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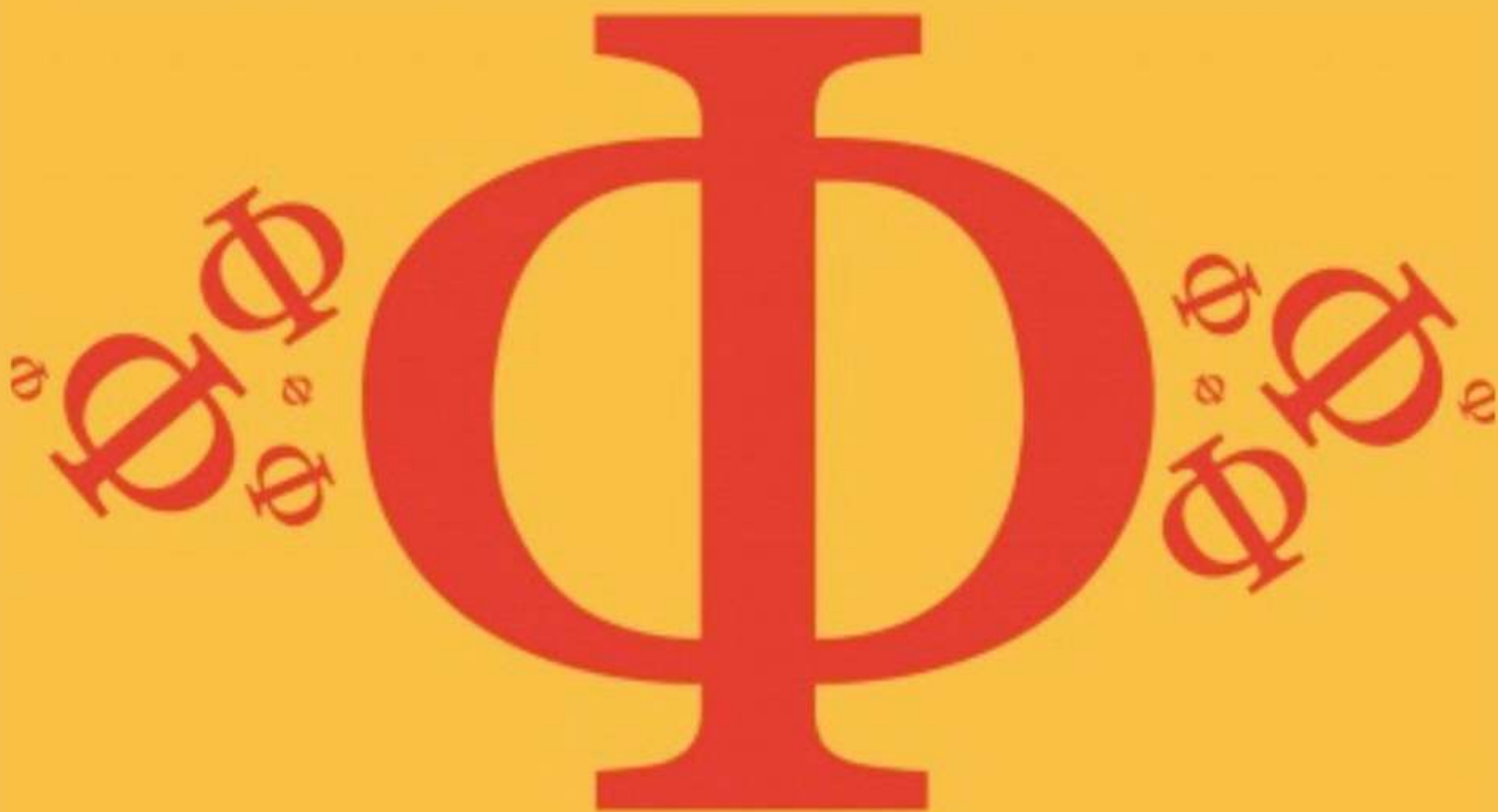
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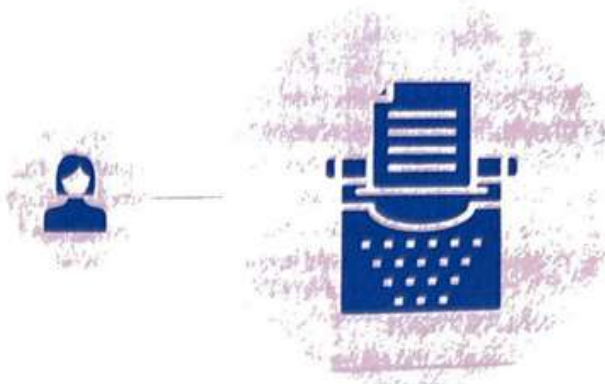
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Personal Statement



MASTER CLASS

PERSONAL STATEMENT MASTERCLASS



YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR APPLICATION AND YOU NEED TO DO EVERYTHING IT TAKES TO GET IT JUST RIGHT. YOU HAVE A MINIMUM OF 1,000 AND A MAXIMUM OF 4,000 CHARACTERS (INCLUDING SPACES) TO SHOW ADMISSIONS TUTORS WHY THEY SHOULD PICK YOU OVER OTHER CANDIDATES.

Apart from your teacher reference this is the only section of the UCAS form where you will have a chance to show the 'real' you, the person beyond the grades. Don't listen to anyone who says universities don't look at personal statements anymore, because they do. Apart from the main, first round of applications, they can be particularly useful in borderline cases if you're up against another candidate, or if you go through Clearing, so you need to give it your all.

You will need to have decided what you want to study before you start, as the main reason for writing the statement is to prove your suitability and passion for that subject, so if you're still undecided, research how to choose your course first. You'll also need to have looked at the course structure at each and every one of the universities you intend to apply to as there can be significant variations between each course, and get a feel for what they offer, and what they are looking for - and keep this in mind when writing your statement.

We have canvassed many admissions tutors to find out what they are looking for and the result is this masterclass on how to plan and write an outstanding personal statement. Don't forget that tutors will be reading a very large volume of personal statements and you need to make your application stand out from the rest. Assume that the reader is an academic who has devoted his or her life to their chosen subject.

WHAT THEY REALLY WANT TO KNOW IS, HAVE YOU CHOSEN THE RIGHT SUBJECT FOR THE RIGHT REASON?

HOW IT WORKS

The Pure Potential Personal Statement Masterclass will help you to write your statement if you follow it step by step and start by writing down as much as you possibly can. Your first few drafts are bound to be rubbish, it's the same for everyone! But it's much easier to cut down on material than it is to come up with it, so jot down everything you can think of in the boxes in bullet points as we go along, we'll edit it down later and turn the best bits into beautiful prose.

If you get stuck on any section then please just move on as you can always come back to it, and we know there's nothing worse than having a mental block or getting stuck in a personal statement rut!

STRUCTURE

There are lots of ways to structure your statement, but Pure Potential's suggestion is approximately 75% dedicated to academic study:

INTRODUCTION

Explain your motivation for studying the subject.

IN-SCHOOL EVIDENCE OF SKILLS & INTEREST (optional)

Briefly mention any specific skills you are learning at school that will be relevant for your course.

EVIDENCE OF YOUR PASSION FOR THE SUBJECT

This must be outside of school so they can see it's a genuine interest!

GAP YEAR PLANS

If applicable.

WIDER SKILLS

What are you doing in or out of school that shows you are a mature, well-rounded person?

CONCLUSION

Remind them why they should pick you.

WRITING YOUR INTRODUCTION

You will need to provide a brief but convincing explanation as to why you want to study your subject at university. This should capture the reader's interest straight away so they are compelled to read on. Here are some suggestions of how to start your statement, but please don't use all of the suggestions below – choose one or two that are right for you, or come up with your own:

YOUR PERSONAL TRIGGER

What got you interested in the subject? Was it a book, a museum trip, a documentary, a film, a teacher, an inspirational mentor, a personal circumstance, a visit to a historical site, or perhaps work experience? Don't ever say 'I have always been interested in "INSERT SUBJECT"!'. This is a cliché that admissions tutors are sick of reading, because it can't possibly be true! Nobody was born with a desire to be a doctor, lawyer or engineer. For example, an applicant might explain how their family holiday to the Somme gave them a genuine sense of the importance of history as a 'real life' phenomenon - something that exists beyond the pages of a textbook.

THE BIG PICTURE

Why is this subject important? Is it significant to the progression of society? What about our understanding of natural history and evolution? Will your subject lead to the betterment of lives of future generations? Does it shape the world we live in somehow? What's going on in the world right now (yes, you can mention COVID if it's relevant) that relates to your subject? This could be anything from cutting-edge scientific research or technology, grey areas in morality or justice, the state of the world's economy, or how looking at ancient civilisations or different cultures helps us to understand who we are. Why do you want to be part of the academic community researching this subject further?

SPECIFIC AREAS OF INTEREST

Having given a broad account of why you love your subject, focus on specific areas of interest within it. For example, if you want to study physics, you could go on to say how it's really the module on astrophysics that gets your pulse racing, and in what way you hope the degree course will develop your passion further. You will need to read the course prospectus for all the universities you are applying to before you write this!

USING QUOTES

We often get asked by students if it is a good idea to start the statement with a fancy quote from an expert in the field, famous author or scientist. Almost every admissions tutor we have spoken to would rather you didn't use one! It is only acceptable to do this if you directly relate it to your course and why you want to study it, show that you fully understand the concept of the quote and use it to enhance your own words instead of just using somebody else's but if you can say it in your own words then do so.

CAREER PLANS

If you have a definite or even a rough idea of what you want to do when you graduate, and your university degree is a stepping stone towards that aspiration then you may wish to write it here. If you have no idea don't worry, many people don't. If you're a budding medic, dentist or similar then you will need to go into further depth, but for all others remember that you are applying for an academic degree, not a job so don't focus too much on your career.

FILL IN THE BOXES RELEVANT TO YOU:

What was my personal trigger?

How does my subject relate to society or current affairs? Why is this particularly important to me?

Which aspect am I really looking forward to studying in more detail? Why?

Is there a quote I like the sound of? Could I express this in my own words?

What are my career plans? How might academic study further these plans?

IN-SCHOOL EVIDENCE OF SKILLS & INTERESTS (OPTIONAL)

WHY OPTIONAL?

This section is optional because you should only talk about current studies if you can talk about them impressively and academically. Not everyone will be able to, or should, relate their current studies to their chosen course, and in fact this section pales in significance to evidence of what you've done out of school, so don't worry if you leave it blank!

Don't forget that every one of your fellow candidates (aka your competition) is studying A-levels, BTECS, IBs or equivalent, so school work is not going to make you stand out, unless you can truly demonstrate your understanding of how your current studies can specifically help your chosen degree course.

WHAT NOT TO DO

What they DON'T want to see is something like this, 'I currently study Maths, English and Biology at A-level. Maths helps with my

problem-solving skills, English helps with essay writing, and Biology has given me an understanding of human anatomy'. Firstly, they know what you study at A-level from the rest of your application form, so don't waste precious words on repeating this information. Secondly, these examples linking your current studies to your degree course are hardly insightful. Far better examples of skills you have picked up during your school studies are critical analysis of evidence, laboratory work or the ability to study independently. Thirdly, don't feel you have to mention each and every one of your subjects, if you pick any, just pick the relevant ones.

SPRINGBOARD

We also suggest that you tell them how your current studies have been a springboard for further reading in your own time. If you take on further independent reading on a topic that interests you, and show enthusiasm for seeing how theories you learn apply to the real world, then you are exactly the type of student universities are looking for. It's not too late either – a quick Google in your chosen area will open up a whole world of related topics for you to mention. Name drop what you read, who wrote it and what was interesting, this leads nicely into the next paragraph.

A-LEVEL / BTEC / IB / etc	RELEVANT SKILLS DEVELOPED
SUBJECT 1	
SUBJECT 2	
SUBJECT 3	
SUBJECT 4	
SUBJECT 5	
SUBJECT 6	
SUBJECT 7	
SUBJECT 8	

EVIDENCE OF YOUR PASSION
FOR THE SUBJECT

This is by far the most important part of your statement where you can really shine because it's the things you've done in your own time which will show a genuine passion for the subject. Remember that one of the main differences between university and school is that there's no one looking over your shoulder, making sure you do your homework. You have to show that you are self-motivated to do things outside of the classroom or lecture theatre. For most students these activities will come under the categories below. Tick all that apply to you and, crucially, are specifically relevant to the course you have chosen. First write down a list of things you've done, then write down what you learnt from that experience / book / documentary / trip that will directly help your degree course. Make sure you name all authors, directors, places, companies, books etc. We've given you a list of suggestions for each category, but don't worry, you're only expected to have done a few from each list!

YOU MAY END UP WITH UP TO
THREE PARAGRAPHS FOR THIS
SECTION – THAT'S OK!

WIDER READING

One excellent way of demonstrating passion is through wider reading, and admissions tutors are looking for students who are willing to read around the subject in their own time. "But I don't know what to read?" we hear you ask! One of the best places to look for reading lists is on the university website. They usually have a list of suggested books for undergraduates, most of which will be available in your local library. If you can't find a reading list, then speak to your teachers, or even call the department of the university you want to apply for – they'll be more than happy to recommend books!

DETAILS	WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
TEXTBOOKS	
PLAYS	
POETRY	
PASSAGES	
ARTICLES	
JOURNALS	
NEWSPAPERS	
OTHER	

EXAM PAPERS PRACTICE

OTHER RESEARCH

There are more interactive ways of researching your chosen subject that will convince admission tutors you are truly interested. Many of these can be free of charge.

DETAILS	WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
THEATRE TRIPS	
ART EXHIBITIONS	
MUSEUM TRIPS	
HISTORICAL SITES	
GEOGRAPHICAL LANDMARKS	
FILM DOCUMENTARIES	
PODCASTS EG. TED	
OTHER	

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

Whether it was online or face-to-face, if you managed to get work experience which relates to your subject, it goes in this section (save the casual weekend jobs for the next section). Did the opportunity reinforce any principles you have only learnt in theory, such as the importance of accuracy, trustworthiness, efficiency, collaboration, empathy, or any number of things that show how you deepened your understanding of the subject. We're NOT looking for generic skills like time-management and general communication here. And don't forget to name drop the companies.

	DETAILS	WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
voluntary work		
Work experience		
Paid employment		
Internships		
Community activities		
Other		
Other		

COURSE-RELATED PROGRAMMES

Many universities and other organisations offer you the chance to sample your chosen subject through taster opportunities, both virtual and in person. These tend to get fully booked quickly, so find out what's going on and where, as early on as possible. We advise a scattergun approach – apply to lots of programmes; you'll learn a lot even if they are at a university you don't intend to apply to.

	DETAILS	WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
Webinars		
Workshops		
Laboratory work		
Lectures		
Masterclasses		
Residentials		
Summer school		
Other		
Other		

OTHER ACTIVITIES

What else have you done that shows you're interested in the subject?

	DETAILS	WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
Competitions		
Prizes		
Awards		
Published work		
Hobbies		
Collections		
Other		

GAP YEAR PLANS

If you are taking a gap year and applying for deferred entry then you should explain what you plan to do briefly in this section – give details and don't be ashamed of backpacking with friends around some far-flung land. Telling the admissions tutor about your plans for the year ahead shows that you are organised, and want to pursue interests outside of your studies, which is healthy and makes you a well-rounded person. If you can relate it to the course, or university life, that's even better. It is an academic application, so don't bang on about this too much, even if you're secretly more excited about travelling than starting university!

PLANS FOR MY GAP YEAR:

How will I fund them?

What am I hoping to achieve or get out of the experience?

How will this help me with my degree, university life or career?

WIDER SKILLS

This is where you will give an account of your non-academic achievements and the skills you picked up along the way through your interests and hobbies either in or out of school. Cover any extra-curricular activities not necessarily related to your course to give the admissions tutor a glimpse of the kind of person you are outside of the classroom.

The table below has a list of skills you may have developed. Alongside each skill enter the most relevant activity – try to pick just one activity per skill, even if you learnt more than one skill from it. Here are some examples: if you have volunteered as a reading mentor for younger students, this would definitely have developed your communication skills; you developed an efficient approach to solving problems during your work experience and you also showed great initiative; if you're on the football team you would

have developed team working skills; a prefect might have a sense of responsibility; living abroad will make you more adaptable; directing a play would give you leadership skills etc. etc. etc.

What kind of things have you done? Sports, school plays, volunteering, fundraising, organising events, community work, a part-time job, other hobbies – this list will be endless because you're all doing such diverse things...

Remember to make yourself stand out. Juggling a Saturday job with studies isn't going to achieve that because thousands of sixth formers do it. You need to demonstrate you've gone the extra mile.

In the box below, fill in the top one or two skills you learnt along the way, here are some examples:

DETAILS	WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
Communication	
Commitment	
Time management	
Teamwork	
Using initiative	
Public speaking	
Adaptability	
Organisation	
Leadership	
Research & analysis	
Maturity	
Responsibility	
Other	

CONCLUSION

People often struggle with this, but it should be an easy paragraph once you've written the rest. Simply finish the personal statement with a one or two line summary of why you are a suitable candidate, what you hope to get out of, and give to, the university community. Make sure this sentence convinces the tutor of how much you're looking forward to it all, so use really aspirational language and be full of enthusiasm for the next chapter of your life.

EXAMPLES

"Overall, I am a hardworking, active person and I am enthusiastic about achieving my goals and becoming a primary school teacher. I am looking forward to university life, both academically and socially."

"I am mature, confident and self-motivated - all qualities that I believe are critical to a successful university experience. I relish the opportunity to study Accountancy and Finance to degree level and hopefully beyond."

"I feel certain that this subject will provide me with the intellectual challenge best suited to my personality and ambition of pursuing an academic career in the social sciences. The prospect of studying a stimulating and dynamic course truly excites me."

WRITE YOUR OWN



EXAM PAPERS PRACTICE

YOUR FIRST DRAFT

Look back at the tables you've filled in – it might not look like it at the moment but this is your first draft! The next step is to choose which points are the most important ones to include.

So what are the admissions tutors looking for? Well, first and foremost it is the things you have done that show passion for the course; the more 'outside of school' evidence the better. Skills such as time management and teamwork are great, but are secondary to evidence of a desire to study a subject. If you can 'double up' on skills and talk about things you have learnt and what you have done to demonstrate your interest in the subject at the same time as one of these skills, then great!

For example, you did work experience at your local medical centre and learnt the importance of patient confidentiality, as well as developing an interest in a health-related career. You may well have also developed excellent communication skills by answering the telephone, contributing to meetings, and interacting with staff and patients.

Go back and look at all that you wrote down, and highlight, or circle the aspects that you think an admissions tutor will find most impressive, and re-write them as brief bullet points in the space opposite:

Introduction

in-school
evidence of
skills &
interest
(optional)

Evidence of
your passion
for the
subject

Wider skills

Conclusion

TURNING IT INTO PROSE

We can't teach you how to write well, but we can give you examples of positive phrases and key words that can help you link sentences together, and combine your experiences with skills. Choose some of these positive phrases and start putting sentences together, crossing each phrase off as you go along to avoid repetition. Add some phrases of your own too for originality.

FINAL NOTES

- Transfer the activities you have deemed worthy of your personal statement to a Word document. If in doubt, include it, because you can always edit it out later. Don't worry about going over the word count at this stage. And don't forget to save regularly!

- Many people find it easier to work on the introduction last. It doesn't matter which order you do it in, as long as you end up with the same structure – subheadings can work well here to maintain order, but don't include this in your final statement. Choose the activity or topic you feel most comfortable talking about first to get the flow of writing started.

- Give enough detail, but don't bore them; 2-3 sentences on any topic should be enough.

- Illustrate your skills and abilities and how they are developing rather than state you have them, for example, don't say 'and this shows I have communication skills' but instead write 'Through this I have practiced my ability to communicate effectively'.

- Do not state facts about the subject such as, 'Geography is the subject that studies the lands, the features, the inhabitants, and the phenomena of the Earth'.

- Do not say lofty, important-sounding without backing them up, for example, 'The complexity of life and the Universe itself shows that the human race has only scratched the surface of knowledge'.

- Do not use negative words like never, hate, useless, mistake, tiring, stressful etc.

- Personal statement advice can seem conflicting: be yourself but don't use humour, demonstrate a good vocabulary but don't overuse the thesaurus, be confident but not cocky, show your passion but don't use the word passion, show your skills but don't list them! We know it is hard, but try to find a balance once you get to the proofreading stage.

FURTHERMORE
ENABLE ME
OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO ME
ON REFLECTION
INTELLECTUAL EXPLORATION
ADDITIONALLY
USED MY INITIATIVE
STRENGTHEN
EXPLORE MY INTERESTS
SKILLS I HAVE GAINED THROUGH
THRIVE UNDER PRESSURE
AS WELL AS
COMMITMENT
REINFORCED
THIS HAS FURTHERED MY
I LEARNED FROM
MOREOVER
MY PURSUITS
TAKING PART IN
CREATIVELY
BENEFIT
EFFICIENTLY
IN ADDITION
HARD WORK
I UNDERTOOK
I ASPIRE TO
MY INTEREST IN
RESPONSIBILITY
I PARTICULARLY ENJOYED
I CONTINUE TO DEVELOP
THROUGH REGULARLY ATTENDING
TO IMPROVE MY
COMBINING... WITH...-HAS TAUGHT ME
THIS HAS EXPANDED MY KNOWLEDGE OF
CHALLENGING
IMMENSELY REWARDING
BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION
THOUGHT-PROVOKING
LEARNED TO PRIORITISE
HIGHLY COMPETITIVE

PROOFREADING

Checking and editing your personal statement should take up as much time as creating the first draft, so don't leave it to the last minute. In fact, you can reasonably expect to have over 20 drafts before you have a submission-ready version. If you have time, we suggest leaving it for a few days to clear your head. Then read it again. Every single line should be a new reason for the admissions tutor to pick you:

- Be ruthless! Get rid of any repetition or waffle.
- Don't have any 'don't's or 'I'll's or 'I'm's! This is a formal document.
- Spelling and grammar must be perfect! NO EXCUSES.
- Don't TRY and sound clever! You are clever and this will shine through, have faith in your achievements.
- Be careful with capitals! Make sure you are correct, and consistent.

· Then ask parents, friends, friends of your parents, employers, mentors – literally anyone you can think of to check through your statement.

· Do your best to get rid of typos before asking people to look at it so they can focus on the content and not silly grammatical errors.

· Don't send it out to everyone all at once, otherwise you'll get lots of different versions back which can be overwhelming. Send it to one person, get their feedback, apply the feedback, then send it on again.

· Don't be surprised if you get conflicting advice from different people – sometimes there is no right or wrong, so if this happens go with your gut instinct.

· Be sure to say please and thank you – so many people forget to ask nicely and show their appreciation!



PERSONAL STATEMENT CHECKLIST

Give this checklist to the readers when you ask them to proof it for you.

- ☐ 1. Does my introduction hold your attention?
- ☐ 2. Can you see clearly why I have chosen my course?
- ☐ 3. Have I demonstrated at least once that I know what the course actually entails?
- ☐ 4. Have I talked about my reading around the subject and shown I have understood what I read?
- ☐ 5. Do I show the skills I have developed through my extra-curricular and in-school activities?
- ☐ 6. Have I given an indication of my future plans beyond university?
- ☐ 7. Are my sentences either too short or too long?
- ☐ 8. How is my grammar?
- ☐ 9. Have I backed up everything I have said with evidence?
- ☐ 10. Is my conclusion positive and does it encompass university life beyond academia?

FINALLY, RUN IT BY YOUR TEACHER

Listen carefully to their advice - they go through this process every year and can draw on valuable experience. Make sure you give them plenty of time to give it proper attention, not 5 minutes before the school deadline!

EXAMPLE PERSONAL STATEMENT

HERE IS A MODEL PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR THE FICTIONAL SUBJECT OF COMEDY STUDIES:

I believe that laughter is fundamental to human experience. Basil Fawlty, John Cleese's comic creation in 'Fawlty Towers', once said, 'Still, you've got to laugh, haven't you?'. We have to laugh because, far from being a distraction or mere entertainment, comedy represents our attempt to reconcile ourselves to some of the deepest human truths, like death and love. I want to study this course to further my understanding both of the history and evolution of comedy, and to improve my critical skills so that I can unravel the whole meaning of each joke and scene.

[Here the student clearly explains what inspires him to study the course. He included a quote, but it is short, embedded in the text, and its meaning is clearly explained. He also demonstrates he understands what the course entails, and expresses enthusiasm]

Comedy Studies A-level has opened my eyes to the potential of comedy to create social change: we studied, 'Brenner, Bird and Fortune', which opened my eyes to politics and the hypocrisies of government in a way conventional news never could. Theoretical study of political satire has led me to research this further in my own time by watching current and historical television shows such as 'Spitting Image', 'Have I got News for You' and 'Mock the Week'. I set myself the task of writing my own show, 'Politically Correct?' which was turned into a school play that I also directed.

[The student discusses his current studies, but briefly and using an insightful example of what he has learnt. He goes on to use this as a springboard to talk about independent study, name-dropping the shows he watched and throws in his achievement of directing a play too]

Having studied the television show 'The Office' in my own time, I became interested in the idea that the conventional sitcom is dead, and documentary realism is the future of televised comedy. To further my understanding of cultural and national differences in humour, I watched the American version of the same show. I found there to be significant changes to the script, for example, the famous cringe-worthy scene in the British version where David Brent dances has been completely rewritten for American audiences; perhaps different use of sarcasm between the two countries means that the timing of punch lines must be adapted.

I completed work experience helping to write scripts for television shows 'People Like Us' and 'After Life'. These two series chart the development of this comic genre, which, unlike the older cheerful sitcoms, deliberately confronts the depths of human despair and failure. Seeing the difference between a line that seemed funny on paper and how it was delivered by the actors on-set showed me how objective comedy can be, and the challenges that face script-writers. To obtain an alternative point of view I also booked tickets to see Channel 4's comedy, 'The Graham Norton Show', being filmed live in London. The experience showed me that comedy can have a vital and performative quality when filmed in front of a live studio audience, and the differences between scripted and off-the-cuff humour.

I have been a regular television reviewer for the local magazine, 'The Pieshop'. Writing reviews has helped me to hone my critical style, and to appraise programmes in a lively and concise way. I also took on the challenge of playing Caliban in the school play of 'The Tempest', an experience which helped me to gain an insight into comedy from the performer's point of view as well as develop my confidence immensely. I also founded the comedy club at school, we have weekly meetings to discuss programmes, I enjoy having heated debates with my peers on what they find funny.

[He has divided his out-of-school experiences into three neat paragraphs that illustrate a broad understanding of various elements of comedy. He talks about what he learnt in a way that shows he is genuinely interested in the subject and engaged with each experience. He has clearly done a range of experience so his third paragraph covers a few experiences in less detail]

I am in the school football team, I enjoy the regular team meetings to improve our performance, and it was immensely rewarding when we won the county cup. I also mentor students at a local primary school and teach them to read. I also ran for, and was elected, the Head Boy position on the Sixth Form Student Council. We regularly liaise with the Upper School students on a range of non-academic issues, and present our findings to the School Governors monthly. These roles have taught me how to balance my studies and extra-curricular responsibilities, which is important because I hope to continue both my sporting and voluntary activities while at university.

[This paragraph is brief but paints a picture of the type of person he is. Also, teamwork, leadership and time management are included in this paragraph without stating them]

Comedy is something I have come back to, inside and outside of the classroom, throughout my life. I think I have the intellectual curiosity, the ability and, most importantly, the sense of humour to gain a much deeper understanding of this subject at university, and would love the opportunity to do so.

[Brief, enthusiastic, positive and a summary of why they should pick him]

USEFUL RESOURCE · purepotential.org · Read over 250 past personal statements annotated by the Pure Potential team.



MAKING YOUR STATEMENT STAND OUT



EVERYONE CAN WRITE A PERSONAL STATEMENT THAT SPARKLES - IT'S JUST A MATTER OF KNOWING HOW. WHETHER YOU ARE A SCIENTIST, A LINGUIST, A STUDENT OF THE HUMANITIES, A MATHEMATICIAN OR A POTENTIAL LAWYER OR MEDIC, THE TRICK IS TO THINK CREATIVELY ABOUT WAYS TO ENRICH YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT.

Our most prestigious universities are looking for intellectual curiosity that goes beyond A-level subjects.

It is especially impressive if you have discovered an author, or followed a political commentator or a science journalist, or kept up to date with a

significant court case in the news, and become a 'specialist' in something that you have made your own. Perhaps you have discovered the social commentary contained in Willkie Collins' Victorian novels or in the slick American detective novels of Raymond Chandler? Perhaps in reading the legal arguments of a significant court case in the news you have begun to question whether law and justice are the same thing? Do you feel particularly strongly about environmental or human rights issues - why? Are you an historian interested in how past revolutions shed light on contemporary social upheavals? Perhaps you are a potential medic with something to say about the ethics of animal testing? Are languages where you shine? Do you relish the challenge of translating the sensibilities of Pablo Neruda's love poetry into English, or are you someone who has discovered the power of Italian neo-realist film or French cinema vérité?

Whatever it is, find a specialist area of cultural interest and be an expert in your chosen field. Aim for something that no-one else will be discussing in their personal statement to make yours the most interesting the admissions tutor will read. For example, if you do plan to write about Covid-19, lockdown and the impact it has had on the world, try to make it unique - we all know it's crippled the world financially, we all have an idea of the toll on mental

health, but if you can find an example to write about that digs a little deeper, and shows a more mature level of understanding of how the world works, then more credit will come your way.

If you can't think where to start, try a Saturday or Sunday newspaper - ideally, a paper with a good reputation for its journalism. Both The Guardian and the Daily Telegraph win awards for their investigative and political journalism and both papers contain excellent reviews of literature, art, theatre and film. Skim read your chosen paper and notice which sections really interest you. Avoiding football scores and celebrity gossip, which headlines grabbed your attention? Was it a news story about a space expedition or the political situation in a particular country, or was it a book review or interview with a film director? Why did your chosen article grab you? What questions did it make you ask? Why did you want to know more?

Suggested reading resources:

The Economist, The Statesman, The London Review of Books, The Times Literary Supplement, The Spectator.

For online political commentary, Google The Huffington Post, Slate and The Atlantic.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR INSPIRATION

If you feel you are short of extra-curricular activities to write about in your personal statement, here are some quick fix solutions to help you. We have listed as many subjects as we can but if yours isn't listed you can email us at info@purepotential.org and we will gladly help out.

ARCHITECTURE

- VISIT INSPIRING BUILDINGS AND MAKE NOTES ON WHY YOU FIND THEM INTERESTING
- KEEP UP TO DATE WITH NEW ARCHITECTURAL TRENDS AND BUILDING TECHNIQUES
- STUDY THE WORK OF ONE OR TWO FAMOUS ARCHITECTS IN GREAT DETAIL

Useful resources: 'The Architects' Journal', 'Architectural Review' and 'The RIBA Journal'

ART & DESIGN

- VISIT ART EXHIBITIONS AND DESIGN SHOWS VIRTUALLY OR IN PERSON
- CHOOSE A FEW FAVOURITE ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS BOTH PAST AND PRESENT AND FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THEIR BODY OF WORK
- GET YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS TO SET YOU EXTRA-CURRICULAR PROJECTS
- LEARN HOW TO USE PROGRAMMES SUCH AS INDESIGN AND PHOTOSHOP

Useful resource:

creativereview.co.uk / itsnicethat.com / creativeboom.com

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

- READ THE NEW SCIENTIST AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC REGULARLY
- ATTEND EVENTS SUCH AS THE CAMBRIDGE SCIENCE FESTIVAL
- RESEARCH THE WORK OF AT LEAST THREE FAMOUS BIOLOGICAL SCIENTISTS AND HOW THEY CHANGED THE WORLD

Useful resource: rsb.org.uk

BUSINESS / MANAGEMENT

- READ THE ECONOMIST AND THE FT REGULARLY; FOLLOW TWO OR THREE STORIES IN DETAIL OVER A LONG PERIOD
- PARTICIPATE IN BUSINESS CHALLENGES SUCH AS YOUNG ENTERPRISE, OR THE ICAEW BASE COMPETITION
- APPLY FOR PLACEMENTS AT SMALL COMPANIES AND GET EXPERIENCE IN A RANGE OF FIELDS WITHIN A BUSINESS (FAMILY OR LOCAL IS FINE)

Useful resource: managementtoday.co.uk

CHEMISTRY

- CHECK THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY WEBSITE FOR UPDATES ON LECTURES AND EVENTS YOU COULD ATTEND
- DISCUSS HOW ADVANCES IN CHEMISTRY AFFECT OUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE
- READ CHEMICAL WEEK FOR THE LATEST NEWS

Useful resource: chemistryworld.com

CLASSICS

- READ BOOKS SUCH AS THE ILIAD BY HOMER AND THE AENEID BY VIRGIL
- LEARN BASIC GREEK AND LATIN IN YOUR SPARE TIME
- VISIT HADRIAN'S WALL OR A SIMILAR HISTORICAL SITE
- LISTEN TO BBC RADIO 4'S PROGRAMMES ON ANCIENT GREECE AND ANCIENT ROME

Useful resource: classics.mit.edu / classicalassociation.org

COMPUTER SCIENCE

- SET UP YOUR OWN WEBSITE, EVEN IF IT IS JUST FOR FUN
- READ COMPUTATIONAL FAIRY TALES BY JEREMY KUBICA
- RESEARCH A FAMOUS COMPUTER SCIENTIST SUCH AS ALAN TURING AND DISCUSS THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE WORLD TODAY
- LOOK UP AND UNDERSTAND THE FOUR MAIN CONCEPTS OF COMPUTER SCIENCE

Useful resources: livescience.com / cs.ox.ac.uk

DENTISTRY

- ASK YOUR FAMILY DENTIST ABOUT THEIR CAREER PATH
- VOLUNTEER TO TEACH YOUNGER CHILDREN ABOUT DENTAL HYGIENE
- PRACTICE AN ACTIVITY THAT WILL DEMONSTRATE EXCELLENT MANUAL DEXTERITY SUCH AS PAINTING, EMBROIDERY, PLAYING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OR EVEN HAVING A GO WITH ELECTRICAL SOLDERING KITS!
- READ JOURNALS SUCH AS THE DENTAL UPDATE OR DENTISTRY MAG

Useful resource: www.bda.org / www.healthcareers.nhs.uk

DRAMA & PERFORMING ARTS

- TRY TO GET A PROMINENT ROLE IN YOUR SCHOOL PRODUCTIONS, WHETHER ON OR OFF STAGE
- VISIT THE THEATRE AS MANY TIMES AS YOU CAN, AND COMPARE THE PRODUCTIONS TO FILM ADAPTATIONS
- READ A DIFFERENT PLAY EVERY WEEK AND MAKE NOTES ON HOW YOU WOULD DIRECT KEY SCENES
- ENSURE YOU HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF ALL GENRES, ERAS AND STYLES OF THEATRE
- READ REVIEWS AND UNDERSTAND HOW TO CRITIQUE THEM

Useful resources: thestage.co.uk / backstage.com

ECONOMICS

- MAKE NOTES ON STORIES ABOUT THE ECONOMY, BOTH NATIONAL AND GLOBAL, THAT INTEREST YOU
- UNDERSTAND CRYPTOCURRENCIES AND WHAT INFLUENCES THEIR VALUE
- TRY TO GET WORK EXPERIENCE OR ATTEND AN INSIGHT DAY AT A LEADING FINANCIAL FIRM
- READ THE FINANCIAL TIMES AND THE ECONOMIST

Useful resource: res.org.uk / investopedia.com

ENGINEERING

- STUDY FIVE STRUCTURES THAT YOU ADMIRE IN GREAT DETAIL, AND ENSURE YOU FULLY UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHY THEY WORK
- THINK ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE GADGETS AND WHAT PROBLEM THEY SOLVE
- TRY AND INVENT SOMETHING THAT SOLVES A PROBLEM, HOWEVER SMALL

Useful resources: tomorrowsengineers.org.uk / raeng.org.uk
'Engineering Education' or 'Applied Sciences, Engineering Technology' publications

ENGLISH LITERATURE

- READ, READ, READ, READ; NOT JUST NOVELS, READ PLAYS AND POETRY TOO, OF ALL ERAS AND GENRES
- WATCH THEATRE, TELEVISION AND FILM ADAPTATIONS OF BOOKS
- START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB AT SCHOOL

Useful resources:

literaryreview.co.uk / The Times Literary Supplement

GEOGRAPHY

- RESEARCH CURRENT GLOBAL ISSUES SUCH AS THE ENVIRONMENT AND POPULATION — BE ABLE TO DISCUSS YOUR FINDINGS IN DEPTH
- UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON PHYSICAL AND HUMAN GEOGRAPHY
- BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

Useful resources:

'Geographical Association' / nationalgeographic.com rgs.org

HISTORY

- VISIT HISTORICAL SITES, MUSEUMS AND EXHIBITIONS
- READ BOOKS, WATCH DOCUMENTARIES AND EVEN FILMS SET IN HISTORICAL TIMES
- DEMONSTRATE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF BIASED AND FLAWED EVIDENCE
- CAREFULLY READ THE COURSE SYLLABUS: WILL YOU BE STUDYING ANCIENT OR MODERN, BRITISH OR INTERNATIONAL, OR A BIT OF EVERYTHING?
- CONSIDER NOW HISTORY MIGHT REMEMBER CURRENT ISSUES, E.G. BREXIT, THE PANDEMIC, TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY AND THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Useful resources: historytoday.com / royalhistsoc.org

HISTORY OF ART

- READ CRITICAL TERMS FOR ART HISTORY BY NELSON AND SHIFF
- LISTEN TO BBC RADIO 4S 'IN OUR TIME' CULTURE ARCHIVE ONLINE
- VISIT ART GALLERIES. MAKE NOTES ON THE ARTISTS AND THEIR PLACE IN HISTORY

Useful resources:

metmuseum.org/toah / tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism

LAW

- ATTEND INSIGHT DAYS RUN BY LAW FIRMS
- VOLUNTEER TO HELP OUT AT YOUR LOCAL SOLICITOR'S OFFICE
- FOLLOW STORIES IN THE NEWS OF HIGH-PROFILE CASES IN A VARIETY OF AREAS (CRIMINAL, COMMERCIAL, PROPERTY, FAMILY ETC.)

Useful resources: 'The Lawyer', 'Lawyer 2b'
'The Law Journal UK', thelawyer.com

MUSIC

- READ MARCUS DU SAUTOY'S THE MUSIC OF THE PRIMES
- RESEARCH HOW MUSIC RELATES TO MATHEMATICS. BBC RADIO 4 HAS AN ARCHIVE PROGRAMME ON THIS
- READ SCALES, INTERVALS, KEYS, TRIADS, RHYTHM, AND METER BY JOHN CLOUGH

Useful resource: musictheory.net

PHARMACY

- GET WORK EXPERIENCE AT YOUR LOCAL PHARMACY OR GPS' SURGERY
- KEEP UP TO DATE ON NEW DRUGS AND ADVANCEMENTS IN THE INDUSTRY
- READ ARTICLES IN JOURNALS SUCH AS THE PHARMACEUTICAL JOURNAL AND THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF CLINICAL PHARMACY

Useful resource: learnhowtobecome.org/pharmacist

PHILOSOPHY

- READ THINK BY SIMON BLACKBURN AND THE PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY BY BERTRAND RUSSELL
- WATCH TED TALKS ONLINE ON THE SUBJECT OF PHILOSOPHY
- READ UP ON THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS

Useful resource: pfallondon.org

PHYSICS

- REGULARLY READ THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD'S SCIENCE BLOG
- KEEP UP WITH DEVELOPMENTS FROM NASA AND CERN
- READ AND MAKE NOTES ON LEE SMOLIN'S THREE ROADS TO QUANTUM GRAVITY

Useful resources: iop.org

POLITICS

- READ ARTICLES FROM POLITICS, REVIEW AND TALKING POLITICS
- SHOW INTEREST IN LOCAL POLITICS BY VOLUNTEERING AT YOUR LOCAL ASSEMBLY AND JOIN YOUR LOCAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT
- SET UP A DEBATING SOCIETY AT SCHOOL
- GET A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE BY READING INTERNATIONAL NEWSPAPERS
- KEEP UP TO DATE WITH GLOBAL CURRENT AFFAIRS ON A DAILY BASIS

Useful resources: spectator.co.uk / theweek.co.uk

PSYCHOLOGY

- READ ARTICLES FROM THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PSYCHOLOGIST
- JOIN THE BRITISH PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY'S STUDENT MEMBERS GROUP
- ATTEND LECTURES SUCH AS 'PSYCHOLOGY 4 STUDENTS' OR ATTEND A PSYCHOLOGY SUMMER SCHOOL AT A LEADING UNIVERSITY

Useful resource: bps.org.uk

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

- WATCH TED TALKS ONLINE ON THE SUBJECT OF RELIGION
- ENSURE YOU CAN FLUENTLY DISCUSS THE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF ALL THE MAIN WORLD RELIGIONS
- STAY UP TO DATE ON CURRENT AFFAIRS AND HOW NEWS STORIES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Useful resources: ted.com/read/ted-studies/religion

SOCIOLOGY

- READ UP ON THEORIES SUCH AS MARXISM, FUNCTIONALISM AND POSTMODERNISM
- ATTEND STUDENT LECTURES ORGANISED BY THE BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
- READ ARTICLES FROM THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, AS WELL AS JOURNALS WHICH RELATE DIRECTLY TO YOUR INTERESTS

Useful resources: sociologyonline.co.uk / britsoc.co.uk

VETERINARY MEDICINE

- READ ECKERT: ANIMAL PHYSIOLOGY BY DAVID RANDALL
- ATTEND EVENTS SUCH AS THE LONDON VET SHOW OR RCVS QUESTION TIME
- VOLUNTEER FOR WORK EXPERIENCE WITH ANIMALS AT YOUR LOCAL VET OR PET SHOP

Useful resources: animalowners.rcvs.org.uk / bva.co.uk

LINGUISTICS

- ENSURE THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGES
- READ NOAM CHOMSKY'S SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES AND STEVEN PINKER'S THE LANGUAGE INSTINCT
- PRACTICE SOME BASIC PHONETICS BY WRITING DOWN SENTENCES IN THE PHONETIC ALPHABET

Useful resource: baal.org.uk / isle-linguistics.org

MATHEMATICS

- RESEARCH MATHEMATICAL THEORY THAT IS OUTSIDE THE A-LEVEL CURRICULUM, EG FERMAT'S LAST THEOREM, EUCLID'S PROOF OF THE INFINITUDE OF PRIMES, PYTHAGOREAN TRIPLETS AND JORDAN NORMAL FORM THEOREM
- ENTER THE UKMT MATHS CHALLENGE AND TAKE PART IN MENSA TESTS
- MAKE NOTES ON THE WAYS IN WHICH MATHEMATICS CAN BE APPLIED IN SOCIETY SUCH AS ENGINEERING, ECONOMICS AND COMPUTER SCIENCE

Useful resources: lms.ac.uk / plus.maths.org.uk

