



How to write a competitive personal statement in 5 steps

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This is City.

What is the personal statement?

- As part of the application form you will be required to write a **personal statement**
- The personal statement is used by universities to **check your interest** in the course you're applying for, and to find out more about the **experiences** you have had at sixth form and in other activities
- Whilst you will likely not start your UCAS form until the summer or September, you can start your personal statement at any point
- Ask yourself the question “*So: why do you want to study this subject, and what makes you the right person for the course?*”



Example personal statement used in Schools Liaison events.
Do not plagiarise this personal statement.

Geography Personal Statement

We share a glorious geographical heritage. Our world, our greatest resource, is in a constant state of transition driven by the raw power of its intrinsic physical and social mechanisms. For me, these processes and the truly wonderful planet which they have created, have sparked my favored passion for everything geographical.

I see geography as much more than an academic subject, but an intricate component to life and as such, the classroom, has never been enough to fully satisfy my thirst for knowledge. Instead, it encourages me to further pursue my interests elsewhere, in magazines such as: Geographical: The National Geographic and The Geographical Journal as well as being actively involved in promoting environmental awareness in my school. I have given presentations on the significance and fragility of local and global ecosystems and produced reports which focused on the benefits of ecotourism in France and Malaysia. These were wonderful opportunities to share the importance and beauty of our natural world with my peers and I hope to continue this work in the future.

I am also a committed member of the Geographical Association at Queen's University and although it gives geography students an opportunity to explore the A level syllabus in greater depth, I believe it is more than a mere study aid, it is an opportunity to exchange and challenge one another's ideas concerning topics covered in class, thus forming a more comprehensive understanding of various global issues. I particularly enjoyed the lecture on the challenges facing remote rural areas, referencing the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, as not only did it show me that these areas are far from the backward communities that I once thought, but as it also bore a specific resonance with me, as living in a rural community I am acutely aware of the problems they face particularly as a result of intensive development.

Furthermore, I recently ~~gained~~ gained work experience in the Research labs of the School of Geography, Archaeology and Paleogeology, at Queen's University. This proved to be an invaluable experience during which I saw the practical application of geographical methods and knowledge. I was shown how to optically and analytically determine the mineral composition of rock and soil samples as well as testing building materials with weathering machines, in order to examine their suitability in construction industry. I also saw how geography contributes to other areas of research such as archaeology and forensics.

Despite these wonderful opportunities, I believe that there is no substitute for experiencing geography first hand, and this has sparked my love for travel. No matter where I am, I cannot help but be astonished by the variation between the socio-economic and cultural constructs of different populations as well as the contrasting physical environments in which these populations exist. A recent trip to Rome has enhanced my personal awareness and understanding of the many social processes and theories explored in the classroom, such as the ideas behind nationalism and ethnic identity. I particularly enjoy the physical aspect of geography and the majesty of our natural world and so have decided to visit Iceland this March where I can experience beautiful glacial formations, raging waterfalls, rugged mountain faces and captivating geological activity.

My interests and responsibilities also extend beyond academia. With the commitments of my part time job and duties as a prefect I am used to working within a strict timetable and believe that this time management skill will be easily transferred into university life. I also enjoy badminton, modern literature and ancient history and find these to be great ways to escape the pressures school and work.

So with my zealous enthusiasm and fascination with our human and physical environments I believe that I will both enjoy and greatly contribute to the development of an undeniably relevant and dynamic field.

Step 1: Technical requirements

- You write **one** personal statement which is sent to all five of your choices
 - So don't mention a specific university you want to apply to
 - If you're applying for courses with different (but similar) titles talk about the subject area and not the title
 - Consider if the courses you are applying for are just too different to write the same statement for
 - If you do still plan to apply for more than one course, you may need to email some university choices to see if they will accept an emailed personal statement in place of another one
- There are no **bold**, *italics* or any either kind of **FORMATTING**
- The maximum you can write is **4000 characters including spaces** or 47 lines (on UCAS)



Step 2: Write a plan

- Your personal statement should focus on skills and experiences needed for the degree, and examples of where you have demonstrated these
- Make a list of skills needed for the degree you've chosen
 - This could be **specific course related skills** like experience working with people, practical hands on experience, presentation skills, debating etc
 - It could also be more **general skills** like leadership, teamwork, communication



Research the skills/experience needed

- If you need some ideas of what skills/experiences might be needed, do some research
- The UCAS website is a great resource for finding out about different subject areas and the types of skills needed to study the subject - www.ucas.com/explore/subjects
- University websites are also a really helpful place to look, as they often say on the course page what kind of skills they are looking for

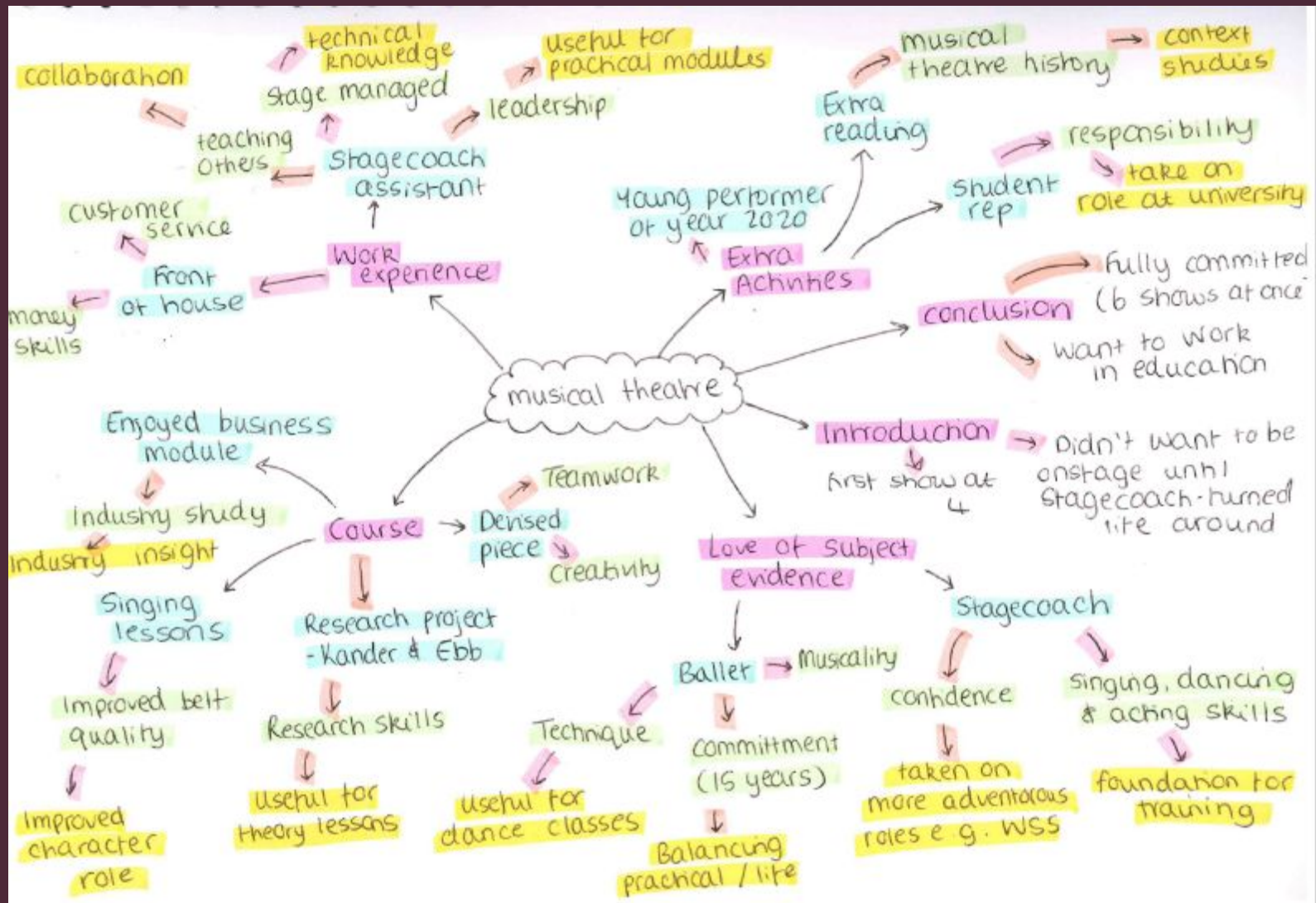
Modules are taught through a combination of:

- lectures and seminars
- project work
- reporting assignments at outside bodies (such as courts, council meetings, press conferences, public meetings)
- timed assignments
- lectures by visiting speakers from various journalistic, political and campaigning backgrounds
- production of magazines/broadcast bulletins/websites
- independent study/research/library work
- work attachments (recorded and evaluated)
- freelance work
- production of portfolios of work
- presentations to seminars
- examinations and assignments under controlled conditions.

Examples you could give where you have demonstrated some of the above:

- Project work
- Writing in different formats
- Working on content such as video, websites
- Giving presentations

Put your thoughts into some kind of plan



Step 3: Start writing

- Your personal statement will be about an A4 page
- You need to include the following sections:
 - Introduction
 - Academic content
 - Love of subject evidence
 - Additional experience/skills
 - Hobbies and interests
 - Conclusion
- You don't need to give the same weighting to each section, because some are more important to the university than others

**65 – 70% introduction,
academic content and
love of subject
evidence**

Additional experience and
skills

Hobbies and interests

Conclusion

Introduction

- This needs to be snappy
- It is hard to find a strong opening sentence, but you should **avoid cliché sayings** such as 'From an early age', 'From a young age' and 'I have always wanted to be a ...'
- You may also want to avoid humour
- You should also **avoid using quotes** unless it really adds to the content

Answer these questions

- Why do you find this subject exciting/interesting or why is this area of work so important?
- When did you become interested in this subject?
- How will this degree help you progress in this area?



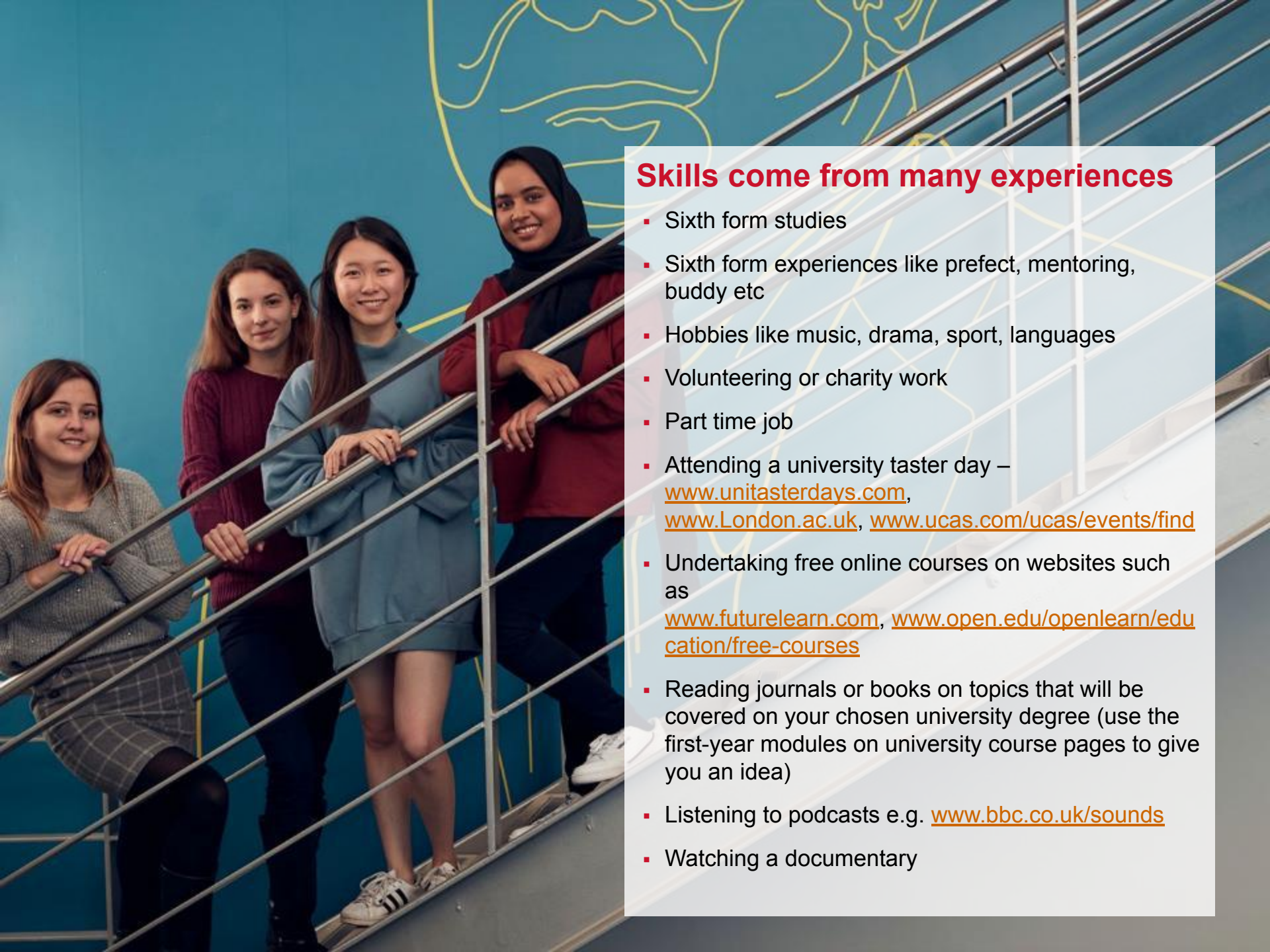
Academic Content: Love of subject evidence

- Everyone will mention sixth form and their extra activities. You are looking to **stand out**
- You need to mention things you have done **beyond the sixth form syllabus** which show how much you love/have engaged with the subject
- Do not just explain, **reflect**

Answer these questions

- What did the activity cover?
- What did you gain from it?
- How has it prepared you for the course you're applying for?





Skills come from many experiences

- Sixth form studies
- Sixth form experiences like prefect, mentoring, buddy etc
- Hobbies like music, drama, sport, languages
- Volunteering or charity work
- Part time job
- Attending a university taster day – www.unitasterdays.com, www.London.ac.uk, www.ucas.com/ucas/events/find
- Undertaking free online courses on websites such as www.futurelearn.com, www.open.edu/openlearn/education/free-courses
- Reading journals or books on topics that will be covered on your chosen university degree (use the first-year modules on university course pages to give you an idea)
- Listening to podcasts e.g. www.bbc.co.uk/sounds
- Watching a documentary

Academic Content: Your studies

- What **skills** and **experience** relevant to your chosen university degree have you gained?
- Talk about your favourite parts of your current course(s) content / the sections that link most to your degree
- If you study multiple subjects, how do the skills in one course support another?
- How have you then been inspired to go **beyond the syllabus**?

Answer these questions

- What have you learnt on your course that will help you on this degree?
- What skills have you gained that you could use on the degree e.g. teamwork, communication, leadership?
- Evidence of independent research or group work, or a lecture that particularly sparked your interest



Additional experience and skills

- This is likely to mostly be work experience – though many courses do not ask for specific work experience. If they specifically ask for it you should contact them to check their opinion on this in light of Covid-19. If you do not have work experience, your academic content section can be larger
- For students applying for a vocational course e.g. Nursing, this should be your second and biggest paragraph (it may crossover with academic content)
- For other courses it doesn't need to be too long, but all work experience is valuable even if it is not related to the course you are applying for
- Do not list everything you did – focus on what was gained from the experience and how this is useful for the course you're applying for

Answer these questions

- What did you do (this should be brief)
- What understanding/skills did you gain from your work experience?
- How has it prepared you for degree study?



Hobbies and interests

- Good things to mention here are volunteering, Student Rep, guides/scouts, Duke of Edinburgh, languages you speak, sport, dance, music etc but could also even include what you like to read
- Try not to list every experience, just choose the best ones and mention the skills gained from these
- If you have too many activities to cover here, ask your sixth form team to mention some in your reference instead

Answer these questions

- What did you do (this should be brief, and only highlight the best things that you did). Make it skills focused
- What understanding/skills did you gain?
- How has it prepared you for degree study?



Conclusion

- Must have a conclusion, even if it is just one concluding sentence
- Could mention future career plans, what looking forward to about university/further study in this area
- Make sure to mention the degree/area of work somewhere in the conclusion so it is not generic
- Don't end with 'I look forward to meeting you' or 'Thank you, I hope you offer me a place' – don't address the university directly
- Should still be an exciting ending to match the introduction



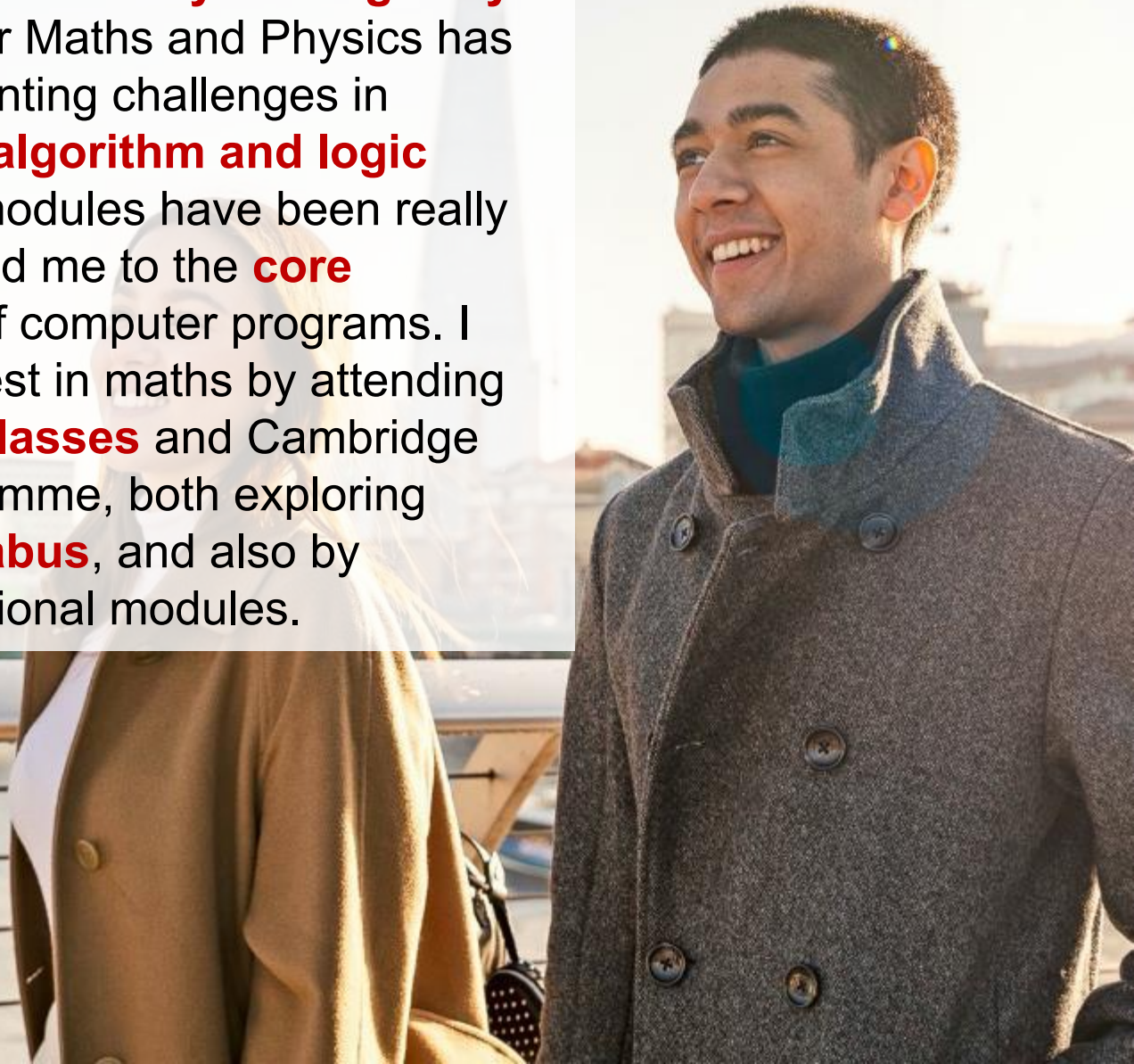
Step 4: Focus your content

- Everything you write **must relate to the course you are applying for.**
- The **ABC method** will help you to go over what you have written and make sure it relates to the degree.
- **A – Activity** (e.g. Work Experience, something they have learnt on their course)
- **B – Benefit** (what skills they gained e.g. communication, leadership, teamwork)
- **C – Course** (how does it relate to the course they are applying for)
- Everything you write should be expanded to include B and should always be able to answer C. If it doesn't then it's not relevant.



An example

Tackling problems methodically and **logically** in A-level Maths, Further Maths and Physics has **prepared me** for confronting challenges in computer science. The **algorithm and logic topics** in the decision modules have been really enjoyable and introduced me to the **core structural principles** of computer programs. I supplemented my interest in maths by attending **lunchtime extension classes** and Cambridge University's HE+ programme, both exploring topics **outside the syllabus**, and also by **self-studying** two additional modules.



Step 5: Re-draft

- Share your personal statement with other people who can help you look objectively at what you have written
- This is likely to be sixth form staff, but may also be family and friends
- Don't share the same draft with multiple people at the same time as it can result in conflicting feedback
- You don't have to implement all feedback, but remember that sixth form staff have read many statements in the past and will be offering advice based on experience



Cutting down your character count if you're over 4000

- Be objective – have you taken too many sentences to say the same thing you could have said in one?
- Try not to be too descriptive e.g. spending several sentences explaining the daily duties of your part time job
- Use the ABC method to make sure everything you say is meeting what the university is looking for. If you're struggling with the C part, you may need to re-write or delete something altogether



Final checks

- Make sure it's within the character count
- Check your spelling and grammar
- Make sure you're not using elaborate language that doesn't make sense
- Don't mention anything you wouldn't be happy to discuss at interview
- Make sure you have paragraphs even if they don't have 'white line spaces' in between
- Delete the title 'personal statement', your name at the end or any subtitles you used while writing



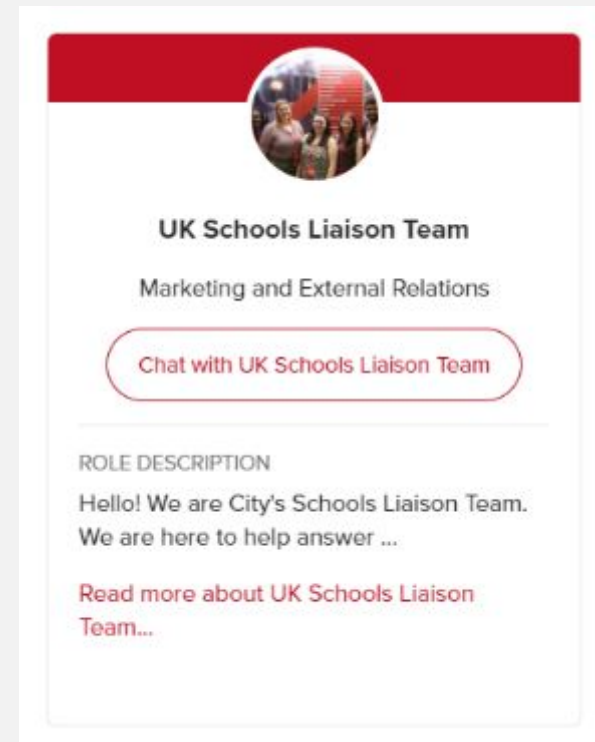
More support with your application

- Our **goingtouni website** has a series of “why study” videos, taster videos and a **personal statement module** to support you with every step of your personal statement, including personal statements analysed by subject area
www.city.ac.uk/study/visit-us/city-at-higher-education-exhibitions
- We hold regular **online events** where you can book to find out more about the application process and ask any questions you have
www.city.ac.uk/study/visit-us/online-events



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- Attend one of our open days
www.city.ac.uk/study/visit-us/undergraduate-open-days
- Register for one of our taster days
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- Tour our campus through our 360 virtual tour
www.city.ac.uk/study/visit-us/campus-tours
- Chat to current City students about their experience
www.city.ac.uk/study/ask-a-student
- Order a prospectus for more information about City's courses
www.city.ac.uk/study/prospectus



If you have a question our schools liaison team can help with, visit www.city.ac.uk/ask-a-student
Click the staff tab and find the UK Schools Liaison team profile



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