

# UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT:

## ANATOMY OF A STATEMENT

This is the personal statement of a recent applicant for A100 Medicine at Oxford. It is **not perfect** and it may **not be suited to every medical school**. There is **no single template for success** in terms of an application to Oxford. Other styles can be equally effective: we encourage individuality and diversity in our students. This statement is however a **good example for an Oxford application** because it helps us see that the applicant is attempting to **match our selection criteria**. An applicant's personal statement is likely to be explored by tutors during an Oxford interview.

A well-written statement will not in isolation gain you a place. It forms one part of an application from a gifted candidate that can be **considered alongside other information** - academic record, BMAT score, school reference, interview performance - in the selection process at Oxford

### PERSONAL STATEMENT AND COMMENTS

Choosing to study medicine is not a decision I have taken lightly. It isn't a career I have wanted to do since a particularly young age, nor did a life changing event prompt my choice. I have thought very long and hard before deciding to apply.

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At first glance, this might seem like a down-beat opening paragraph. Although you may think that an arresting opening statement will impress, admissions tutors may be sceptical of exaggerated descriptions of a revelatory moment or lifelong desire to become a doctor. This introduction shows **honesty** and a degree of introspection. Throughout the statement, the applicant works hard to show that they have a realistic view of medicine. You won't prove that you have the **motivation** for medicine by simply saying that you do: it is what you have done to inform yourself about the career - and the views that you have formed - that will convince us that you really know what being a doctor is like and that this is what you want to do.

Various periods of work experience have taught me much about the career. A local hospital placement gave me the opportunity to visit A&E, Radiology and Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

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Whilst fleeting, these visits to the departments highlighted the variety and diversity of the fascinating specialities medicine encompasses. A placement shadowing a clinic staff was hugely informative regarding daily life as a doctor. During the day I sat in on consultations ranging from routine post natal checkups to discussions of treatment for young people with diabetes and overactive thyroid glands.

You won't be judged on what you've done: we want to know what you learned from doing it.

This student describes their experiences of healthcare that have helped them decide that they want to study and practise medicine. We understand that opportunities to obtain experience vary, so you won't be judged on what you've done: we want to know what you learned from doing it. The description of the placements here isn't over-exaggerated, and the applicant takes care to explain what they have seen and done and the insight each opportunity afforded them. The relatively detailed account of the infant's check-up conveys the impression of engagement during the placement and suggests an **intellectual curiosity** to understand the infant's condition and its treatment. The applicant also takes care to point out an example of the importance of good **communication skills** and argues how their sales position has helped them develop such skills.

Throughout my time there the doctor's genuine interest in his cases and unfaltering motivation highlighted to me the privilege of having such a stimulating profession. This, together with the ever advancing nature of a career in medicine, was brought to the fore by an infant who was having a check up as a result of her being put on an ECMO machine after her birth with Meconium Aspiration Syndrome. The ease with which the doctor broached and dealt with sensitive subject matter also emphasised the importance of a warm, approachable manner and an ability to communicate to a person on their level of understanding. I believe I have honed these skills and gained invaluable experience of the eccentricities of the general public myself in my job as a salesperson.

It is important to convey an impression of **engagement** and **intellectual curiosity** when talking about any work experience/placement/voluntary work.

Since February of this year I have volunteered in a care home for a couple of hours each week. I assist with serving meals to the residents as well as feeding one of the more infirm ladies. My time there has brought to my attention the more unpleasant side of medicine and has proved by far the most useful work experience I have had; preparing me for the stark realities of physical ageing and senility. In spite of this, I genuinely enjoy my time there; giving residents, some of whom go months without visitors, 10 minutes of my time to chat can be very rewarding in the obvious enjoyment they get from it. The experience has shown me very clearly the importance of caring for the emotional as well as the physical needs of patients.

The applicant presents evidence that they have become **well-informed** about the realities of healthcare.

This paragraph reaffirms the applicant's motivation for medicine. They admit that working in a nursing home is not glamorous but explain how rewarding it has been. There is evidence of **analytical skills** here and there is no doubt that the applicant has become **well-informed** about the realities of healthcare. **Empathy** comes across as well, with the applicant recognising that a brief interaction can have such a positive effect on the overlooked residents of the home.

Outside of my lessons I enjoy orienteering with a local club. As part of an expedition I took part in, we walked 80km over 4 days in torrential rain. The challenging conditions demanded teamwork and trust to maintain morale and perform effectively as a group; as well as calm rational thought in stressful situations. Also, through this activity and the people I met, I have become a member of the SJA which has enabled me to gain first aid qualifications and go out on duties.

Although the bulk of a personal statement should be academic-related, it is important to show a life outside of studying. The involvement in a club or association demonstrates wider spare time interests, and the description of the challenging walking expedition provides evidence that the student can **work with others** and can cope in an arduous situation, obliquely suggesting that they might have the **capacity for sustained and intense work**. The student also shows that they understand that taking time out to relax and manage any stress is important, and conveys the impression of good time management. The passing reference to the drama group reinforces the impression that this applicant is a team-player. It is useful to describe sporting or musical interests although, as, this applicant shows, these non-academic interests don't need to be particularly high-powered ones.

Other activities I enjoy include drama -I was a member of a local group for 6 years - cycling and playing the guitar and piano which allow me to relax.

Non-academic interests don't need to be particularly high-powered.

I know that medicine is not a "9 to 5" job and is by no means the glamorous source of easy money it is often perceived to be. I understand the hours are long and potentially antisocial and that the career can be physically exhausting and emotionally draining. It is apparent that becoming a medic will involve inherent sacrifice.

However medicine is also a deeply gratifying and fascinating career path. I want to be a medic because my passion and aptitude is foremost scientific and to me 5 or 6 years more of formal education followed by a lifetime of further learning sounds like a stimulating career option and, thankfully, a far cry from the monotony some jobs pose. Nevertheless, as an intrinsically social person, I would relish a career requiring the development of strong empathic relationships with patients too. Crucially, I know I have the enthusiasm, capacity for hard work and the open and enquiring mind needed to succeed in such a fulfilling vocation.

In the concluding paragraphs, the statement is emphasising that, although aware of the negatives associated with the practice of medicine, fact-finding placements have given the applicant the insight and motivation to be certain that it is the right career for them. The applicant ends by summarising the key personal attributes that they believe make them well-suited to medicine.

## VERDICT AND ADVICE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Of course, there is **room for improvement** with this statement. No reference is made to the scientific subjects that are being studied at school or to particular modules that the applicant has found particularly exciting: this could have helped convey **enthusiasm and curiosity in science**. Although the applicant asserts that they have an 'open and enquiring mind', there is no description of any extracurricular project or reading that the applicant might have undertaken, perhaps to help them understand a highly-charged **ethical issue**.

Despite those omissions, this is an effective personal statement. It is well constructed, connects with the reader, and the material flows in a logical sequence. It further conveys the impression that the applicant has done the research and knows exactly what is in store: they are **not applying with a naive view** or because that is what is expected of them. Writing a statement along these lines would provide a **good foundation** for a competitive applicant and offers lots of material that can be discussed at an interview.

## SELECTION CRITERIA FOR MEDICINE AT OXFORD

You can refer to the selection criteria at:

[www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/study/medicine/courses/preclin/your-application/selectioncriteria](http://www.medsci.ox.ac.uk/study/medicine/courses/preclin/your-application/selectioncriteria)