

TSR Asks: How prospective 2023 and 2024 undergraduates feel about personal statements

Methodology: TSR Asks monthly omnibus survey of prospective 2023 and 2024 entry undergraduates, aged 16+

Base: 484 responses (3rd-5th December 2022)

How concerned prospective 2023 and 2024 entry undergraduates feel about personal statements

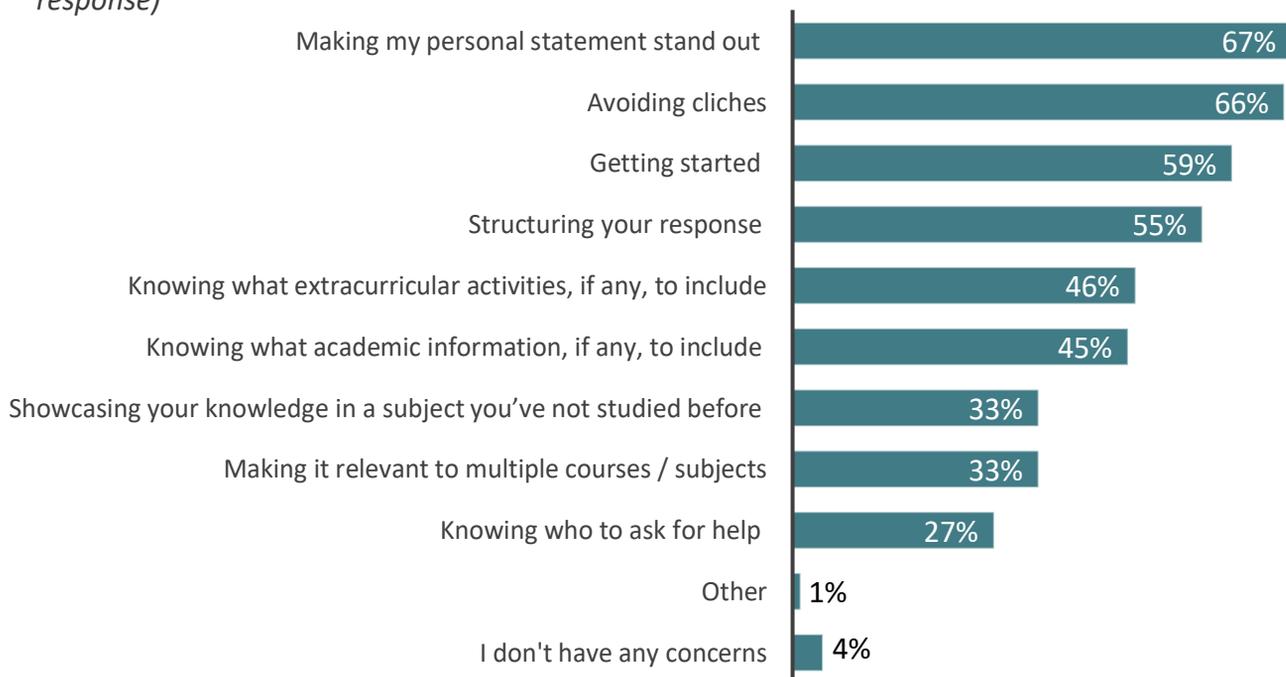
Following calls in the press to reform personal statements, we asked students their views on this important topic, including their concerns about writing them. Over two thirds of participants said they were either quite or very concerned about writing their personal statement, with respondents' most frequent concerns including making their personal statement stand out, avoiding cliches, and getting started.

Q: How concerned are you about writing your personal statement? (Single response)

68% of prospective UGs were very or quite concerned about writing their personal statement

“How does admissions read through a personal statement? What’s the thought process?”

Q: Do you have / did you have any of the following concerns about personal statements? (Multiple response)



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Worries about writing their personal statement

When asked what one word they would use to describe how they felt about writing their personal statement, the words 'stressed', 'nervous' and 'anxious' were most frequently used, suggesting worry about the process

Q: What one word would you use to describe how you feel / felt about writing your personal statement? (Open question)



Importance of their personal statement

Respondents thought personal statements were of high importance to their university applications, feeling this was second in importance only to their A-Level grades when universities assessed their applications

Q: Which of the following do you think are most important to universities when assessing your application? Please rank from 1 to 6 where 1 is most important (Ranking question)

1) Predicted or achieved grades at A-Level or equivalent

2) Personal statement

3) Subjects studied at A-Level or equivalent

4) Academic reference

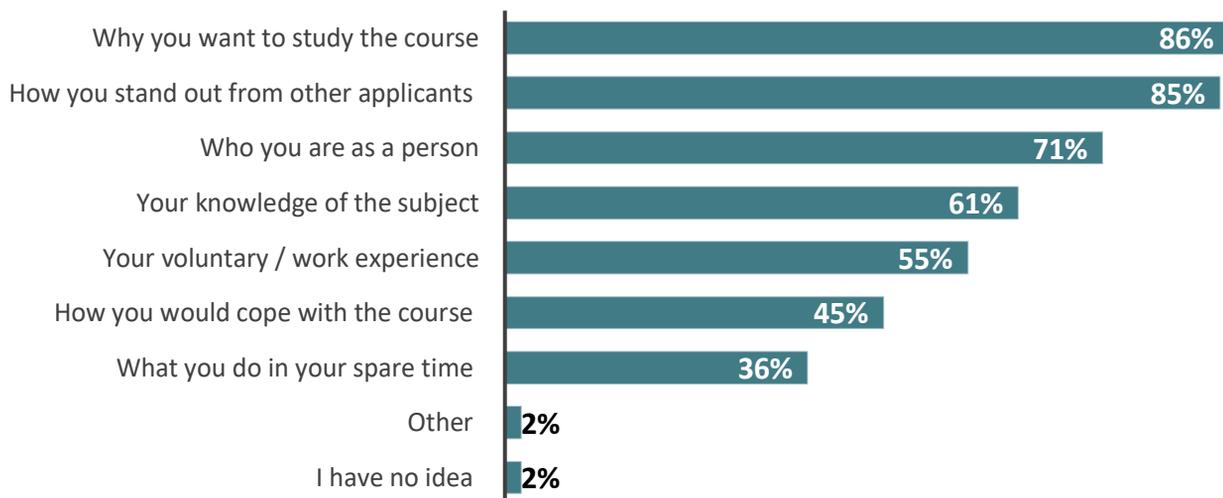
5) GCSE or equivalent grades

6) Paid employment history

How can universities help?

Respondents generally had some understanding of what universities were looking for in a personal statement, with most feeling it should demonstrate why they want to study the course, and how they stand out from other applicants. However, almost all wanted information and support from universities to help with their personal statements, with examples of successful personal statements, hints and tips about how to structure them, and advice on what to include key information they wanted to see.

Q: What do you think universities are looking for in a personal statement? (Multiple response)



Q: What would you like to see from universities to help with your personal statement? (Multiple response)

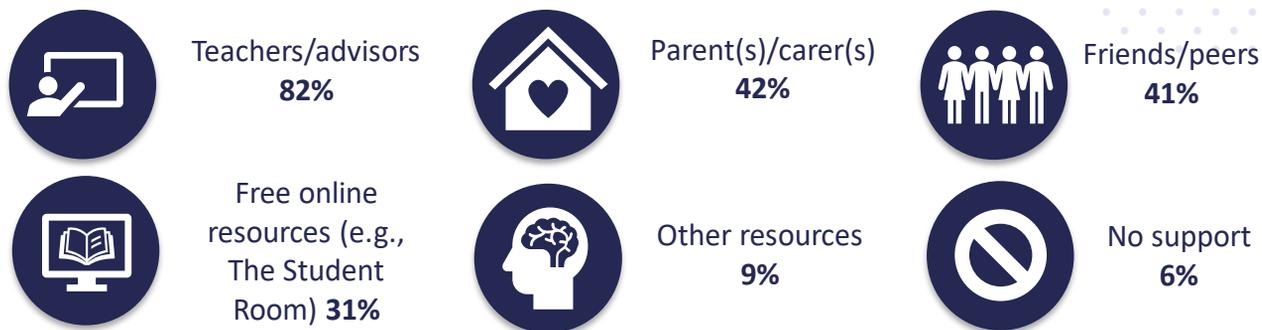
- 69% Examples of successful personal statements
- 66% Hints and tips about how to structure them
- 65% Advice on what to include
- 61% Examples of what to avoid
- 58% Information about how they will be used in the offer making process
- 54% Information about their relative importance compared to other factors
- 45% Information about how they will be used if I don't make my grades
- 3% I wouldn't want any information on that

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Support with their personal statement

Positively, the majority of 2023 entry respondents had received support with their personal statement, most commonly from their teachers

Q: Are you receiving / did you receive support writing your personal statement from any of the following? (Base: 271 2023 entry respondents) (Multiple Response)



Personal statement reform

Despite the current personal statement process being a source of concern for many, respondents were split as to whether they would prefer to stick with the current format or move towards a short answer question system.

Q: If you were just starting out writing your personal statement, which would you prefer? (Single response)

