

ADVICE ON THE PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES (BC98)

Your personal statement is an important part of your application to Oxford. It allows you to tell us about your interests, achievements and ambitions in your own words. Although we do not formally score your statement we read it carefully and use the information it contains as part of our short-listing exercise. If you are invited for interview, the statement is likely to provide a focus for the questions that you are asked. It is therefore essential that your statement is an accurate, unembellished account of your activities. We may check the claims that you make on your statement: discovery of fabricated or exaggerated material – during the admissions exercise, or even later on during your time as a student – may bring into question your suitability to study on the course.

Present yourself in the best light: the same basic facts about yourself (in terms of education, interests, experience), when presented differently, can quite dramatically convey positive or negative messages about you to tutors.

For Biomedical Sciences, whilst your academic record and BMAT performance data will come into play when candidates are being short-listed for interview, time spent in drafting an effective personal statement should also help your overall chances of success. Every detail becomes even more important once you have reached the interviews and are being considered for a place.

1. Please do not be shy in declaring any mitigating circumstances

These may help us to put your achievements or personality within a finer context. We actively look for reasons why you may have under-performed in examinations, or performed well against the odds. These may be factors associated with your schooling, health or domestic circumstances. If you are returning to study after a break, or switching vocation, it is even more important to highlight your reasons for choosing a course at Oxford, and for you to demonstrate your determination, resilience, ability and commitment.

2. Do not simply recount everything you have ever undertaken

We're looking for quality, not quantity! Remember that large numbers of candidates apply for our courses. Tell us in what ways you will stand out from the crowd. In choosing to talk about an activity, describe what you have drawn from the experience: has it changed you as a person? Did it surprise you?

3. We want to learn about you as a person, not just your academic qualifications

If you have undertaken extra-curricular activities, or hold positions of responsibility at school, tell us why you sought these, and why they are important to you. You will not impress us by simply recounting that you took up a placement in Thailand, but we might be more appreciative if you tell us what you personally learnt from the experience, about your interaction with local people, and about shadowing the medical team working within your village.

Example: I have become involved with a city music and drama group, and work especially with the younger members. I find this exciting and more than occasionally challenging. Coaching for the group has given me experience in organising others, as well as teaching them. Watching group members learn and progress is thrilling, especially in the case of one of them who has ADHD. At first he was incapable of remaining still, silent or attentive for even a few minutes, but eventually became far more focused and calmer, making excellent progress in many areas.

4. Directly address our selection criteria in your statement

- Motivation and capacity for sustained and intense work.

Example: My interest has always been in how the body works in the way it does, and why. This was triggered early on by my mother's cancer, and I felt compelled to find out all about this

condition, and what could be done to help treat it. I am thirsty for new knowledge, and am fascinated by the interrelatedness of systems in the human body.

- A strong track record of academic achievement, and particular ability and potential in science and/or mathematics. An excellent record at GCSE (or equivalent).
- Intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm and readiness to cope with the academic demands of the course.

Example: I read beyond the syllabus topics covered at A-level extensively, and decided to research and write an extended essay discussing ethics and science, with particular emphasis on 'living wills'. I enjoyed the challenge and discipline of studying independently, and follow recent developments and debate in this area.

- Reasoning and problem solving ability: use of a logical and critical approach, and strong powers of analysis.
- Communication: Good command of the English language. Ability to express ideas clearly and effectively. Ability to listen.

Example 1: I have worked as a hotel waitress during the summer conference season, which allowed me to develop teamwork skills, and work under various time pressures. It also allowed me to interact with many different members of the public.

Example 2: I took part in my school's open day, and demonstrated experiments in the Chemistry lab. During the last year I have also participated in a reading scheme, helping younger pupils with learning difficulties.

- Ability to generate own ideas and proposals. Originality and creativity of thought, lateral thinking and hypothesis-generation.

5. You will not be alone in trying to open your statement with an attention grabbing intro

If you try this, make sure it helps tutors to learn something about what motivates and enthuses you.

Example: My vast collection of books and videos on "How the Body Works" when I was 7 years old first triggered my interest in the functions of the body. Watching the little personified, cartoon blobs that represented red blood cells run around an animated yet functioning body fascinated me and I longed to find out more. As a result, when a friend received a letter explaining their little girl had just been diagnosed with X at just 14 months old, I was intrigued to find out what this was.

6. The statement is called a 'personal' statement for a reason

It should be written by you, not by your parents, siblings, or teachers. Do not plagiarise material that you find on the web as there is a great chance that such deception will be discovered.

7. Do not feel that there is a precise template to follow that will score you points!

We look for bright and independent thinkers, so try to be original!