

# Writing a Personal Statement

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## Introduction

Within this brief guide we will look at:

1. How to approach writing personal statements in applications for a job
2. How to write a personal statement for postgraduate courses

## Personal Statement Completion for Job Applications

During the selection process for many posts, you will be required to submit a personal or supporting statement (these terms may be used interchangeably).

Personal statements enable you to document your relevant skills and experience in relation to the requirements outlined in the job description and person specification, including examples of when and where these have been demonstrated.

## Creating your personal statement

- If one is available, the starting point for completing a personal statement should be the **job description** and **person specification**.
- The **job description** describes the duties and responsibilities of the post.
- The **person specification** will list the skills, knowledge and experience that have been identified as the key requirements to undertake the duties and responsibilities outlined in the job description.
- Although the job description is an important document, you should systematically illustrate how you meet the **person specification** for a post in your personal statement.
- You will usually be asked to complete your personal statement electronically and be given guidelines for its completion. It is important to read these guidance notes carefully, as they will clearly describe what information the employer is looking for.



## The person specification

Outlined below is a typical person specification. You will normally see the following coding used against each point under the person specification:

- E** = Essential to carry out role to minimum required standard
- D** = Desirable but not essential to carry out the role
- A** = Application form
- I** = Interview
- P** = Presentation

## Example Person Specification

Post: Graduate Surveyor

Post No: AK2304

<b>QUALIFICATIONS</b>		
1. A relevant property degree with Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors accreditation.	E	A/I
<b>EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE</b>		
1. Experience of working on property portfolios.	D	A/I
2. Preparation and presentation of reports.	D	A/I
3. A good knowledge of current property legislation.	D	A/I
<b>SKILLS</b>		
1. An ability to communicate clearly and negotiate at all levels both orally and in writing (including report writing).	E	A/I/P
2. Ability to assess and reconcile conflicting demands and issues and work on own initiative.	E	I
3. Ability to use a range of relevant IT software (e.g. Microsoft Office).	E	A/I
4. Project management skills - e.g. to manage property related projects.	E	I
<b>OTHER</b>		
1. An appreciation of the need for confidentiality and understanding of data protection requirements.	E	I
2. An understanding of how customer focused service can be implemented and delivered.	E	I
3. Possession of a full driving license.	D	A

The person specification clearly lays out the structure that your personal statement should take, i.e. main headings (qualifications, experience and knowledge etc.) and possibly sub-headings (ability to communicate clearly, an appreciation of the need for confidentiality etc.).

In many ways it is better to view your statement as a collection of short, focused and evidence-based statements that will provide the information the reader will be looking for to make an informed judgement on your suitability for the post. It will be this judgement that will make the difference between being invited to interview, or not.

Prior to completing the personal statement, it is essential that you look at the detail of the job description and the requirements stated in the person specification and list the evidence you can provide. This evidence will be based on examples taken from your experience that illustrate how you have acquired the knowledge, gained the experience or applied the skills required to undertake the role. Ideally, your examples will link back into the job description so you can demonstrate experience within the role or a similar role and an understanding of the role purpose.

In terms of structuring your personal statement, it should contain the following elements:

1. An introduction clearly outlining your interest in the post.
2. A main body where you address the points in the person specification, either individually or as a group (if some points within the specification are similar or closely related, e.g. teamwork and interpersonal skills).
3. A concluding paragraph reiterating key points within your application, emphasising your suitability for the position.

The main bulk of your statement will consist of short paragraphs that will provide the evidence of how you meet the criteria specified by the employer.

When writing these paragraphs, you might find the following framework useful in helping you to structure your evidence using the **STAR technique**:

**S = Situation** (Begin by placing the example you are using into some kind of context for the reader, i.e. when and where the event took place)

**T = Task** (Describe what it was you had to do - what was the overall objective? Were there any constraints acting upon you as an individual, or as a group, e.g. budget, time etc.?)

**A = Action** (Describe what you did to complete the task. NB: even if you are describing a team situation, describe how you made a difference to the outcome and role you took within the team.)

**R = Result/Review** (What was the outcome? What did you learn from the experience?)

In summary, here are the main points of what constitutes an effective personal statement:

- A well written introduction that holds the reader's attention and outlines your interest in the post
- Clear evidence of how you match the requirements stated on the person specification. The most relevant examples you can give could come from employment but could also be from placements, degree programme / dissertation, outside interests, volunteering and personal experience. Try to use a range of examples.

- The key items to address within the person specification are the essential requirements and it will be important to address these as fully as possible. These are the 'must haves' within your application. The criteria identified as desirable can be viewed as the 'nice to haves' – if you can't provide convincing evidence in relation to these criteria, then at least demonstrate your potential to meet them in the future.
- A concluding paragraph that emphasises the key points of your application and which provides a summary of your interest in and suitability for the position.
- Some applications will put a word limit on your statement i.e. for teaching posts it is usually 1 page maximum. It is important to write in a concise and focused manner,
- regardless of word count.

## Examples of giving evidence on a statement

### **Excellent interpersonal, communication, and presentational skills, both written and oral**

My placement required strong communication skills with internal and external parties at all levels within the organisation. When providing face-to-face support or solving telephone enquiries, it was essential to explain things in a simple and logical manner. Whilst on placements, I acted as a mentor to an apprentice, through this role I demonstrated the ability to motivate through the use of positive language and questioning skills.

Delivering presentations was a major part of my degree. I was involved in a variety of individual and group presentations to communicate key information on a topic, or project that I was involved in. Accepting that I was not a natural presenter and felt uncomfortable in this situation, I accessed training and development from the university's academic skills team. The effect of this training was to make me more confident and relaxed when presenting and ensuring that I communicated my content in a much more relaxed and effective manner.

Both my degree and placement experience have developed my ability to communicate effectively via email and the telephone. Effective written communication skills have been essential in communicating with a wide variety of work colleagues from different professional disciplines as well as clients, customers and third parties. Producing academic assignments on a regular basis has ensured that I produce reports and essays that are well researched, have a clear structure and focus on the question being addressed. Written reports, minutes and professional emails all demonstrate my ability to communicate effectively. (246 words)

### **The ability to work under pressure and to meet tight deadlines**

The team at Company Z is a small one and had a lot of ongoing projects. I worked on a number of projects at the same time. Time pressures were tested further as I found myself working in both team Z and team Y. When working under pressure and to tight deadlines, I have used time management and prioritisation to ensure all tasks have been completed in an accurate and timely manner. To facilitate planning, I use tools such as Outlook calendar and tasks to monitor progress and ensure that my time is managed efficiently in order to meet my priorities.

Whilst at university, I have needed to prioritise my workload in order to complete academic assignments to set deadlines. In doing this I have prioritised in accordance with the set timescales and the degree of work involved. Given that there is a mark penalty for late submission, it has been critical to my achievement whilst on the degree to complete and submit my assignments on time. (167 words)

## Application Form Checklist. Have you...

Read the job description and person specification?	Yes / No
Created a draft version of your statement (to save until you're ready to send, and return to if you get invited to interview)?	Yes / No
Clearly addressed the Essential criteria?	Yes / No
Answered as many of the Desirable criteria as possible?	Yes / No
Provided concise, yet specific examples using the STAR technique?	Yes / No
Used a variety of examples from employment, academia, work experience and extracurricular activities?	Yes / No
Made effective use of headings and bullet points?	Yes / No
Submitted the form before the closing deadline?	Yes / No

## Writing supporting or personal statements for postgraduate study

Usually in your application you are asked to provide a supporting or personal statement (these terms are often used inter-changeably). You may not necessarily be given any guidance on this but as a general rule, your statement should follow the structure outlined below:

- An engaging introduction that clearly outlines your interest and motivation for undertaking the course. It will also outline the reasons for choosing that particular university and what attracts you to higher level study at that institution.
- How your undergraduate degree has prepared you for higher level study, particularly in developing specific skills and knowledge that the course will develop further. Look to focus on specific skills such as communication, critical thinking, independent research, time planning etc. Be sure to provide evidence to show how these skills have been developed. Additionally, if you have completed projects or written a dissertation that is particularly relevant or related to your chosen subject of study, then provide some information about it within your statement.
- What you have learned from your (related) work experiences that will support your learning on the course. Again, provide the evidence to support your

claims. Your experience may have developed your commercial awareness (an understanding of how business works), direct experience within a specific role that relates to the course, experience of marketing, experience of working in a commercial laboratory or working within mental health etc. All your work experience has the potential to be relevant on some level; the challenge is for you to communicate this value to the reader. Transferable skills can be a good place to start.

- How the course will contribute to your further academic or career development. There may be a requirement for the postgraduate course in order to enter your chosen career, e.g. forensic psychology or social work. It may be that the postgraduate course is a common pathway into the career but not necessarily a prerequisite, or you may be looking at progressing from the Master's onto a PhD. All of these are valid reasons for studying a postgraduate course and it will be important to demonstrate to the reader that your course choice is an informed one and that it links to your future aspirations.
- A conclusion, reiterating the above points and reaffirming your desire to study at that institution.

For a large number of Master's courses you will be applying direct to the university and there may be no word limit specified. However, for certain postgraduate courses such as Social Work and Teaching in England, you will apply through UCAS or the Department of Education's Teacher Training website and the maximum word count will be stated.

Remember, for further advice or help with your application you can attend one of our [workshops](#) on CVs and applications or you can [book an appointment](#) with a Careers Adviser.