

Writing a personal statement

Guidance for PhD applicants

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

The 1,500 word personal statement is an important element of your application to doctoral study, whether full-time or part-time. It is one of several elements considered during the application process, alongside your research proposal and the references you provide. The doctoral admissions team uses the information you provide in your personal statement to make the best case for funding allocation in an equitable way. The personal statement helps the admissions team understand your motivation for doctoral study, and relevant professional, academic and personal context. The information you provide allows us to identify a broader set of skills than those that may be exemplified strictly within the academic transcript, references or research proposal.

There is no fixed format for the personal statement. The more specific you can be, the better.

You do not have to disclose anything that you do not want to disclose.

You may wish to address some or all of the following topics:

- Your specific motivation for doctoral study and for your proposed research study. You may bring professional, academic or personal motivations to bear on this. Include an account of what you want to achieve beyond your doctoral research, and how it might help with that.
- Your specific set of research skills, including how you obtained them, that are linked to your proposed study. Identify any interdisciplinary skills that you may have, or any knowledge you possess that illustrates how you would approach your research. Examples may include, but are not limited to: experience in school leadership, counselling, non-profit sector, policy making, lived experience, computing skills including knowledge of programming languages, data analytics, arts-based skills including proficiency in particular media, language and literacy skills including being fluent in more than one language
- If you are aware of skills that you need to develop to successfully complete your doctoral research, please outline these briefly and consider the learning opportunities that might help you in doing that.
- Your prior professional and academic background. Explain how this may be relevant to your proposed research and, if relevant, provide examples of work, publications, events, or artefacts that may support the development of your proposed research (if useful, you can include hyperlinks).
- Any information showing that the institution where you previously studied was 'world-leading' in the area where you took your degree (for example taught by renowned experts in that area, hosted conferences in a particular specialism, awards for a certain programme of study)
- Your specific set of personal circumstances, including contextual information that you consider has allowed you to demonstrate resilience in relation to your prior professional or academic achievement. You may wish to identify particular obstacles that you have overcome. These may be of a social, political, or economic nature, or may relate to you as a person.

- Any factors that may enable you to take an innovative angle to your doctoral study, methodological approaches, or the dissemination of your findings.

You may include any other points in your personal statement that you believe should be considered in your application.

When writing your personal statement, please also consider a few practical points:

- Please write clearly, in plain language, without embellishment or overstatement.
- The word limit for your personal statement is **1,500 words**, all-inclusive.