UCAS Personal Statements – Building Paragraphs

A personal statement usually has between three and five paragraphs. Each paragraph has a main idea that is supported by specific details.

> The personal statement is the best way for students to prove that they are well-rounded individuals by discussing any improvement with clubs, societies, part-time employment, volunteering etc.
> University of Leicester

If your main idea is that you have been inspired to apply for the course by talks and lectures you have listened to, your claim (that you have been inspired) will be backed by the names of the speakers and their talks, and at least one example of an inspiring point that was made in each talk. Simply stating names, or name dropping, proves nothing, so always supply the specific details.

Contents

Example Paragraphs

Opening Paragraphs

I actually wanted to become a doctor. That was until all the medical books I seemed to read were of psychosomatic patients, then of psychological disorders. Whilst my interest in medicine faded, my interest in Psychology grew exponentially. The more I read, the more I realised that elements of Psychology can be found in all aspects of life.

The ongoing conflict between law and natural justice is, for me, the most fascinating aspect of the modern civil state. Justice can sit awkwardly with our sense of fair play, an idea explored by Nick Freeman in The Art of The Loophole. He argues that the consequences of acquitting potential offenders are justified by the benefits of exposing fundamental flaws in legal procedure. I am not entirely convinced but I appreciate his argument. It is this nuanced, mischievously shrewd approach to rhetoric, advocacy and the delivery of justice that compels me to read law at university.

Paragraphs About Reading

I focused on Early Modern History for A-Level as I had little awareness of critical periods like the Wars of the Roses and key individuals like Martin Luther. Exploring the intersecting themes between these topics is especially compelling. Just looking at King's College Chapel, half-smothered in Henry VII's usurping crests and symbols, despite being built by Henry VI, shows how relevant this period still is. My reading began with The White/Red Queen by Gregory, an introduction to the period. Eager for academic texts, Johnson's 'The Shadow King: The Life and Death of Henry VI' gave me a deep look at the personality and formation of characters who are dismissed by public history. I also read 'The Wars of the Roses' by Stewart, which struck me with his passion for the period, especially around invisible characters like John Morton.

'Fermat's Last Theorem' by Simon Singh has been one of my favourite books. Not only did it demonstrate to me the power of a mathematician's single-minded effort, but it also brought to my attention the links between seemingly different areas of Mathematics. Andrew Wiles met Fermat's challenge by proving the Taniyama-Shimura Conjecture, the link between elliptic equations and modular forms. Also, fascinated by Singh's narration of Galois' role in proving the theorem, I went on to teach myself group theory using the undergraduate text 'Abstract Algebra' by Dan Saracino. Although its purpose was mysterious to me at first, I soon realized its connections to Number Theory. By establishing a one-to-one correspondence between elements in two right cosets of a subgroup, I proved Lagrange's theorem which, surprisingly, leads to Fermat's Little Theorem, while by proving a theorem about the direct product of cyclic groups, I derived Chinese Remainder Theorem. Such links allow problems in one area to be transformed and solved by techniques from another,

hence they deepen my understanding of mathematics as a whole and motivate me to learn about new branches of mathematics that I am yet to encounter.

Paragraphs About Competitions

Over the summer of 2019 I was selected for a STAAR (Summertime Advanced Aerospace Residency) STEM programme run by RAF Cosford and Northrup Grumman. Through this program, I gained an insight into how the needs of an air mission shape the way that engineers and scientists design aerospace systems. I had the opportunity to compare the aerodynamic performance of double wedge and bi-convex aerofoils and analyse how they generate lift efficiently during hypersonic flight. After the programme, I felt inspired to delve deeper and studied a paper on giga-voxel computational morphogenesis for structural design, in which topology optimisation using a supercomputer produced an unrestricted and lighter wing design, with a resolution two times the magnitude previously obtained. At the end of the residency, we had the opportunity to plan our own mission, with support from RAF Cosford engineers, and to design appropriate advanced aerospace systems solutions. We presented our project to RAF dignitaries and STAAR partners and I received a Crest Award for my efforts.

Last year I earned a scholarship to attend the John Locke Institute's summer school via its Social Sciences essay competition. The thought-provoking title, 'What, if anything, gives the government the right to force you to pay tax?' made me recognise how crucial John Locke's social contract is and how it should enable the people and the state to form a trusting relationship. But it must be reimagined for the twenty-first century: Locke's views on the role of the state would, by modern standards, be so limited that governments would be unable to deal with global problems, like pandemics, financial crises or climate change. This course led me to enter The New College of Humanities essay competition, where my answer to 'Is democracy experiencing a setback worldwide?' received a commendation. Unfortunately, my conclusion was that democracy is failing globally due to a lack of education in two senses; firstly, the younger generation is becoming less aware of the horrific histories of authoritarian states, and secondly, people are becoming less inclined to participate politically or at least in a meaningful way.

Paragraphs About Further Learning

More recently, I have been exploring the links between numerical analysis and calculus, using methods such as Runge-Kutta to approximate solution curves for differential equations that are otherwise unsolvable. In order to derive 2nd order RK methods, which have two stages of gradient calculations, I wrote the second stage as its 2D Taylor series, combined this with the first stage, compared the resulted expression with the Taylor expansion of the solution value, and found the conditions required to achieve the desired accuracy. As higher order RK methods result in smaller global errors, I applied RK4 and RK6 in a simulation of the gravitational interactions and orbits of the Sun-Earth system. The

versatility of mathematics, demonstrated by such applications, is another aspect that I find truly intriguing.

To build my knowledge, I completed a MOOC on the Neurobiology of Everyday Life, covering the role of the brain in homeostasis, proprioception, and abstract functions such as cognition. After this I took part in a Neuroscience research programme with University of Oxford. During the programme, my group conducted an experiment to discover if the brain can distinguish between white noise and music. We collected the fMRI results from a real test subject and used t-tests to determine if the data was statistically significant. The signals recorded from the MRI translated to voxels, which are the 3D pixels that form the image from the MRI scan. The frequency of the various signals, produced by the movement of H+ ions in the brain, determines if the level of brain activity is significant compared to the baseline. The results showed that there was significant brain activity in the auditory cortex when music was played as opposed to white noise. Due to my interest in neurological diseases, I also read a Nature article on the re-engineering of psychedelics to form analogues that could treat depression, anxiety, and addiction. During the programme, I asked about the feasibility of this and was shocked to find that psychedelics are extremely effective in treatment especially when paired with CBT.

Paragraphs About Projects and EPQs

My love for the idea of space travel led me to create a computer model of the gravitational interactions of the Earth and Moon, using numerical methods to calculate forces, accelerations, velocities and positions. I successfully applied the Euler-Cromer method but encountered an issue with accuracy. I, therefore, plan to include the Sun, as its gravitational influence on the Moon is 4x that of the Earth. I was fascinated to learn how similar models can solve so many Engineering and Physics problems. For example, non-linear vibration equations such as Van Der Pol and Duffing oscillations for springs and dampening. Having read about the uses of metamaterials in aerospace Engineering,

Being asked to contribute to Number 10's report from The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities allowed me to see domestic and international politics through a policy-driven lens. Building on this experience in policy proposal, for my EPQ, I created a White Paper examining the regional inequalities in the UK, making suggestions for how local councils can be placed at the centre of the levelling up agenda. This would start to tackle the unequal distribution of funds in poorer areas and is just one example of how I put my passion, learning and expertise into action. As Chekov said, 'knowledge is of no use unless you put it into practice'.

Paragraphs About Work Experience

My thirst is not slaked by the classroom; I give weekly tours around Stowe House, the incredible 18th-century home of the extravagant 3rd Duke of Buckingham. For me Stowe is

a view into the class system, which witnessed the rise and fall of a powerful family. Giving tours illustrated the difficulties of accessibly explaining history, illustrating Kipling's point that "If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten". The relationship between public and intellectual history fascinates me, from Shakespeare to Wertenbaker and Mantel, it is incredible how literature affects waves of historical thinking and continues to re-direct revisionists' works. With this in mind, I created my own narratives: an animated film about the Battle of Bosworth and a film about the experience of a soldier in the West Indies Battalion in the wake of BLM. Furthering a Black History theme, I chose the historiography of the American Civil War for my coursework, given its resonance with current affairs. I was especially gripped by Randall's argument in The Blundering Generation, which for me presented parallels between Brexit and the Civil War with his argument that the war was due to a lack of compromise between extremists leading to a polarisation of moderates. This is why history is so engaging: its trends affect our lives every day and lays the groundwork for the future. Only through history can we see souls.

In July I worked with the Alpine F1 team in vehicle performance, gaining insights into how cars are designed for varied environments. For circuits with more braking zones, brake discs with more holes help to prevent overheating, oxidation and failure. However, the disc loses rigidity, decreasing optimum performance and this provides another example of an optimization problem in engineering. I compared on-track distortion of the car's T-tray to Alpine's simulation data and measured downward flex via sensor data of the aerodynamic load above. The aim was to improve the accuracy of the simulator and use this to inform car setup. My time at Alpine confirmed my aspiration to strive for constant improvements in technology beneficial and accessible to the population. To apply myself further, I entered the F1 in Schools competition as elected team manager and chief designer. We developed two 3D printed front wings, one which took longer to manufacture but was smoother and generated less air friction, and another that was lighter but with a higher frictional coefficient. We concluded that, with the high impulse of the car's propulsion, the former was better.

Paragraphs About Personal Experiences

I am a proactive and passionate student; I have worked with the Dubai based AMSAF Investment LLC. I have interned at Andersen Global to explore how people find alternatives to navigate complex tax law legally. I have also been fortunate to visit many developing countries and experience their political systems first-hand. During my backpacking trips to countries such as Thailand, India, Tanzania, Mozambique and Kenya, I volunteered in multiple orphanages and schools. I was left saddened by the lack of funding and horrific conditions children face daily. Their political systems were often crumbling under the weight of severe corruption, economic inequality and social problems.

My membership of Chatham House, the Royal Institute for International Affairs, has allowed me to explore the problems with different democratic systems worldwide. For example, we

see the systemic nature of corruption both in unstable 'democracies' in the Middle East and Northern Africa, and in 'stable' democracies in countries such as the USA. At Chatham house, I attended an event with Nancy Pelosi. I questioned her on the prospect of recovery for American democracy post insurrection. Her fascinating response was that this was not a failure of American democracy, but rather an attack on it. However, I felt that she failed to address the prima causa - namely that American democracy, based on consensus politics and laid out in an entrenched constitution, is unable to adapt to the changing social backdrop of a highly divided American society. Its democracy is being attacked because it is failing.

Paragraphs About Academic Extra-curricular

My interest in politics extends far beyond lesson time: I am a keen member of various school societies, including the Religion and Philosophy Society. I combined my interest in politics and religious studies in a presentation on the impact of religion on international relations. In this presentation, I explored the hold that religion has on global politics, from elections in the US to the international sanctions that China has received because of their treatment of Uighur Muslims and how the relationship between religion and international relations was forever changed by 9/11.

Outside of the classroom, debating is my passion and it has earned me several years' experience of the MUN and ESU's Schools' Mace. Advocacy presents a thrilling intellectual challenge as well as offering exposure to a myriad of fascinating topics. A recent motion on elected judges led me to The Law Machine, and I have found Marcel Berlins to be a perceptive and articulate guide through the delicacies of judicial appointments and other corners of the UK's legal system.

Paragraphs About Other Extra-curricular

I am a keen cricketer, representing the Buckinghamshire Cricket Academy, and I am also a runner and a single figure handicapped golfer. I currently serve as a school and a House prefect, and an NCO in CCF, with the rank of Corporal. I have gained valuable teamworking experience and skills through these experiences, and also by completing my Gold DofE Award.

Achieving a Distinction in my Grade 7 LAMDA exam has given me the confidence to articulate my arguments clearly and effectively. Furthermore, being selected for the England Hockey Performance Centre and leading my county team to becoming National Champions has taught me the importance of teamwork and developed my leadership skills as captain of my school 1st XI for hockey. The opportunity to learn more about politics internationally, as well as the social sciences behind it, is a hugely exciting prospect and one I cannot wait to begin.

Closing Paragraphs

The majority of candidates end their personal statements with an extracurricular paragraph but, as an alternative, this can be omitted, and a conclusion paragraph works equally well.

Through my studies I have acquired the transferable skills vital for tackling the rigours of a law degree; Maths and Further Maths have developed a keen eye for accuracy, Chemistry has stimulated my analytical approach to complex issues and English has refined my essay-writing. As an Academic Scholar and Prefect, I often help younger students with difficult areas in their studies. I believe that the ability to deconstruct and logically explain complex concepts is a skill that will be a valuable asset for studying law at university.

At school I am a Senior Pastoral Prefect and have had the opportunity to empathise with hundreds of individual pupils first-hand, learning which questions to ask to get a better idea of where the student is mentally and help them to come up with a fitting solution. In short, this confirmed to me that I would love to use the knowledge I will gain through Psychology to work with others and potentially be able to aid them, and I am eager to start this new journey.