

The personal statement has changed, and most advice hasn't caught up

Three questions, 4,000 characters, and the one thing that separates the strong ones

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What actually changed

The single long essay is gone. Your child now answers three questions, sharing 4,000 characters between them.

1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?
2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

Each answer needs a minimum of 350 characters, which is around 55 words. Past that there's no rule. Your child splits the 4,000 however they want and UCAS says so directly.

What the new format rewards

The old statement rewarded a clever opening and a smooth run between paragraphs. Question three now asks why an experience was useful, so a list of activities has nowhere to hide.

Don't spend characters on grades either. They're already on the form. Question two wants to know what the studying taught your child, not what they scored.

One thread beats five topics

This is the whole thing, and it's the bit almost nobody does.

The strongest statements have one idea running through them, picked up in each answer from a different angle. Take a student interested in why some countries stay poor. Their reading moves from inequality to institutions to trade policy, and the same question sits underneath all of it.

Compare that with four unrelated books on four corners of economics. Same reading time. Only one of those students sounds like they're actually thinking about something.

A thread also pulls in the odd things. The parts of your child that look irrelevant are often the strongest material once they connect to the question they keep circling.

What good looks like

Two pairs. The difference every time is reflecting rather than reporting.

Common	Better
From a young age I have always been fascinated by economics.	My teacher described inflation as a tax on savers. I didn't agree with her, and I've spent the last year reading about why.
I completed a week of work experience at an engineering firm.	On my week at an engineering firm I sat in a two-hour meeting about half a millimetre. Most of the week was meetings like that.

Say what it taught or changed, rather than what your child did.

Finding your child's thread

Ask them what they've been arguing about for the last year. Not what they've studied. What they keep coming back to.

That's why Year 12 matters more than September does. A thread gets built by following one question for months and it can't be assembled the week before the deadline.

The one warning

🔴 Never copy a line and never let your child paraphrase one. UCAS runs similarity checking across every statement submitted, comparing against statements from previous years. A phrase borrowed from a public library of statements is exactly what that's built to find.

Do this today, it takes ten minutes

Don't write a statement. Write three or four lines answering question one, in your child's words. Fifty-five words is the minimum, so this is smaller than it sounds.

Then list everything that could go in questions two and three. Reading, competitions, work experience, projects, clubs, the things they do that nobody asked them to do.

Now circle anything on that list that connects to anything else. Two or three items pointing the same way is your thread.

If you want someone to look at it properly

My partners at Oxbridge Applications run a personal statement package, four reviews with an Oxbridge-educated consultant, two of them 45-minute video calls, from a first structural read through to the final polish.

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