



St Mary's spotlight: personal statements

Writing a personal statement can be the most daunting aspect of applying to university. Students are frequently given lots of advice from family, friends, teachers and careers specialists, telling them to 'stand out from the crowd', 'sound interesting' and 'appear knowledgeable'. But what is the best way to go about this? Admissions Tutors at St Mary's who read thousands of statements each year share what they look for and how they make decisions when sifting through applications that they receive for courses at the University. Here is what they have to say:

1. Focus 75% of the personal statement on the subject you want to study

- Discuss why you're applying to study the course, identifying any specific areas of interest within the subject area that you'd like to develop as part of your studies. You should also link your present studies to the proposed degree.
- Clearly demonstrate a good understanding and enthusiasm for the subject applied for. Present your academic reading – mention your favourite author, researcher or academic who shares your interests or inspires you. Mention extracurricular activities which are related to your chosen subject area, for example, participating in competitive athletic events for those applying to Sport, editing or writing for a school newsletter/blog/website for those applying for Journalism can help illustrate engagement in the subject area.
- Demonstrate that you understand the skills needed to succeed. For example, analytical skills, research skills, communication skills, organisational skills and motivation, alongside the specific skills required for the degree that you have applied for. You will need to support these claims with evidence, using examples to demonstrate how you have used your set of skills to achieve the desired outcome.
- Give an indication of what you hope the degree will allow you to do in future and mention any specific career aspirations that you may have, as this indicates commitment to the chosen subject.

2. Focus a maximum of 25% of the personal statement on what you do outside of the classroom

- What do you enjoy? How does this link to the subject that you want to study, or show your readiness for university?
- The Admissions Tutor will be looking for your potential to succeed and real interest in the subject, especially if the course is vocational, alongside evidence that you can work hard and learn. They are also looking at what you will contribute to the course, the degree and to university life.

Some quick and easy tips

- Be concise and make it easy to read.
- Check spelling and grammar.
- Start early.
- If you have an interesting life story then only tell it if it is relevant to your application and course choice.

In short, you need to demonstrate that you understand the course you have applied for and the demands it will place on you, and that you will be an interesting and enthusiastic student to teach.