

THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Advising the Advisers 2018

The importance of the Personal Statement

Dr Sarah Mak

Admissions Specialist



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Task 1 – How do these numbers relate to personal statements/UCAS applications?

Discuss with the person next to you

5

148

4000

75

1779

47

700,000

20,067



5

Maximum number of course choices

- Same personal statement for all five choices
- Personal statement needs to reflect each course
- For combined courses the personal statement should address each subject
- Avoid expressing preference for one university

- One course either at Oxford or Cambridge
- Medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine: 4 choices and 1 other



47/4000

Personal statement can be no longer than 47 lines / 4000 characters

- Full use of space, but with correct punctuation
- Avoid repetition of information contained in the UCAS form
- Clear, logical structure
- Good command of English
- Error free
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations or non-standard English



75

**Recommend that a minimum of 75% is
academically focused**

- LSE looks for applicants who engage academically with the subject they are applying for



20,067

Number of applications LSE received

- Highest application : places ratio in UK
- Volume and quality of applications
- No interviews
- Personal statement very important



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Over 700,000

Number of applications through UCAS this year

- Personal statement must be original and written by the student (UCAS similarity detection)



1779

Number of applicants who began their personal statement with: 'From a young age I have (always) been...'

148

Number of applicants who used a Nelson Mandela quote in their personal statement.



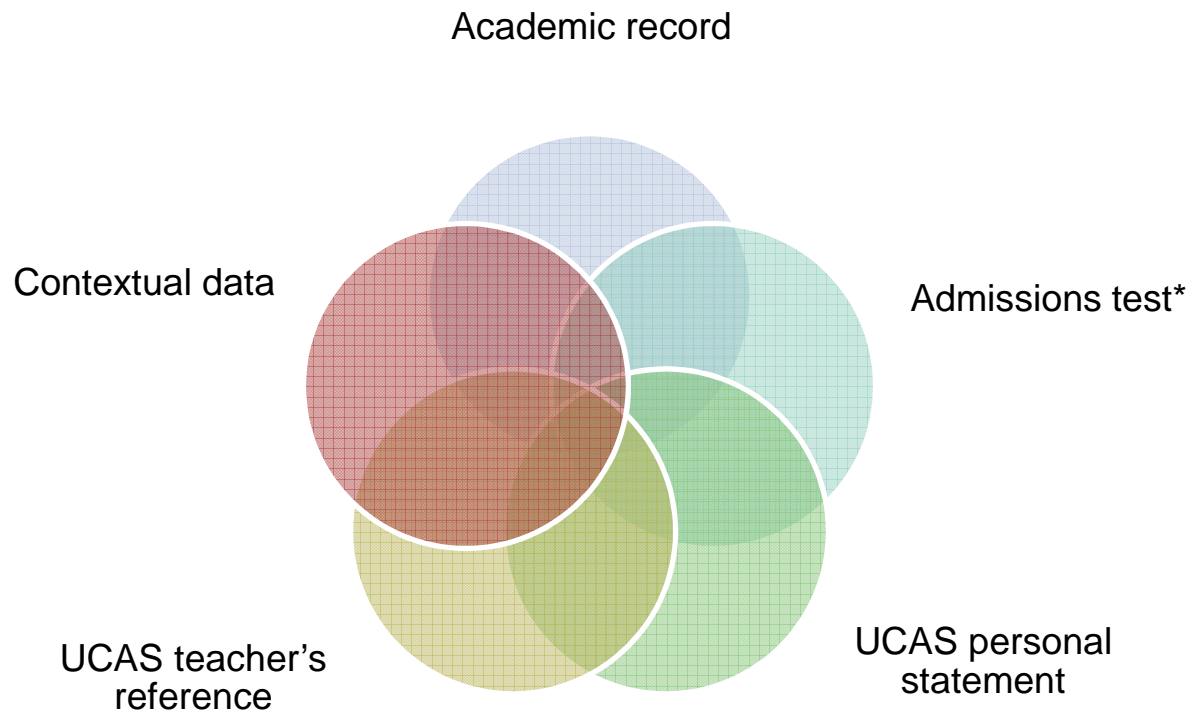
"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"



Use of the Personal Statement



Personal statements in context



Value and Use of the Personal Statement

Value

- Allows students to discover if they truly love the subject
- Show motivation and commitment
- Make a good first impression
- Allows students to sell themselves

LSE use

- A key part of our holistic assessment process
- Provides an insight into candidate's motivation and enthusiasm
- Can be used to reject applicants



What makes an effective personal statement?



What makes an effective personal statement?

Evidence of...

1. Enthusiasm and motivation for study of the subject
2. Understanding and/or experience of the subject
3. Academic engagement with the subject (80%)
4. Relevant knowledge and skills for the subject
5. Originality and independence of thought.



Structure and Style

80%
Academic
including
super-curricular

20%
extra-curricular

- Why do they want to study this course?
 - current studies
 - outside reading

- Super-curricular:
 - what have they read, listened to, watched, visited
 - how do these things support and compliment the course they are applying for?

- Extra-curricular:
 - should try and focus on transferable skills

- Encourage them to be reflective:
 - critically engage with any reading materials
 - be honest
 - check spelling and grammar



What might be included?

- Previous/current studies
- Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)
- Academic interests and activities
- Free online courses
- Reading and attendance at lectures
- Museum/gallery visits
- Work experience placements or internships
- Paid or unpaid work
- Volunteering activities
- Clubs and societies
- Skills related activities
- Sports
- Hobbies



1. ENTHUSIASM AND MOTIVATION FOR STUDY OF THE SUBJECT



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Enthusiasm and motivation for the study of the subject

Why this particular subject?

Example:

'When I studied the upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries, I began to see how this period is key to understanding the modern era. As I examined the Industrial Age and the growth of global trade, I focused increasingly on economics. I believe that the analytical tools of both fields are essential for a deep understanding of the world.'

Economic History with Economics



Enthusiasm and motivation for the study of the subject

Less convincing examples:

“I have a strong interest in history, politics and international relations. University study will allow me to explore and develop my enthusiasm for these subjects.”

International Relations



2.UNDERSTANDING AND/OR EXPERIENCE OF THE SUBJECT



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Understanding and/or experience of the subject

What aspects are of particular interest?

What are the key issues?

Example:

'I am particularly interested in how law interacts with morality. To what extent laws should govern and regulate people's wellbeing? For instance would we be able to justify stem-cell research without defining when life begins?'

Law



Understanding and/or experience of the subject

What aspects are of particular interest?

What are the key issues?

Example:

'I am also involved in the Values Versus Violence youth project, which enabled me to visit Belfast as part of a group of European young people. I learned much about social and political conflict on the trip, and saw the relevance of history as the divisions between communities over historical issues remains to this day.'

History



Understanding and or experience of the subject

Less convincing examples:

'I have been fascinated by the idea of becoming a lawyer ever since I watched the TV drama Suits.'

Law

'My love for the subject began in Year 6, when I conducted independent research for a project on natural hazards, which introduced me to tectonic theory.'

Geography



3. ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SUBJECT



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Academic engagement with the subject

Relevant reading, events, lectures, documentaries, TED talks etc.

Examples:

'Having read "End This Depression Now" by Paul Krugman I gained a deeper understanding of Keynesian theory. I found his argument convincing because...'

Philosophy, Politics and Economics

'In my Royal Economics Society competition essay I drew on econometric analysis to argue that high levels of inequality can have a negative effect on growth. This was backed up by reading "The Price of Inequality"...

Economics



Academic engagement with the subject

Less convincing example:

'A lecture I attended by Michael Sandel encouraged a rigorous philosophical style, and studying Spanish independently has also illustrated how expression affects meaning. Literature at A level, has strengthened my precise phrasing of arguments. Simon Blackburn's "Being Good" has stimulated my views on moral behaviour. I have been inspired to act according to these beliefs: I set up my school's first feminist society.'

Politics and Philosophy



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4. RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR THE SUBJECT



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Relevant knowledge and skills for the subject

Studies, extra-curricular, work experience

Skills or understanding gained

Example:

‘Studying both Economics and Sociology has given me a good theoretical understanding of social science perspectives. This will prove particularly useful when studying an interdisciplinary course. My AS level Maths this has helped me to apply and develop my numerical skills which means that I can readily evaluate and analyse quantitative data.’

Social Policy



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Relevant knowledge and skills

Less convincing example:

'My EPQ investigates income inequality and employment opportunities in the global South. Writing my EPQ has taught me to think logically and challenged me to research and carry out analytical work.'

Economics



Relevant knowledge and skills for the subject

Less convincing example:

'I am currently a College Prefect and am also in the process of completing my Duke of Edinburgh Gold award. I regularly play football to maintain fitness and am working towards my grade 6 in piano.'

Finance



5. ORIGINALITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF THOUGHT



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Originality or independence of thought

Opinion and reflection

Examples:

'I believe that Hart's conception of the law is more convincing as it recognises human limitations.'

Law

'Although many conservative economists have already dismissed such suggestions, I think that disregarding any certain factor is against the essence of economics, as every factor plays an important role towards the happening of every event.'

Economics



Originality or independence of thought

Less convincing example:

'The universe around us is in a constant forward and backward spiral to reach one ultimate goal, equilibrium; a state of dynamism but steady due to the equality between opposing forces.'

Economics and Economic History

'A twelve-year-old girl got home from school one day and decided to pick up a book in the family office room that was entitled 'Torts'. Puzzled, she began to read out of genuine curiosity. That girl was me.'

Law



Elements of an effective personal statement - Recap

Evidence of...

1. Enthusiasm and motivation for study of the subject
2. Understanding and/or experience of the subject
3. Academic engagement with the subject (80%)
4. Relevant knowledge and skills for the subject
5. Originality and independence of thought



Task 2 - Personal Statement Examples

What feedback would you give a student with this personal statement?

Done well/keep

-
-

Improve/change

-
-
-



Personal Statement A - Law

Done well/keep doing

- ✓ Wider reading
- ✓ Mentions Pathways to Law
- ✓ Some relevant extra-curricular, e.g. debating, leadership

Improve/change

- Repetition of information, e.g. GCSE grades
- Not convincing why interested in academic study of Law – vague ‘defend the defenceless’
- Wider reading not explained – what has been learned/gained?
- Link wider reading and lectures together more coherently
- Career of lawyer rather than study of Law
- Describes legal research experience rather than reflect or explain
- Extra-curricular link more explicitly to skills/experiences needed



Task 3 - Personal Statement Examples

In pairs/threes rank the personal statements in order of how effective you think they are:

1 = Most effective/ most likely to receive an offer

3 = Least effective/ least likely to receive and offer



Personal Statement Examples

In pairs/threes rank the personal statements in order of how effective you think they are:

1 = Personal Statement B – Philosophy and Economics

2 = Personal Statement C – International Relations

3 = Personal Statement A - Law



Personal Statement B – Philosophy & Economics

Done well/keep doing

- ✓ Discusses interest Economics and Philosophy together
- ✓ Awareness and understanding of key issues
- ✓ Wider reading
- ✓ Own opinion

Improve/change

- Greater focus on Economics (EPQ and Essay)
- More academic engagement with philosophy
- Less 'flowery' language
- Lines 28 – 31 do not add much value



Personal Statement C – IR

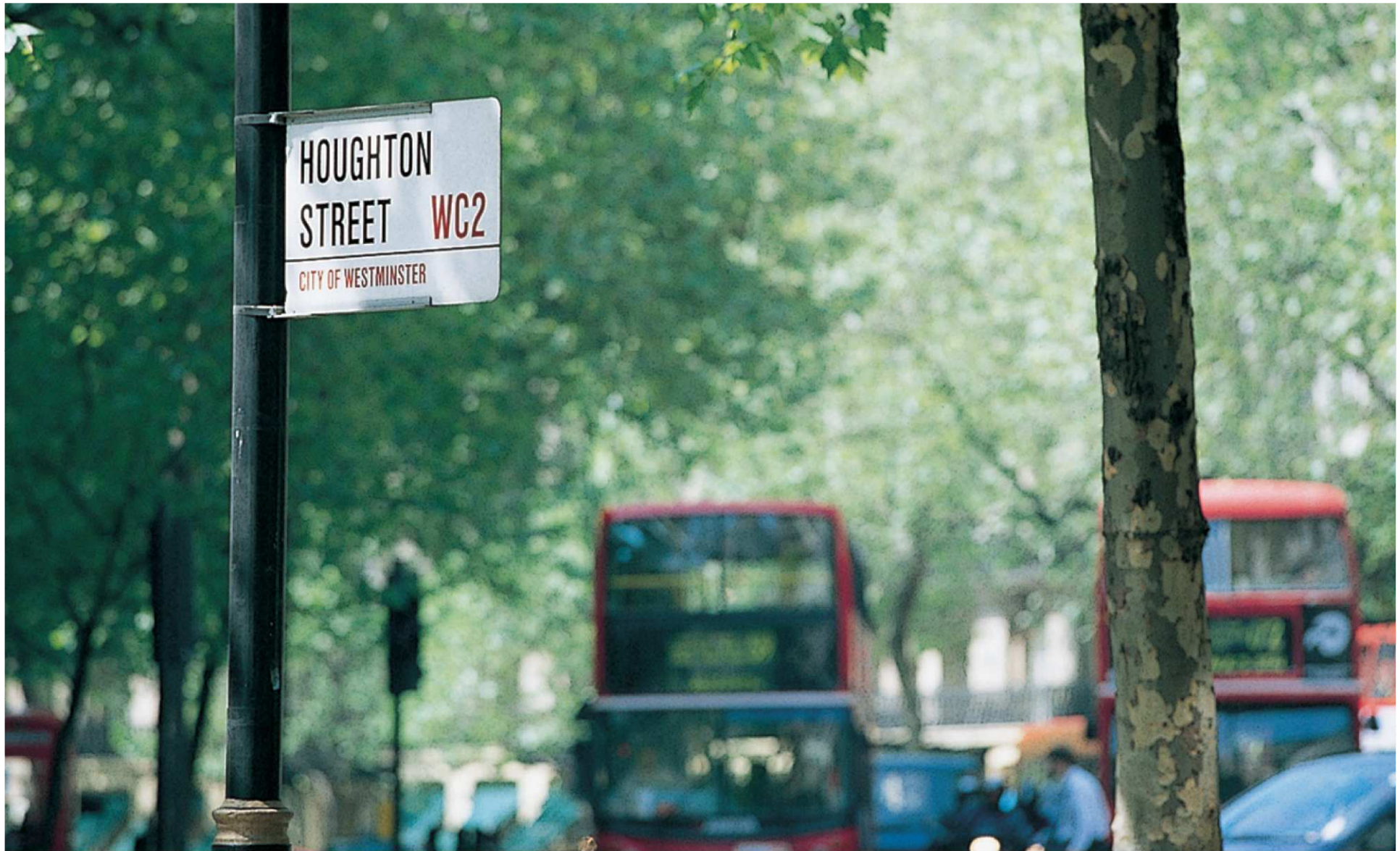
Done well/keep doing

- ✓ Shows some awareness and enthusiasm for the course
- ✓ Relevant wider reading and experiences
- ✓ Independent research project

Improve/change

- Vague in places – e.g. Lines 8-9 & 15
- More specific reflections/explanations e.g. IR issues and topics
- Fewer examples with more depth/detail
- Independent research project – explore key issues and content not just method
- Wider reading fewer examples and explained not listed





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