

Personal Statement Guidance

Personal statements

As a Cambridge applicant, your personal statement will be read in full. We are aware that, in most cases, your personal statement will be directed to more than one university. At Cambridge, we see the personal statement as your chance to give us a sense of yourself as a potential undergraduate student and academic. An applicant's personal statement is not given a formal mark, nor do we go through it with a red pen. Personal statements are one part of an admissions process which is holistic and which aims to identify candidates with the greatest academic potential, irrespective of background.

In the personal statement, Cambridge Admissions Tutors and Directors of Studies are interested predominantly in hearing about your academic exploration beyond your school curriculum (sometimes called 'super-curricular' exploration), and, in particular, what you think about, find interesting about, and have learnt from the material with which you have been engaging. Telling us about this will help you to explain your academic reasons for wanting to study the subject; demonstrate your enthusiasm for and commitment to your chosen course; express any particular interests within the field.

About your super-curricular engagement

It is important to emphasise that such academic exploration, as with all parts of the Cambridge admissions process, is contextualised. We are not going to be impressed so much by what it is that you have been engaging with – be it journal articles or YouTube videos, books or podcasts – as the fact that you are engaging academically in your own time, and crucially that you have thoughts you wish to share about your engagement. The best personal statements convey a pattern and critical logic to their authors' academic engagement: we encourage you, as you explore your academic interests, to think about connections between those interests which might at first seem disparate.

Extra-curricular engagement and your post-16 studies

'Extra-curricular' engagement refers to non-academic activities which are not related to your chosen course. Participating in extra-curricular activities which are of no relevance to the course will not increase your chances of receiving a Cambridge offer, and writing about them at any length may reduce the amount of space you have at your disposal to write about your academic interests and engagement.

We recommend keeping description of and reflection on what you have learnt within the school curriculum to a minimum. Your interests beyond the curriculum will naturally often spring from what you have been learning on it, and personal statements will often mention an applicant's school-based learning insofar that it was a springboard for further thought and exploration in their own time. But Admissions Tutors and Directors of Studies at Cambridge are not looking for sustained reflection on classroom learning in the personal statement.

Which section(s) in the UCAS form should I use?

Whilst we do not recommend any particular split to the three sections of the personal statement, we strongly encourage applicants to pay attention to this guidance, and to give themselves enough space to talk in some detail about super-curricular engagement which is of relevance to their chosen course. We do not have any preference for which section this detailed super-curricular information comes in.

Additional personal statement

At Cambridge, we provide you with the option to submit an additional personal statement as part of your application. Applicants typically use this to highlight particular features of the Cambridge course that attracted them; to write in more detail about their interest in a specific Cambridge course if it is unique or differs from their other university choices; and to tell us about any further academic exploration they have been doing since submitting their UCAS application. Where an applicant is applying for a unique Cambridge course not offered elsewhere, or where their choice of Cambridge course differs from all their other UCAS choices, we are very used to reading statements directed towards other universities, and hearing about the specific Cambridge course in the additional statement.

This additional personal statement is optional, applicants will not be disadvantaged if they have nothing to add, and there is no need to repeat information they provided in their UCAS personal statement as we will have already received a copy of this. However, if you feel that the new structure of the personal statement has slightly constrained the space you have to talk about the super-curricular engagement that Cambridge is particularly interested in, you may wish to treat the additional personal statement as an opportunity to tell us about any such engagement which you were not able to include in the UCAS statement.