses or hospitals for nursing?
- Have you attended any taster courses or summer schools?
- Do you have any other hobbies?

## Personal Statement

**Take a look at this statement – it contains many errors – can you spot them?**

(answers are on opposite page)

“The law is reason, free from passion”. Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> My name is Jonathan and I am currently studying Geography, IT and Sociology A levels at Havering 6<sup>th</sup> Form College in Hornchurch Essex.<sup>2</sup> I am predicted B for sociology, B for IT and C for Geograh<sup>y</sup>.<sup>3</sup> I am passionate<sup>4</sup> about studying law at University and want to become a barrister for my career. I have enjoyed being at College and have made lots of friends and am a keen sportsman. I am captain of my football team and play every Saturday for my local club. I have also won several awards for athletics and in my secondary school was on the athletics team, basketball team and also played rugby.<sup>5</sup> I enjoy travelling and have been to Australia, Mexico, Spain and China.<sup>6</sup> I want to really persue<sup>7</sup> a law degree because my uncle is a police comissioner<sup>8</sup> and my brother is studying criminology and forensic science<sup>9</sup> at Kingston University.<sup>10</sup> Talking to them about law has lead<sup>11</sup> me to this decision.<sup>12</sup> I think it will be really interesting to study law as I have studied sociology which will help me understand more about law.<sup>13</sup> My interest started when I started<sup>14</sup> watching CSI and Silent Witness and I have read books about law such as Wire in the Blood and Patricia Cornnell<sup>15</sup> which are all about crime.<sup>16</sup> I want to be able to become a barrister and find out more about why people carry out crime. Why me, do you ask? What makes me serious about studying law? What can I do to help? Is it right that people carry out crime and are not punished adequately?<sup>17</sup> Knife crime is so serious for our young generation and being a teenager I am worried about the escallating<sup>18</sup> crime rate especially in London and I want to be part of a system that will put things right.<sup>19</sup> In my spare time I work in Sainsbury's on the checkout every Saturday and this has helped me develop lots of skills. My supervisor has praised me for my work there.<sup>20</sup> Apart from my love of football, athletics, basket ball<sup>21</sup>, I enjoy socialising with my friends, going to the cinema and reading.<sup>22</sup> I am a very friendly person, a good communicator<sup>23</sup> who has lots of friends and I think I would fit into University life very well. I think is this the right course for me as I have done lots of research and visited several Universities in reaching this decision.<sup>24</sup> I would like to go to Essex University<sup>25</sup> because I think I would enjoy the course and I know other people studying there at the moment.<sup>26</sup> My attendance and punctuality is excellent and I always submit my work on time. I am working well in all of my A level subjects and have received an award for geography<sup>27</sup> although I find sociology the most challenging subjects and have had a few problems with the course in my first year.<sup>28</sup> I hope that you will consider my application to study law at your university as I think I would be an excellent student on the course.<sup>29</sup> Thank you for taking the time to read this.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is interesting but why is it relevant? Be careful when using quotes as it can look pretentious. If you use a quote you should then reflect on it saying how it resonates with you.

<sup>2</sup> Name, address, qualifications, predicted grades are not necessary as this information is in the personal details, education and reference section of your application. You are taking up valuable space!

<sup>3</sup> Spelling.

<sup>4</sup> Don't use the word passionate. Admissions tutors are tired of seeing this word as it is so over used!

<sup>5</sup> Sporting activities are fine but mention these later in the personal statement as you should begin with your reasons to study law and why you are academically suited to this course. Remember the 70/30 rule.

<sup>6</sup> Travel is OK but say what you enjoyed or learnt from travelling. What relevance does this have at this stage of your personal statement?

<sup>7</sup> Spelling

<sup>8</sup> Spelling

<sup>9</sup> Family connections with law – this could be explored much more. It would be much better to say that from discussions with family members you have become very interested in certain issues/aspects of the law and give examples of what interests you.

<sup>10</sup> Grammar

<sup>11</sup> Spelling

<sup>12</sup> Grammar

<sup>13</sup> It is good to refer to Sociology A level as this is the most relevant subject BUT the opportunity is lost here as you do not give any examples of what you have studied which help you understand law. Much more could be said here, e.g. the causes of crime, the nature versus nurture argument, etc. Also mention the skills gained from all A level subjects as they will benefit you on an undergraduate degree course, e.g. presentation skills, essay writing, independent research skills, problem solving.

<sup>14</sup> Grammar

<sup>15</sup> Spelling

<sup>16</sup> The examples given for your interest in Law, CSI, Silent Witness and background reading are all bad examples as they would be frowned upon by a Law admissions tutor as they are not academic works. Also they tend to show an interest in forensic science and criminal profiling rather than law – this is sending the wrong message to the admissions tutor as he might think you would be more suited to a criminology course or forensic science course.

<sup>17</sup> The series of questions are likely to irritate the admissions tutor and serve no real purpose – they come across as naïve and immature.

<sup>18</sup> Spelling.

<sup>19</sup> Knife crime is a very relevant and important issue but it needs to be explored much more to be effective – perhaps here you could bring in your understanding of some issues from your sociology A level? You could also develop your ideas by researching the issue a little and referring to articles you have read.

<sup>20</sup> Part-time work should be mentioned when it is either relevant or you can demonstrate some of the skills you have acquired, e.g. customer service skills, confidence in dealing with the public, teamwork, time management etc. Say why you were praised by the supervisor!

<sup>21</sup> Repetition.

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<sup>22</sup> When you talk about your extra-curricular interests, say what skills you have gained, e.g. leadership, teamwork, confidence and try to make yourself sound interesting. What do you read other than crime books?

<sup>23</sup> Spelling.

<sup>24</sup> If you have researched the course and visited several universities, you do not say what you have found out about the course and what attracts you to it. The admissions tutor is unlikely to be convinced that you have done any research at all.

<sup>25</sup> Never mention the name of the university you would most like to go to as this will immediately put off admissions tutors from other Universities and they will probably reject you instantly.

<sup>26</sup> Having friends at a university is not a valid reason for you to study this course.

<sup>27</sup> Getting an award for geography is a good point but you need to say why you received the award otherwise what relevance does this have to your skills or your degree choice?

<sup>28</sup> Try not to highlight a weakness. This could be made into a positive by stating that whilst you have found Sociology to be a challenging subject, you have made significant improvements this year.

<sup>29</sup> On what basis would an admissions tutor regard you as an excellent candidate for the course? You have not given enough examples of your academic ability to do well on the course, an understanding of what you will be studying, or the skills you can bring.

<sup>30</sup> The ending is very weak. There is no need to say "thank you for taking the time to read this".

## **Style**

The structure needs work as the information is presented as a list in one long dense piece of text making it hard for the admissions tutor to read. Group the information into paragraphs to highlight key points.

Grammar and spelling is poor – you would be rejected for the number of spelling mistakes in this personal statement.

The language is a bit dull and does not grab attention – try to inject some enthusiasm and avoid using "I" at the beginning of every sentence.

It gives the impression that the statement was written quickly, without enough care taken to correct or edit. The admissions tutor would interpret this as a very weak attempt by someone who was not particularly serious about studying law at university.

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## Example of a Law Personal Statement

My interest in law stems from a mock forensic investigation in secondary school into who had 'killed' our school head mistress. Sitting in the trial, I was intrigued at having learnt how law affects everyday life. This brief insight into the British legal system spurred me to read and follow global law issues which often depicted the distinctive differences in legal structures. Our system proves to be fair and just and attempts to rule its decisions based on what is morally right in today's society. Law possesses its own culture, language and history, an aspect inspiring me to choose this path.

The first opportunity to deepen my legal knowledge was in the form of A-level studies at my current sixth form college. AS law has given me an insight into civil and criminal law, tort, and legislation, visiting my local magistrate's court allowed me to see our justice system at work. Next year I hope to further my knowledge of criminal law and tort and also develop synoptic skills. From reading *The Independent* regularly, I've acquired an interest in human rights law, looking at the moral and ethical issues of global situations, and also in European law. As the European Union continues to expand I believe it will also continue to take a bigger role in the way certain legal decisions are made in the UK.

Studying history has further developed my comprehension, reasoning and interpretation skills; allowing me to evaluate different points of view in order to reach my own personal judgement. I strongly believe these will be of great value for my coursework this year. The history course has also enhanced my research skills as it has encouraged me to read more regularly and a wider variety of texts. Finally studying law also requires outstanding oral skills to argue and persuade, taking part in the Jack Petchey 'Speak Out' Challenge allowed me to put these skills into practice.

Being bi-lingual in Spanish I thoroughly enjoy learning languages, hence I am also currently studying A-level German. At present I am reading 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' in Spanish and this year as part of my A2 Spanish studies I will be studying a play by Federico Garcia Lorca 'La casa de Bernarda Alba'. Both pieces of literature will allow me to expand on my vocabulary and grammar and aid in dealing with more complicated texts. Having the knowledge about another European legal system will be of a great advantage to me when pursuing my career in the legal corridors of the European Union or perhaps the United Nations. Another interesting aspect is the way legal decisions are made I hope to be able to draw parallels between the Spanish and British legal systems. One particular legal ruling over this summer was one to ban bull fighting in Catalonia alone. It interested me to know that such a big ruling on a significant feature of Spain only accounted for a small region of the country. It would appear the Spanish legal system accounts for this decision.

I strive to maintain a balance between my studying and leisure and do so by taking part in activities which I enjoy. I currently play for Marshall's Netball Club on a weekly basis in a competitive league. In the past I've been selected regionally, training with the Essex Metropolitan development academy. Netball requires team work and constant commitment, the same kind of commitment required to study law. Playing classical guitar is another of my hobbies. I am currently working towards grade 6, which requires a good amount of patience. Going to University will allow me to gain responsibility and independence more so than I have gained over this past year. I am sure I will adapt to new surroundings and I look forward to my third year of study abroad.

Studying law comes with many responsibilities. As a disciplined and committed student I feel I am equipped and ready to study such a challenging course. I look to discuss why the law is the way it is, debating whether it should be so and how it could be different.

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## University of Essex – Actual Personal Statements – with comments on their Strengths and Weaknesses by Essex Admissions Tutors

### Accounting, Finance and Banking

Accounting is an analytical interpretation of financial information; I see accounting as the backbone of every organisation, it decides the success or failure of a business and it adds and recognises the value of money. Without accounting money will be of little or no value. My passion for business and inquisitiveness about the current financial crisis in the EU has confirmed my decision to study for a degree in accounting.

To broaden my understanding and knowledge, I have been reading *The Economist and Financial Times*. This gives me an insight into the state of the economy and business organisations, and allows me to be up-to-date with information that happens in the economy. In order to research my chosen career in accounting, I have attended presentations on accounting by local universities and accountancy firms, in which I found out more about the course and the role of an accountant. This has increased my knowledge of the career and improved my understanding of the financial and accounting sector.

Whilst studying A-level Accounting at college I have developed a strong interest in the subject and would like to improve my knowledge by continuing to study the subject at university. By studying accounts in college, I have learnt a lot about how accounting is used in a variety of business situations and the measurement of financial transaction. I am also studying A-level Economics, which helps me as the subjects combine well. By studying both these subjects, I have a greater understanding of the various concepts, methods and analytical skills involved in them. Whilst studying for my A-levels I have also worked part-time in the retail industry, for Burton. This has allowed me to develop excellent time management skills, working under pressure, and the importance of combining customer service and financial transactions. Additionally, last summer I volunteered at the charity Centrepont helping redecorate their premises to help young people who are in danger of being homeless. I feel I have been fortunate in my life and appreciate the opportunity to give something back by helping out young people who have had less opportunity.

Since I have been at college, I have developed many new skills and improved those I already have. I have become more organised: designating periods for study and meeting coursework deadlines. The fundamental skill, in which I have developed, is becoming more independent in researching and demonstrating new skills.

University is a chance for me to challenge myself in a new environment to achieve my full potential. I intend to maximise all opportunities presented to me by enhancing my understanding of accounting and finance, whilst maintaining a keen interest in my voluntary activities. I also aim to attend extra classes and public lectures to boost my financial knowledge. I am fascinated by systems of accountancy and am sure that a degree in accounting and finance will lay the foundations for my chosen career path. I am dedicated towards my goal of embarking upon a profession in the financial world, but in addition, I feel that attending university will aid in my overall development both personally and professionally. Being an individual who strives to make the most of opportunities that are provided to me, and to whom hard work and success are very important, I am wholly committed to achieving the aforementioned aims and reaching my career potential from my university experience.

### Strengths

- **The opening sentence directly addresses the chosen course, which implies decisiveness and commitment without the need for a lengthy introduction. The final paragraph about their interest in university life is also strong: having a strong closing paragraph is also important.**
- **The student goes into a lot of detail about what subject they are studying at the moment, which is relevant to accounting.**

### Weaknesses

- **There is a brief reference to the current state of the economy but this could have been developed to show an appreciation of how accounting is related to current affairs.**
- **The final two sentences are a little vague and wordy, the beginning and end of personal statements are important so it is good to be succinct.**

### Top Tip from an Essex Admissions Selector

**'Ensure your personal statement is well structured and demonstrates your commitment to the course(s) you have applied for.'**

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## **Biology and related courses**

My interest in biology stems from my childhood, when I kept tadpoles and watched some of them grow into frogs, and I saw how so many did not survive, as is often the way in nature. I have always enjoyed learning about science, as I can see how applicable the knowledge is to the real world and how scientific research means that humans are always finding new ways to solve problems. I have a great interest in science in current affairs, for example I was fascinated by the ecological difficulties following the Costa Concordia disaster and the challenges in salvaging the shipwreck while also protecting and conserving the sea bed and marine life around it.

I have chosen a biological sciences course as it seems to best fit my interests. I am particularly interested in human biology; I enjoy topics like cell biology, disease and anatomy. I like learning about how the body works including the processes like digestion and circulation, and the functions of complex organs such as the heart and lungs. My AS-level Biology teacher has been an inspiration to me as she has a huge enthusiasm for the subject and a unique way of explaining theories and broadening our knowledge. As a result, I have a strong interest in studying biology at a higher level and am looking forward to exploring the subject in more depth.

I have been able to extend my understanding by linking Biology to topics from the other subjects that I study. Chemistry has been particularly helpful, as it is inherent in biology, allowing me to gain a better understanding of both subjects. Geography has expanded my interest in the formation of the world, incorporating animals, humans and all the interactions between these elements. In addition to these subjects, I have also taken AS-level Critical Thinking, which has given me a totally different, but equally important and relevant, style of learning. I have experienced a variety of teaching approaches which have enabled me to broaden my interests even further. I have particularly enjoyed the field trips in geography and biology, and look forward to participating in more hands-on learning at university.

Playing an active role in my sixth form committee, I have been instrumental in making important decisions on the running of the sixth form, and have also become a trusted assistant to staff during events. I am regularly asked to give tours of the school to new teachers and pupils, and have also been involved in their interviews and selection; I felt proud to be given this responsibility. The committee also organises the Sixth Form Prom every year which can be stressful as it is an important event and has to be well-run, enjoyed by all and delivered on budget. These activities show I can cope with positions of responsibility, work well in a team and am not afraid of a challenge. These are skills I am sure will enhance my biology studies and also demonstrate a willingness to get involved in student life at university.

I grew up in Dorset, and this beautiful part of the world has many rural paths ideal for walking and cycling. I now know these routes well and, due to my growing knowledge of Biology, I can now apply my knowledge to the countryside I am so familiar with, helping to reinforce my understanding of the world around us. I now feel ready to discover a new part of the UK and am looking forward to the challenge of moving away from home and gaining more independence. These reasons, alongside my Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award, explain why I am looking forward to going to university and particularly to studying Biology.

### **Strengths**

- **This student relates academic and extra-curricular activities back to the study of biology, which is effective.**
- **It is useful to explain what skills you have gained from your activities and apply them to the course you have chosen, as this applicant does.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **The Duke of Edinburgh Award is just mentioned in passing and too briefly to contribute anything else to this personal statement.**
- **Sometimes the word 'biology' is capitalised and sometimes it is not. It is best to aim for consistency in your grammar.**

**Top tip from an Essex Admissions Selector:**

***'Statements that lack detail can appear manufactured and insincere. Try to mention topics that you have a particular interest in studying.'***

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## **Computer Science and related courses**

Ever since I got my first computer as a child, I have been fascinated by computers and how they work. I am especially interested in how to program them and have self-taught myself the basics of many programming languages such as html and php for websites. Computers have always been a hobby for me but now I want to turn this into a professional and rewarding career. I am keen to work in the games industry or in a programming role using the skills that I know I will gain at university.

At college I am taking A levels in History, Further Mathematics and Computing, so am building skills that I will be able to use at university and in any future career. For example, in my History classes, historical sources are vital when researching a historical period, so I have to analyse texts in a critical and thoughtful manner. My A-levels Further Mathematics has given me a good grounding in algorithms and logic, which are pivotal in the study of computer science. This course has also given me valuable skills in logical thinking and problem solving.

However, my A-level Computing has given me a strong foundation on which to extend my computing knowledge at university. I have particularly enjoyed looking at technological advances in products like laptops, iPhones and other portable devices. I find the ways these devices influence our day-to-day lives, and how it is continually changing, to be fascinating. I am excited about being part of, and fully understanding, this ever evolving technology.

I have a part-time job working in a busy Apple repair shop. I have to interact with many different customers, which has developed my social and communication skills. As part of this role, I need to have an excellent working knowledge of all computer applications, as well as components and hardware, and help full-time staff in diagnosing faults with computers. This further knowledge will benefit my future studies and the practical side of studying computer science at university, working on individual and group projects, is something I am really looking forward to.

When I am not studying or working, I like to watch The Simpsons and agree with creator Matt Groening who said 'I've loved science fiction ever since I was a little kid, mainly from looking at the covers of science-fiction magazines and books, and I've read quite extensively as an adult', as I also love to read science fiction books.

At university I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge of computers and ICT.

### **Strengths**

- **The personal statement opens with an excellent summary of what prompted initial interest in the subject. This also shows their enthusiasm for the subject, which admissions selectors like to read about.**
- **The student demonstrates that their interest in the subject goes beyond the classroom, which will strengthen the application.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **Quotes should be kept short and only use them if they are relevant to your application.**
- **The closing paragraph is very short and abrupt. Remember to make use of this last chance to impress the admissions selector.**

### **Top Tip from an Essex Admissions Selector**

***'It is important to show that you enjoy the subject. Many applicants demonstrate this by talking about how they started using computers, what they enjoyed about that and why they now want to study this at university. This is a great signal that someone knows what they are applying for and comes across very naturally in a personal statement.'***

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## **Economics**

Economic issues influence our lives every day. Economics is about more than just a recession, the inflation or exchange rates, it is also about how our choices, such as consuming goods or introducing a new policy affect us. As economics is so important to everyone, I wish to further my knowledge in this area by studying the subject further at university.

Studying A-level Economics has given me the opportunity to develop my prime interest. However, by also studying A-level History, I have seen how many macroeconomic issues overlap with historical events, such as the economic boom of the 1920s when the USA expanded 'hire and purchase' broadly, so everyone could purchase their own luxury items. This then led to the Wall Street crash in 1929 when poorer families had trouble with repayment and similarities can be seen in recent years in Europe. All my A-levels, as I am also studying A-level Sociology, have given me new skills, like the ability to be an independent learner, to undertake my own research and to evaluate sources. These are all skills I will use further at university. As additional work to complement my A-levels, I am currently reading *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith to improve my understanding of the origins of economics, and *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, which shows how relevant economics is to everyday life. I also subscribe to *The Economist* to keep up-to-date with current affairs. I am particularly interested in the current economic crisis in Europe and would like to study this further at university.

Outside of college I volunteer at my local youth centre twice a week. I have done this for three years, so am one of the experienced volunteers and often lead other volunteers when they first join our team. My role involves organising, running and evaluating sessions and activities for year 8 pupils, which has improved my communication and leadership skills, and helped me learn to work well with other people.

I look forward to studying Economics at university, as it is a subject that has a relevance to everyday life, affects everyone and impacts virtually every aspect of our lives.

### **Strengths**

- **The student succeeds in conveying enthusiasm for the subject.**
- **The strong involvement in a local youth centre shows dedication and commitment.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **Attention must be made to style. The second paragraph is far too long and could have been broken down into at least three separate ones.**
- **The student doesn't elaborate on the current economic crisis in Europe, which slightly undermines their claim that they keep up-to-date with current affairs.**

#### **Top tip from an Essex Admissions Selector**

***'Your personal statement should demonstrate your interest, potential ability and understanding of economics.'***

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## **History**

My fascination with studying the past, looking at how events have influenced and shaped the world we now live in, and delving into periods of time from different viewpoints, has made me want to study history at university.

My GCSE and A-level study has greatly improved my understanding of history, with a particular focus on war in the twentieth-century. Visiting the battlefields of Ypres and the Somme allowed me to put the dates and facts I learned in my classes into context, as well as consider the people involved, particularly when taking an emotional trip to view the massive cemeteries there. I returned to the classroom with an increased interest in studying history from the perspective of different individuals, such as the foot soldier or the civilians waiting anxiously at home. I am looking forward to further my knowledge of this at university, as well as looking at new topics such as American history, to understand how the USA has become such a super power.

Studying A-level History has given me many useful skills, like being able to write and research independently, and analyse different sources of information. My other A-levels, in Politics and in English Literature, are also relevant, as they involve analysing work and producing essays that express my ideas clearly. I am looking forward to putting these skills into practice at university, as well as improving and adding to these abilities.

Last summer, I was part of a volunteer group that visited West Africa for five weeks. I am also a keen badminton player and have been a member of my local club for five years, working up from the junior ranks to represent my club in tournaments. I now also coach the juniors, which has been a valuable experience and allowed me to share my enjoyment for badminton. I am looking forward to continuing with badminton at university.

I am confident that I will do well studying history at university, and that this experience will prepare me well for a wide arrange of future career options.

### **Strengths**

- **The student's comments about visiting the battlefields shows their enthusiasm for the subject, which is very important!**
- **The student also shows they have given thought to other aspects of history (eg American history) that they would like to explore at university, which shows they are forward-thinking and enthusiastic.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **There is over-use of the phrase 'I am looking forward to'.**
- **This personal statement is a little short and some parts could have been elaborated on, such as the student's trip to Africa or any voluntary work that they'd like to do at university.**

#### **Top Tip from an Essex Admissions Selector**

***'Why not add a sentence about what you like reading or have read recently, even if it is fiction or not related to the subject that you are applying for. Any arts student will have to do a great deal of reading at university, so showing some enthusiasm for this at application stage doesn't go amiss!'***

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## **Literature**

I am applying to study English literature.

As a child, I was always tucked into bed with a story, be it Goldilocks and The Three Bears or an invented tale from my mum's imagination. Once I could read and write, I was either lost in novels or spending my time writing my own stories. That a book can transport you from a boring afternoon to Enid Blyton's Magic Faraway Tree has always excited me, so it is no surprise that I love English and wish to study it at university.

As part of my A-level English Literature, I have been introduced to interesting texts, which have taken me on journeys that I could otherwise never experience. I enjoy studying novels, plays and poetry. In fact, in addition to the books I have studied at school, one of my favourite poets is Carol Ann Duffy. I particularly enjoy her collection Rapture, but also admire the feminist stance in a lot of her works, such as The World's Wife. Out of my A-level subjects, I feel English Literature is my strongest, which is down to the keen interest in the subject that I have shown from a young age. Although I have not decided on a definite career aspiration, I know a degree in English covers a range of topics, such as creative writing and language study, so I feel a possibility could be teaching or journalism.

Within my A level English Literature, I have enjoyed studying A Streetcar Named Desire, works by Shakespeare and Tennyson's poems, which have shown me many different writing styles. My strength in this subject is my ability to write essays fluently, while including detailed knowledge of texts I have studied. However, my broad range of A-level subjects, which include German, Psychology and Art, have given me further strengths, such as learning a language and developing a deeper understanding of the German culture, a different way to express my opinions in creative work in art and a variety of ways of thinking and learning through psychology.

I was disappointed not to be Head Girl, but my position of Deputy Head Girl has made me a voice for the student body, and given me an experience of a responsible role that I can use in later life. Outside of school, I am very interested in the theatre, so have participated in, and worked on, several productions at my local theatre over the last four years, which has built on my confidence in performing in front of an audience. I have undertaken volunteer work, working with disabled children and young children in medium-sized groups at the theatre, which enabled me to improve my skills in team-building, and in managing and leading groups in a demanding setting.

I have always enjoyed netball, so am a member of my local club, as well as playing for my school. Over the years I have competed in competitions, as well as taken part in a 'netball marathon' for a local charity. These activities outside of school have made me realise that, as a student, I want to get fully involved in university life, such as joining a student theatre society or writing for the student newspaper, as well as continuing with netball.

I look forward to studying English Literature at university level because the range of genres and authors available to study entices me, and I believe it will be an enjoyable and exciting course that will help me in whatever career path I choose.

### **Strengths**

- **Writing well about texts you are studying demonstrates passion and ability. You should also discuss books discovered outside of your studies, as this shows a real motivation to read.**
- **Referencing other subjects, and how they enhance your engagement with literary texts, is a strength. Remember that literature doesn't happen in isolation.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **The student could have used a better opening sentence.**
- **Try to avoid comments that could be perceived as negative. The student didn't need to say that she was disappointed about not being Head Girl but that it was an honour to be made Deputy Head Girl.**

#### **Top tip from an Essex Admissions Selector**

***'Many literature applicants talk about books they liked as a child and, although this is nice (and it is true that people tend to develop a love of reading early in life) you don't need to start at the beginning! Admissions selectors are interested in how you are developing as a reader, so try to include what you have been reading and thinking about recently.'***

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## **Mathematics**

I find mathematics a fascinating subject, as it is the sole basis on which physical and theoretical theories are made, and provides the proof for all these theories. It intrigues me that, with the right numbers and applications, anything can be achieved, like using a mathematical proof to define Sir Isaac Newton's three laws of motion.

My A-level Mathematics has cemented my belief that mathematics is the foundation of modern, everyday life, and that every aspect of mathematics is beneficial in some way. As part of my A-level studies, for example, I have particularly enjoyed looking at how statistics can help with handling data and using it to predict future measurements, like weather forecasting. My A-level Mathematics has helped me look at everyday problems in a more logical way. Last summer I volunteered in a local charity shop and, for the last year, I have held a part-time job in Next. These roles really showed me how mathematics can be applied to simple everyday situations, like money handling and stock control.

Since my first year in high school, I have been involved in the UKMT Maths Challenge each year, and received the silver award on many occasions. Last summer I also attended a Maths Summer School.

Inside and outside of school, I enjoy working in a team or group as I have good inter-personal skills. I play cricket for my local team and we all work together well, complementing each other's abilities. I have participated in other sports including basketball, football and athletics. At university I would be interested in taking part in sports, which have not been offered at my school or in my local area.

Last year I achieved the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award, which demonstrates that I am committed, responsible and hard working. I also play the saxophone to grade 7 level and, at university, would be interested in joining or setting up a jazz society.

At university, I am looking forward to expanding my mathematics knowledge in topics like differential equations and statistics, as well as learning new subjects offered at university-level such as cryptography and mathematical finance.

Currently, at school, I am tutoring a year 10 pupil with her GCSE Mathematics. As well as being a rewarding experience for me, I have helped this pupil a great deal and teachers say that I have boosted her confidence in mathematics. This has given me invaluable experience in teaching another person about a subject that I love, as well as helping to develop my organisation skills. This activity has made me consider a future career in teaching. However, I believe mathematics to be an admirable discipline and feel that studying this subject at university can lead to many diverse career paths. I am keen to further develop the depth and range of my mathematical knowledge with this in mind.

### **Strengths**

- **The student demonstrates passion for the subject. Do not sell yourself short, show the admission selectors that you have interest in your chosen field.**
- **The student has given thought to their future, talking about hobbies they would like to try or to set up at university, as well as possible careers. It is always good to be forward-thinking in your personal statement.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **More detail could have been given about the UKMT Maths Challenge and Maths Summer School, as these are relevant to the chosen degree.**
- **The student does not mention other A levels. Although not essential, an interest in other subjects beyond mathematics could be useful, especially if they complement your studies in mathematics (eg A-level Further Maths or Physics).**

**Top tip from an Essex Admissions Selector**

***'Ensure you relate your qualifications and skills to the field of mathematics.'***

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## **Sociology and related courses - Criminology**

I have been fascinated with law and order, and how this impacts on society, from a young age. I have a particular interest in related issues, such as what leads people to commit crime and the counter effects that crime has on society as a whole, as well as on the individual.

I have chosen A-level subjects that reflect my keen interest in the nature of society. My A-level Sociology has helped me develop my knowledge and understanding of what drives a society in one direction or another. As I have a particular interest in law and order, my focus within my A-level Sociology has been in the nature of criminal behaviour – what makes people commit crime, what is the impact of background, upbringing and gender on a criminal, and how do acts of crime affect society?

I have found my studies in English literature have enabled me to develop a strong ability to analyse information, ideas and personalities. This has helped my study of major texts, which have themselves changed our society. I have enjoyed looking at authors such as Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. I believe my A-level Drama and Theatre Studies has given me the opportunity to look at theatre in practice, as well as researching theories on the influence of performance and analysis of human behaviour. Watching live theatre, and seeing for myself how work by actors and writers plays on our collective consciousness, and on our shared norms and values within society, has been a real inspiration to me.

I have a part-time job, outside of my A-levels, working two evenings a week in a retail store. This has really helped my customer service skills, as I have to interact with all sorts of different people. Again this job allows me to see society in action.

I am deeply interested in criminology and sociology, and I think it's vital to study something genuinely fascinating. I have had first-hand contact with offenders from my work at the local prison, as I have been part of the chaplaincy team there for two years. My work here involves assessing the risk of self-harm and suicide amongst prisoners, as well as generally providing support. Within this role, I am used to adhering to a strict code of conduct and behaviour. This experience ignited a passion in me to work with offenders and, in particular, repeat offenders. I believe this work has given me a good understanding of the effects of crime but that this is just a small part of a much bigger subject, so I am really looking forward to broadening my understanding of criminology and studying the subject at university-level.

I am interested in the areas of restorative justice and re-offending rates in terms of future career, although I believe my university studies will reveal other career options to me. I am eager to study this subject further, as I wish to combine my personal experience with an academic understanding in a way that can actually effect change in people's lives. I believe a degree in criminology can open many diverse doors for me, and I look forward to the next step in my journey.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read my application. I hope you can see my potential.

### **Strengths**

- **Work experience and voluntary work demonstrates both focus and commitment on the part of the student.**
- **There is evidence that the student has read around and understands the subject area.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **Each paragraph begins with 'I', this is very repetitive and shows a lack of stylistic consideration.**
- **The last sentence is unnecessary and could have been put to better use.**

#### **Top tip from an Essex Admissions Selector**

***'Admissions selectors like personal statements for criminology that don't talk about forensics or attempting to 'solve the crime problem', which are all detective work rather than criminology. Make sure you know your subject area as that will be more impressive to admissions selectors.'***

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## **Sports and Exercise Science**

Sports and exercise science provides a fantastic opportunity to learn about performance enhancement; be it improving fitness, breaking a world record or winning a competition. Professional sports players strive to reach their full potential and I believe the opportunity to learn how an individual can reach their peak is both fascinating and inspiring.

Studying A-level Physical Education has developed my understanding of human anatomy, and I have built strong analytical skills, particularly when considering elite performance and health. There has been substantial independent research as part of my course, and I have thoroughly enjoyed taking responsibility for my learning, as well as working to deadlines. As part of my course, I was able to attend a residential summer school for sports science at my local university, which gave me a good introduction to university life. In addition, studying A-level Biology has improved my ability to conduct effective experiments and ensure I develop a keen eye for detail when collecting, analysing and presenting data for my final research project.

One of my favourite athletes is heptathlete, Jessica Ennis. I am particularly interested in how her body copes with seven punishing events over just two days, how it adapts, and how she trains effectively. I have also been fascinated to see how she handled the psychological pressure of being the favourite at a home Olympics, which I have looked at further as part of my A-level Psychology. Psychology has required me to adapt to very different styles of learning, enabling me to build effective written communication skills and develop the ability to extract and apply relevant information from a range of resources to my academic work. This course has also given me an alternative perspective to my other studies.

Last year, I was a part of a sports programme designed to encourage primary school children to participate in activities that improve their fitness. I was given one piece of miniature gym equipment and a group of five; not only did I try to make the session beneficial for their health but encourage them to take various roles such as that of an official or coach, eg by placing them in control of timing or encouraging the group to support the participant and then provide feedback. This experience was very valuable, as I was able to truly see the psychological effects others have on a performer. I now volunteer at a local primary school, teaching sport to pupils aged 7-9, and coach the under-12s team at my football club. These responsibilities have enabled me to pass on my love of sport, as well as taught me the importance of reliability, commitment and effective communication with others.

In my spare time I play in my local football club and compete in my local volleyball league, which gives me a good balance with my academic study.

During my A-level studies, I have learnt a lot of new information that has both interested me and increased my passion for sport. I truly feel that I have learnt a lot through my time at college. I know that studying sports and exercise science at university-level will increase my knowledge tenfold, and enable me to have a detailed knowledge of the subject for when I enter the working world.

### **Strengths**

- **The student supports their interest in sports science with evidence of extra-curricular information, such as coaching, which will be impressive to admissions selectors.**
- **It is good to mention any previous experience of visiting universities, such as a summer school or A-level conference, as this demonstrates a keen interest.**

### **Weaknesses**

- **The student is clearly focused on the subject which is important, but they fail to present themselves as a well-rounded individual by not mentioning interests outside of sports.**
- **The student could have elaborated further on skills they have gained through involvement in football and volleyball.**

#### **Top tip from an Essex Admissions Selector**

***'Be sure to clearly articulate your interest in sport and demonstrate your understanding that studying sport and exercise science is about developing scientific knowledge and skills.'***