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Parents' Guide to University 2026

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The 2026 changes to personal statements

By Shay Jordan, Outreach Officer at the University of East Anglia

The UCAS personal statement is your child's chance to showcase their ambitions, skills, and experience, and explain why they're suitable for their chosen course. Previously, applicants were given one large text box with a 4000-character limit, but limited guidance. Many struggled to know where to start. For 2026 entry, this has changed significantly.

The purpose of the personal statement remains the same:

- To evidence and communicate passion, knowledge, and skills
- To link academic, extracurricular, and other experiences to the chosen subject area
- To explain why the applicant's experience is relevant and what they've learnt from it.

However, it's now split into three structured sections, each headed with a question to prompt the applicant. UCAS say the new questions will "level the playing field, providing clear guidance and structure for all applicants" by breaking the personal statement down into manageable parts.

Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Your child should showcase their passion and knowledge for their chosen subject. They should explain why they're a good fit, what excites them about the subject, and how it links to their career aspirations.

How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

Your child should share the skills they've developed in their education, then reflect on how they'll help them to succeed. They should give examples from their projects and academic achievements.

What else have you done to prepare outside of education?

Finally, your child should share their activities and personal experiences outside of the classroom. This could include work experience, volunteering, additional responsibilities, and hobbies which make them suited to their future studies.

The overall 4000-character limit remains and runs across all three sections. Your child is required to write a minimum of 350 characters in each section, but they can choose how to split the remainder of their characters between the sections.

The questions aren't there to add an extra layer of challenge to the personal statement, and applicants shouldn't spend too much time deciding in which section to put something in. Admissions teams generally read the personal statement as a whole (not three separate pieces), so your child should focus on including all relevant information, rather than stressing about where it sits.

For that reason, your child shouldn't repeat information across sections. It adds no value to write about the same skill or experience twice. All three sections are read by the same person, so your child should make the most of the space to show off their best bits!



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