

Wider Reading and Super-Curricular Engagement for UCAS Personal Statements

University admissions tutors tell us that the most valuable part of a personal statement is the section which details your academic enrichment outside the A Level curriculum. Your subject teachers will have already offered many ideas for how you can enhance your subject knowledge. However, below are some more general examples of how you can further your interests over the coming weeks and months in readiness for drafting your UCAS personal statement at the beginning of Year 13. Remember, this is not an exhaustive list, more a suggestion of places to start your research:

Videos

Videos are a great way to engage with your subject, particularly if you are a visual learner. Examples of the organisations offering short talks and presentations in video format from influential international experts include:

- www.ted.com
- www.bigthink.com
- www.youtube.com/edu

Online courses

Many organisations offer massive open online courses (MOOCs) at university level across a wide range of disciplines, including:

- www.futurelearn.com
- www.edx.org
- www.coursera.org
- www.cosmolearning.org
- www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses

If you are unsure which organisation is running a course you are interested in you can also search using multiple criteria at www.mooc-list.com

University Reading Lists

Many university websites publish sample reading lists for first year courses which can be a useful introduction to a subject at undergraduate level. In addition, excellent resources have been developed for Sixth Form students by both Oxford and Cambridge - you don't have to want to study at either of these universities to take advantage of this information:

- www.myheplus.com HE+ from the University of Cambridge offers activities and suggestions for wider reading across 19 subject groups
- www.explore.org This website from Oxford University raises 'big questions' for students to consider which are underpinned by the latest university thinking and research

Taster events:

University taster events are similar to open days but with an enhanced focus on a particular course, subject or faculty. They often include sample lectures and tutorials and give you the opportunity to experience the typical undergraduate teaching at a given university. Search for virtual events on individual university websites, or use:

- www.unitasterdays.com
- www.ucas.com/events/exploring-university/learn-about-uni-taster-course

Public lectures

Many universities offer public lectures covering a wide range of disciplines which often tackle key contemporary issues. These are usually free and held in university lecture halls but in the current climate some have moved online. You can search 'university public lectures' or visit individual university websites for details of upcoming events. For example:

- Newcastle University www.ncl.ac.uk/events/public-lectures/upcoming
- University of York www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/public-lectures

Periodicals, news sources and online resource banks

Unlike books, periodicals and news sources supply a steady stream of the latest topical studies and information. Many periodicals specialise in a particular area which enables you to find the latest subject specific research. Some examples of useful general sources include, but is not limited to:

BBC News	The Economist	National Geographic
New Scientist	The Stage	Music Week

Visit the Directory of Open Access Journals, www.doaj.org a database with approx. 12,000 journals covering all aspects of science, technology, medicine, social science and humanities. Bright Knowledge, www.brightknowledge.org/#categories contains articles and career profiles for most subject areas.

Podcasts

Podcasts come in a variety of lengths and offer a convenient, low-tech way to further your interests whilst doing something else. You can find and download top podcasts from such places as iTunes and Stitcher, as well as in apps like Downcast and Pocket Casts.

Part-time employment/volunteering/work experience

Prior to lockdown, many of you will have had part-time jobs and had already undertaken some volunteering and/or work experience. The key part of integrating these opportunities into your personal statement is your reflection on them in the context of your chosen course. You should not only communicate the meaningful activities that you have undertaken but what you have learnt from them. How have they changed or reinforced your knowledge/views/choices?

Other methods

You don't always need to read books to enhance your knowledge and understanding. For some subjects it is just as relevant to consider alternative approaches. This could be practising maths problems, adding to a portfolio, performing in front of an audience, conducting experiments and considering physical concepts and their real-world application.

Remember...

Be selective and analytical - the most important thing is to consider **what you have learnt** from undertaking wider reading and super-curricular activities rather than compiling a list of everything you have done. Record your key learning outcomes from each source and then consider their relevance to the course you are applying for. This will enable you to rank your activities in order of importance and therefore structure your personal statement effectively.

Please contact the Careers Department at careersstaff@staidans.co.uk if you would like individual information, advice and guidance on drafting your personal statement – we are happy to help.

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