
Understanding the University Application Cycle

Session 2: Writing a Personal Statement

Reading 2: Don'ts when writing a personal statement

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as copying someone else's work or taking someone else's ideas and claiming them as your own. This is taken very seriously in the professional world and students will be penalised if they are found plagiarising. UCAS has a method of identifying whether personal statements are too similar. It is wise to advise your students to write their statements independently in order to avoid overlap with their peers. Students should credit anything that is not original, for example to authors of ideas or information that they use in their personal statements.

Cliché and humour

While your students may want to include humour or clichés as a marker of a unique personal statement, these can be risky. Often the admission tutor may think that a student is not taking the application seriously or has run out of content to include. It can also offend whoever is reading the statement. Advise your students to avoid including humour. As well as this, using clichéd statements such as 'since I was young' can become repetitive for the admission tutors and suggests a lack of originality. Your students should be concise when explaining why they decided on the course they are applying for and draw on experiences when relevant.

Sweeping statements

Some students will want to demonstrate that they know about a subject by making a sweeping statement about the course. For example, a student applying for nursing may express that 'nursing is a demanding job'. These statements over-generalise and simplify a complex subject/sector. This does not demonstrate knowledge. The tutors reading the statements are experts and will perhaps feel that the student lacks knowledge, experience and understanding of the subject if they make bold sweeping statements. Instead, advise your students to focus on the qualities they have that will help them in their chosen course, rather than making definitive statements that merely repeat what is already known about the course.