

RESEARCH: THE FOUNDATION OF ANY PERSONAL STATEMENT

Overall aim of the activities

This set of lesson activities have been designed to support applicants to research and plan their personal statement. They are flexible and can be incorporated into your current programmes or adapted to suit different cohorts of students. All activities can be completed independently in short 20-minute sessions or be combined across sets to suit your needs.

The aim is to support students in creating a reference bank of examples and evidence. This research can then become a reference point before starting to draft and finalise their personal statement or to support further conversations with students about their progression options.

These activities could also be adapted to support students in thinking about relevant skills and experiences that might be used to write a CV. Students will need to undertake independent research into the courses or subject areas they are interested in to support these activities.

KEY CONCEPTS

- ▶ Research
- ▶ Skills
- ▶ Experiences
- ▶ Evidence

KEY OBJECTIVES

1. Research course or subject areas to identify specific subject specific or transferable skills to evidence.
2. Feel confident to adapt personal experiences to use as examples in their personal statement.
3. Build a bank of personal evidence to start drafting their own personal statement.
4. Explain how to use the PEEL method as a structure for writing their personal statement.
5. Complete a first draft and understand how to get their personal statement reviewed.

Gatsby Benchmarks

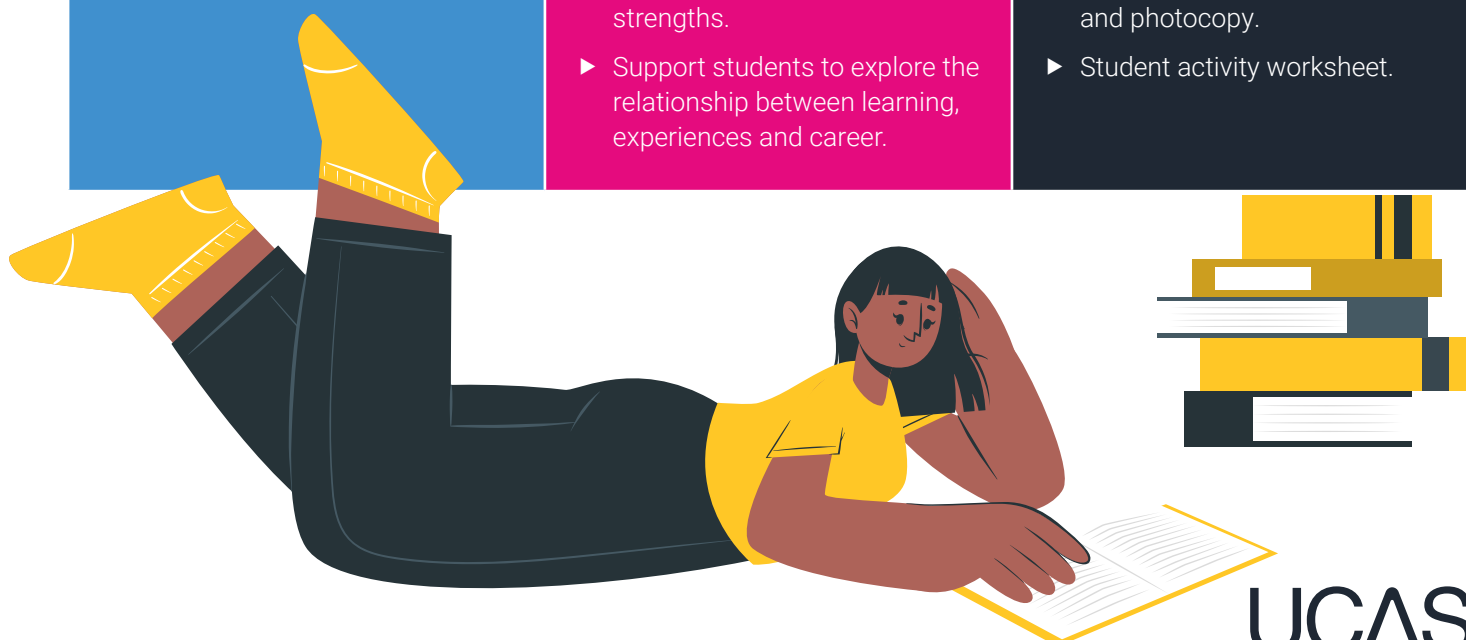
- ▶ Encounters with further and higher education.
- ▶ Personal guidance.

CDI Framework

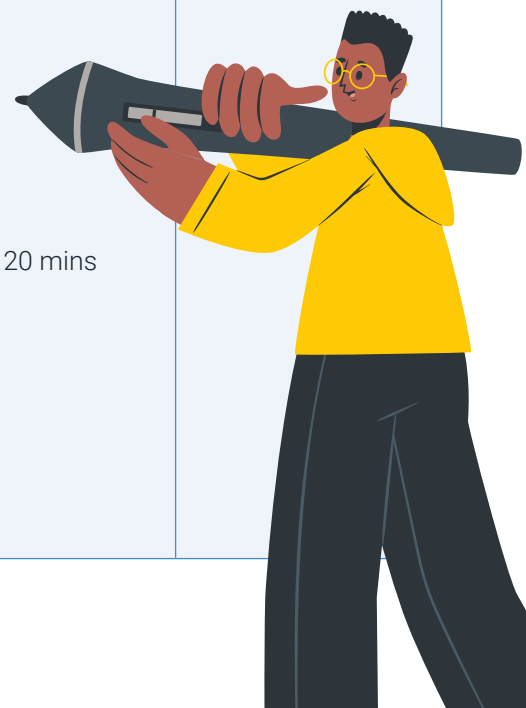
- ▶ Grow throughout life.
- ▶ Support student reflection on their experiences, skills and strengths.
- ▶ Support students to explore the relationship between learning, experiences and career.

Resources

- ▶ Lesson slide decks for the classroom.
- ▶ Lesson plans for you to edit and photocopy.
- ▶ Student activity worksheet.



| Lesson | Learning Outcomes | Activity Summary | Suggested time | Resources |
|----------------------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| Skills Skills Skills | <p>Explain what a skill is.</p> <p>Identify and categorise at least 9 different skills.</p> <p>Reflect on your personal experiences to recognise the skills you have.</p> | <p>Activity 1: What is a skill?</p> <p>Ask students what they think a skill is. Show the dictionary definitions of the word skill. Do they agree with these definitions?</p> <p>In pairs or groups can they write their own definition of what a skill is? Why do they think it's important to think about skills for their personal statement? Explain that it's important to think about skills when planning their personal statement as they will need to use lots of examples.</p> | 20 mins | <p>Bingo grid</p> <p>Bingo example cut outs</p> <p>Activity slides</p> <p>Student activity worksheet</p> <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> |
| | | <p>Activity 2: Discuss the 3 types of skill categories.</p> <p>There are lots of different ways to categorise skills; for simplicity we are exploring it as follows:</p> <p>Transferable skills: general skills that are important for many areas of life including our education or job. They are skills you can develop and be transferred across different areas.</p> <p>Personal skills: abilities we are born with, our natural talents, or things we develop through our experiences.</p> <p>Knowledge based skills: skills that are specific to a subject, areas or topics.</p> <p>Remind students that skills are gained through all experiences (personal, education, training etc).</p> <p>Paired or group discussion: students to think of 3 examples of skills that might fall into each group. Feedback and share answers. Show slide with a range of other examples to support discussion if needed.</p> | 20 mins | |
| | | <p>Activity 3: Skills bingo</p> <p>To help start student reflection on their experiences, skills and strengths use the bingo grid to play 'Skills bingo'. Students choose 9 skills off the list of 24 provided and write them on their blank grid. Cut up the skills provided and pull them out randomly. For each skill read out if the student chose to put it on their grid, they need to mark it off. Keep going until someone has 3 in a row, column, or diagonally.</p> <p>Extension: for each skill they have on their grid, they must provide an example of when they have used this skill before it can be marked off. Keep going until someone has 3 in a row, column or diagonally.</p> | 20 mins | |



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| Admissible evidence | <p>Explain what evidence is.</p> <p>State examples of subject and experiential evidence.</p> <p>Reflect on personal experiences or activities to identify examples of evidence.</p> | <p>Activity 1: Consequences</p> <p>A short little game intended to help students think about subject and experiential evidence. Once students have completed all eight steps of the story, unfold and read out the completed stories. Discussion could then centre on a number of different aspects to suit the cohort, and you could use the following questions to guide students:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do the examples given link to the subject at the start of the story? Do the examples make sense when read out as a whole? Have any examples others have written surprised or interested them? <p>Use the game as an introduction to start a conversation that these examples could be 'evidence'. Refer to the dictionary definition and explain that evidence is what helps build a personal statement.</p> | 20 mins | <p>Activity ppt slides</p> <p>Student activity worksheet</p> <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> <p>Springpod teacher and adviser resources</p> |
| | | <p>Activity 2: Evidence jigsaw</p> <p>Discussion with students on what different examples of evidence they can think of to highlight their personal experiences, skills or knowledge. This can be done as a whole or small group activity. Encourage them to think outside the box.</p> <p>Show the examples of evidence listed and get them to identify if they have any examples (e.g. podcast titles they currently listen to, books they have read, programmes that have interested them, influencers they follow) that might link to a subject or career they have thought about for the future (even if they are not sure what they want to do next). This is about getting them to think broadly about evidence. Try to get them to think of 5 and see if they can identify any not listed.</p> <p>If they can't think of any this is their chance to start putting together a bank of evidence as they start researching course options and might help them build their evidence jigsaw. Can they list 5 they will look into?</p> | 20 mins | |

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| Admissible evidence | <p>Explain what evidence is.</p> <p>State examples of subject and experiential evidence.</p> <p>Reflect on personal experiences or activities to identify examples of evidence.</p> | <p>Activity 3: Browsing history</p> <p>Depending on school/college policy on mobile phone access etc this activity may need to be set for homework or as an independent activity.</p> <p>Ask students to start looking at their digital footprint for examples of evidence. Ask them to look at their online history (or YouTube, social accounts, browser history) for the last two weeks (or any set time frame).</p> <p>Make a note of the things they have viewed, watched, read or listened to that link to a subject or career area they might be thinking about for their future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ How many link directly? ▶ How many link indirectly? ▶ How many are because they've been researching a specific topic in their current studies vs how many are just because they came across it? ▶ Get them to start thinking about the most interesting, most surprising or new things they've learnt from this. <p>If they have none then this is their chance to start building some evidence as they start researching course options and thinking about what might help them build that evidence jigsaw.</p> <p>This is also an opportunity to highlight to students that they can access online subject taster sessions and virtual work experience through UCAS, they just need to register for UCAS to access them.</p> <p>You can find out more about the UCAS collaboration with Springpod and how their Subject Spotlights and Virtual Work Experiences can help students explore their options and access teacher and adviser resources online.</p> | 20 mins | <p>Activity ppt slides</p> <p>Student activity worksheet</p> <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> <p>Springpod teacher and adviser resources</p> |



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| Building the foundations | <p>Identify preparation activities for the personal statement</p> <p>Explain the purpose of the PEEL structure</p> <p>Reflect on the relevancy of their current experiences, skills or evidence.</p> | <p>Activity 1: So what?</p> <p>List as many achievements, personal experiences or skills they think would support their university/college application – in 3 minutes!</p> <p>Then, in pairs, one student goes through their list of experiences, while the other says ‘so what?’ until the first student can explain why it might be useful and relevant to their application. This activity is to surface the idea there must be a reason to include information and not just provide a list of achievements, experiences or skills.</p> | 20 mins | <p>Activity ppt slides</p> <p>Student activity worksheet</p> <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> |
| | | <p>Activity 2: Pick and mix</p> <p>Discussion: ask students what skills and experiences they think admissions tutors / employers are looking for when reading a personal statement (or CV) Hardworking? Committed? Motivated?</p> <p>Then ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Is everyone looking for the same skills or experiences? ▶ How can you find out what skills or experiences are specifically required? ▶ Why would it help to know what each choice wanted? ▶ Reflect on activity 1; how did asking ‘So What’ encourage them to expand or add more detail? ▶ Do you think admissions tutors might ask ‘So What’? <p>Propose the idea it’s helpful to think about the personal statement (or CV) as if it was a personal project – all about them! And how would you start any other project? With research! It’s no different for this.</p> <p>You might have already explored skills, experience and evidence with your students. Ask students to now make a list of all the places they could go to find out more about which specific skills, experiences or evidence would be relevant to the course, subject or career they might be interested in.</p> <p>Share and feedback as a class, using the examples given as a starting point; are there any others they’ve thought of? Get students to choose three that they are going to do in the next 4 weeks.</p> | 20 mins | |

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| Building the foundations | <p>Identify preparation activities for the personal statement</p> <p>Explain the purpose of the PEEL structure</p> <p>Reflect on the relevancy of their current experiences, skills or evidence.</p> | <p>Activity 3: Practising PEEL</p> <p>This activity is to get students practicing the PEEL method which will help them to include examples and evidence in their personal statement and remind them to link it back to the course(s) they are applying to. Get them to practice before you start asking them to draft any statements so they can build confidence in the technique.</p> <p>Ask students to practice the technique by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sharing some paragraphs from example personal statements you might have from previous cohorts. Get them to highlight whenever they can see PEEL is used or could have improved the extracts. NB: remind students of the plagiarism detection process all personal statements go through at UCAS. 2. Alternatively ask the students to work through two examples making using PEEL to structure them. <p>Share through class discussion.</p> | 20 mins | <p>Activity ppt slides</p> <p>Student activity worksheet</p> <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> |



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| Your personal statement blueprint | <p>Identify common skills across all 5 UCAS choices.</p> <p>Map skills to the personal statement questions, ensuring each part of their statement is focused and relevant.</p> <p>Identify the tools that they can use to help them write a first draft highlighting their strengths and experiences.</p> | <p>Activity 1: What are the questions</p> <p>You may have already used the 'Personal statement introductory' slides with your students. Use this as an opportunity to remind students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The 3 personal statement questions ▶ The importance of understanding the requirements of the courses being applied for <p>If you haven't undertaken any of the previous lesson activities, these are designed to prepare students ahead of starting to draft their personal statement.</p> | 20 mins | <p>Personal statement introductory slides</p> <p>Comparison chart worksheet</p> <p>Activity ppt slides</p> <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> <p>UCAS subject personal statement guides</p> <p>UCAS personal statement builder</p> |
| | | <p>Activity 2: Skills mapping</p> <p>Explain that the UCAS personal statement needs to be relevant for all 5 of their choices. Since they can only submit one for all their courses, it's crucial to focus on subject-specific and transferable skills that are most aligned across all of their chosen courses to demonstrate how they meet the requirements for each course and get them to think critically about how to tailor their statements.</p> <p>Using the comparison chart worksheet, encourage students to map out skills, evidence and examples against their 5 choices.</p> <p>The chart has columns for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ UCAS Choice (Course) ▶ Key Transferable Skills (e.g., communication, problem-solving, teamwork) ▶ Subject-Specific Skills (or knowledge) (e.g., research skills, technical knowledge) ▶ Personal Evidence (real-life experiences or achievements) <p>Once students have completed their mapping charts, ask them to highlight the common specific and transferable skills that appear across multiple or all 5 of their courses.</p> <p>These are the skills that will become the foundation of their personal statement as will be relevant to all choices.</p> <p>Encourage students to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which skills appear in all their UCAS choices? • What are the key strengths they want to emphasise in their personal statement? • Do they have examples and evidence for those identified? | 20 mins | |

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| Your personal statement blueprint | <p>Identify common skills across all 5 UCAS choices.</p> <p>Map skills to the personal statement questions, ensuring each part of their statement is focused and relevant.</p> <p>Identify the tools that they can use to help them write a first draft highlighting their strengths and experiences.</p> | <p>Activity 3: Ready, Set, Draft!</p> <p>Discuss how mapping skills and doing research helps ensure their personal statement is cohesive and focused. Refer back to the information and research done in previous lesson activities (Skills, Skills, Skills, Admissible Evidence, and Building the Foundations).</p> <p>Signpost students to log into the UCAS Hub and access the UCAS personal statement builder. This is where they can start their first draft. From this they can preview and then export as a PDF or copy and paste into a Word document to save, using the built-in functionality.</p> <p>There's also a link within the builder to our subject specific guides with lots of extra information and support. Don't forget to check out the rest of our personal statement support on ucas.com.</p> <p>AI and UCAS similarity detection</p> <p>It's important to discuss the appropriate use of AI when drafting their personal statement. This should be used alongside the UCAS guidance on using AI in the personal statement. Use slides 13 and 14 to discuss.</p> <p>Remind students that when they complete their application, they must declare that their personal statement hasn't been copied or provided from another source, including artificial intelligence software.</p> <p>As part of UCAS's responsibility to applicants and universities and colleges, the UCAS Verification Team run checks to detect fraudulent applications and patterns of similarity in personal statements. Read our guide to fraud and verification and similarity.</p> <p>If UCAS software detects elements of a personal statement that are similar to others, the universities or colleges it is intended for may be notified.</p> | 20 mins | <p>Personal statement introductory slides</p> <p>Comparison chart worksheet</p> <p>Activity ppt slides</p> <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> <p>UCAS subject personal statement guides</p> <p>UCAS personal statement builder</p> |



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| Reviewing your personal statement | Identify spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors within their personal statement. | <p>Activity 1: Why review?</p> <p>This lesson is designed to be used as a follow on of lessons 1 – 4. Students should have a completed draft of their personal statement, or near completion of a draft, before the delivery of this lesson.</p> <p>Use this as an opportunity to discuss with students the importance of reviewing a draft before submission. Slide 3 acts as a checklist for students to complete before moving on to any further activities.</p> <p>If students are using a paper copy of their personal statement, encourage them to make notes of relevant amendments as they go along. For electronic versions, it is good to encourage students to use the review tools on Microsoft Word to monitor changes and make notes of changes to complete after the lesson.</p> | 20 mins | Personal statement review slides |
| | Use a range of proofreading skills to support in making improvements to their personal statement. | <p>Activity 2: Effective proofreading</p> <p>Discuss the practical tips for proofreading from slide 4. Give students time to proofread their work, focusing on one type of error at a time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Spelling ► Punctuation and capital letters ► Sentence structures <p>Remind student of the appropriate use of AI – slides 5 and 6.</p> | 20 mins | <p>You can find all the resources in our personal statement toolkit</p> <p>UCAS AI resources</p> <p>Students should have a copy of their personal statement available</p> |
| | Respond to feedback to support in making improvements to their personal statement. | <p>Activity 3: Read and review</p> <p>Students should now feel confident to share their draft with someone to review. Slide 7 offers some prompts to use to help others assess the personal statement draft.</p> <p>Remind students when sharing their personal statement about similarity detection. Peer review can be a useful activity but should be done with consideration of this.</p> <p>The student worksheet can also be used to support in writing some WWW/EBI comments that students can use to improve their draft prior to submission.</p> | 20 mins | |