



Causeway
Education

www.causeway.education

Personal Statement training

Session objectives

You will:

- Understand how academics and teachers view personal statements differently
- Rethink your existing provision and systems



Teachers and academics

Read through the personal statement extracts on the following slides and decide which comment (A or B) comes from:

- a teacher



- an admissions tutor



Teachers and admissions tutors

Law

“Captivated by the all-encompassing importance of the law in society, I am amazed at the way crime is moderated, precedents are set and how they construct the nature of the world around us.”

A

This part slightly increases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.

“Shows clear enthusiasm for Law and links this to understanding of its role in society.”

B

This Personal Statement slightly decreases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.

“This is an empty opening statement with no examples cited to back it up. The weak attempt to define Law wastes space and provides no useful details about the applicant.”



Teachers and admissions tutors

English

"I especially enjoy reading War poetry as it offers subjective and emotive responses that are rarely found in historical accounts. To pursue this interest I studied the pastoral idyll outside of the curriculum and explored the impact which the First World War had on ideas of rural land, particularly in Hardy's poem 'In time of the "Breaking of Nations"' (1915) and Edward Thomas's 'As the Team's Head Brass' (1916). ... I feel that the interlinking of the war and the land makes the war seem "nearer" in Thomas' poem, whereas in Hardy's work the presence of war is distanced through the use of everyday imagery such as the "maid and her wight".

A

This Personal Statement **strongly increases** the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.

"Good evidence of wider reading and critical ability."

B

This Personal Statement **slightly decreases** the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.

"More language analysis than overview."

Teachers and admissions tutors

Medicine

Whilst shadowing in GI surgery, I observed a necrotic pancreatitis patient in severe septic shock who required a pancreatectomy. Communication skills were crucial when conversing with relatives as the doctor had to pitch an explanation of the treatment suitably with regard to the 50% survival prognosis and the implication of diabetes. During the operation, a pseudocyst ruptured excreting 4000ml of pus; effective cooperation was paramount as the surgeon delegated roles to ensure minimal invasive damage was caused. Encountering both clinical and social challenges of the treatment prompted me to research alternatives including autologous pancreatic islet cell transplantation. Although APIC data boasts 69% of patients gain insulin independence, NICE predominantly recommends the “enforcement of life change programmes”, from this I realised the crucial role of primary care services in promoting healthy lifestyles to prevent the onset of disease.

A

This Personal Statement strongly increases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.

“Excellent analysis of a complex case. The student actually shows their understanding of communication skills rather than simply stating how important they are. The reflection at the end shows their maturity.”

B

This Personal Statement slightly decreases the likelihood that the applicant would be offered a place.

“Too much medical information. The section is too long and impersonal.”

The “access gap”

“Students from the state sector with the same grades as their private sector peers are a third less likely to get an offer at a leading university.”

(Boliver 2013; Jerrim 2013)

Research by Jones (2012) finds significant disparities between personal statements of state and privately educated applicants.

Research by Jones (2012) found that teachers and academics only agreed in 23% cases as to what made a good personal statement.

(<https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/making-a-statement-university-admissions/>)



Four common problems with personal statements

1. Students use generalisations, clichés and unevidenced enthusiasm.
They fail to show academic suitability and motivation for a specific degree.
2. Not developing and analysing wider/work experience.
3. Inappropriate emphasis on extra-curricular activities.
4. Poor editing and the use of an inappropriate language and register.



Key findings

Academics particularly value sections in which students pursue a focused topic of interest.

Examples

History: analysing an argument about the reality of the ‘American dream’ in post-war America.

Geography: examining a case study about a water transfer scheme in China

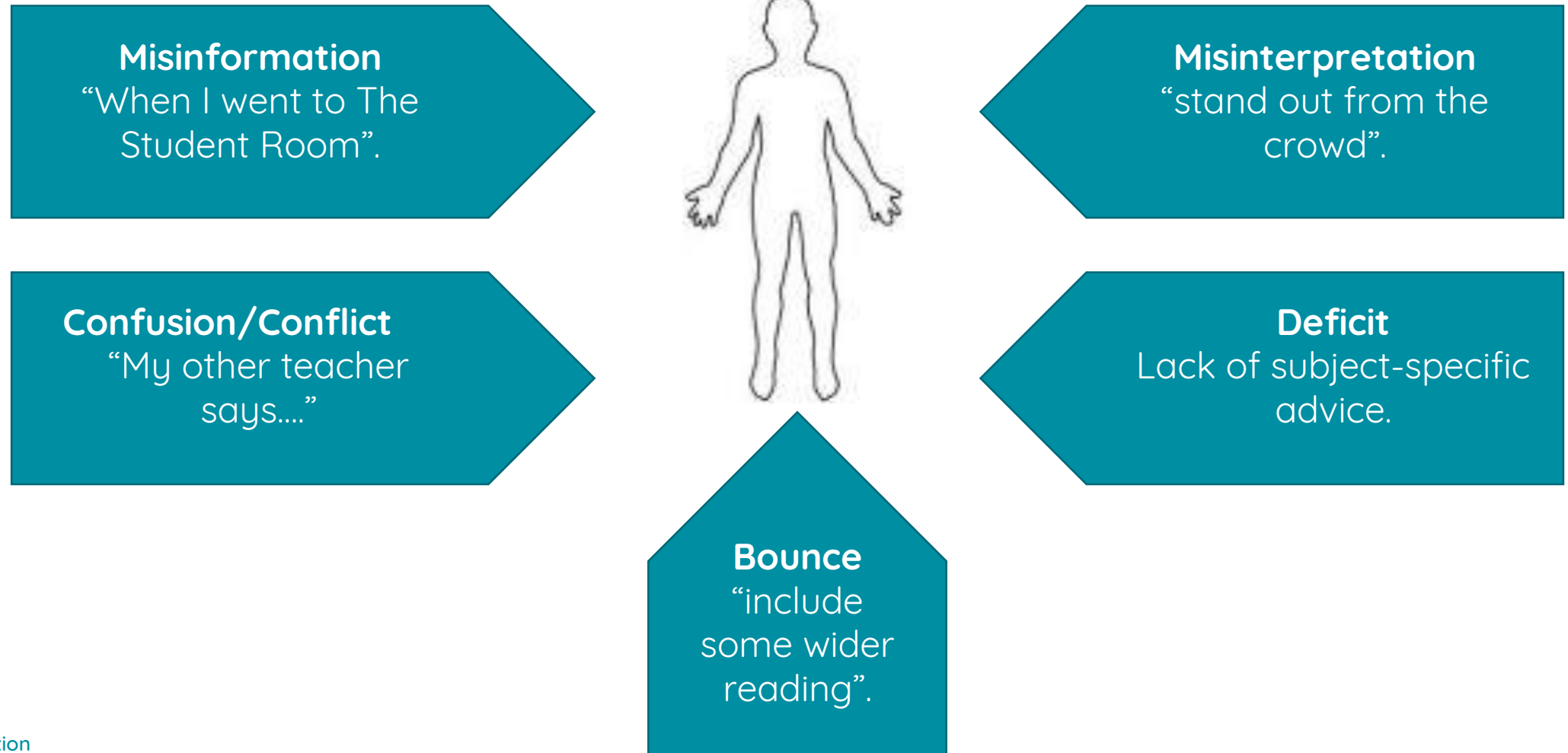
Physics: analysing a recent research development in the production of intense radiation for X-rays

Law: analysing a recent case where a businessman won his legal action against Google in a landmark “right to be forgotten” case

Healthcare subjects: analysing a work experience interaction such as observing a GP advising and reassuring a patient with cerebral palsy.



What are your students experiencing?



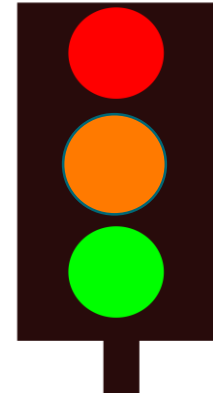
Structure and detail

1. Why do you want to study your chosen course?

2. Is there a specific topic that you can discuss in detail?

3. What have you learnt from taking part in course-related activities?

4. What are your extra-curricular activities?



Only 1 detail needed for each activity

Can you go into just a bit more detail about any key ideas?

Can you go into more detail and give

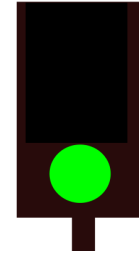


Causeway
Education

Modelling feedback

Paragraph 1- Introduction Business

Business, finance and accounting has been a passion of mine for some years now. I first had the idea of becoming a chartered accountant when my uncle told me about what he does in his role as finance manager of a local hospital; he inspired me to look deeper into the field and that was where my interest in finance and economics was first rooted.



What are the main problems you can see with this introduction?

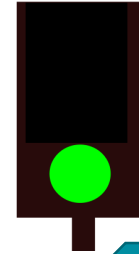
What feedback would you give an applicant on this section of a personal statement?



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 1: Introduction Business

I would like to study business as I am excited by the prospect of involving imaginative thinking to solve complex business problems. My aim is to work with business managers, showing them the newest and most effective organisational and co-ordinating techniques as well as using up-to-date technologies to make a company successful. At my part-time job, for example, I helped my manager design a more efficient system for stock-taking, saving significant amounts of employee time every week.



Why is this a stronger introductory paragraph?

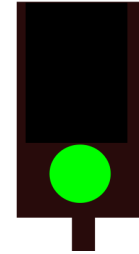
Pick out specific sentences.



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 2: Topic of Interest Law

I am especially fascinated by all aspects of human rights law and am passionate about bringing justice to people who are not able to represent themselves. Human rights are a key part in making society fair and this part of the law shows how it can be a glue that holds society together.



What is the student trying to do here; what are the main problems?

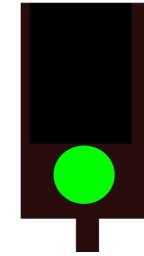
What feedback would you give?



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 2: Topic of Interest Law

I have developed an interest in human rights law and read up on the recent case of two women who were challenging the new law that immigrants wished to join their spouses had to pass a "pre-entry" English language test. One of the main legal issues centred on whether the new policy breached the appellants' right to a family life. I was struck by the level of uncertainty in the wording of the final judgement. Although the appeal failed, the judges stated that a "significant number" of future cases, for example, those in which immigrants had learning difficulties, would be likely to breach human rights. My research led me to reflect on the fact that the application of specific laws depends on very subtle differences in the circumstances of different cases.



What are the good features you would pick out in this paragraph of independent research?



Topic of interest

Strong topics of interest have these characteristics:

1. **FOCUS:** focus on a small/specific topic



2. **SELECT:** select 2-3 key points to summarise



3. **REFLECT:** individual reflection on what they learnt from the research



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 2: Topic of Interest-Law

Focus

I have developed an interest in human rights law and read up on the recent case of two women who were challenging the new law that immigrants wished to join their spouses had to pass a "pre-entry" English language test.

Select

One of the main legal issues centred on whether the new policy breached the appellants' right to a family life. I was struck by the level of uncertainty in the wording of the final judgement. Although the appeal failed, the judges stated that a "significant number" of future cases, for example, those in which immigrants had learning difficulties, would be likely to breach human rights.

Reflect

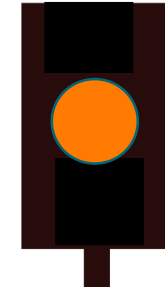
My research led me to reflect on the fact that the application of specific laws depends on very subtle differences in the circumstances of different cases.



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 3: Work Experience Graphic Design

I recently set up and completed a week-long work experience placement at a local graphic design company. The experience gave me a real insight into the graphic design industry and reinforced my desire to study the subject at university.



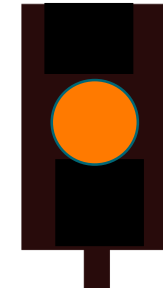
How would you encourage a student to develop this paragraph?



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 3: Work Experience Graphic Design

During a work experience placement with a graphic design company, I was particularly interested in the challenges of creating clear infographics. To emphasize the most important information, I experimented with combining different hooks with a range of fonts.



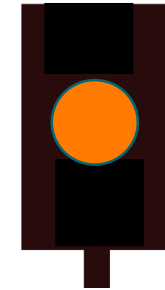
What good features would you pick out to encourage this student?



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 3: Academic Activities Geography

I recently attended a Sutton Trust summer school at King's College London. I carried out some in depth research into climate change data, which gave me a real insight into what it will be like to study Geography at university.



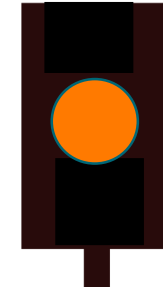
How would you encourage a student to develop this paragraph?



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 3: Academic Activities Geography

Whilst participating in a Sutton Trust summer school at King's College London I carried out research on the importance of filling data gaps in order to monitor the rate of climate change and have a deeper understanding of the effect of individual pollutants on climate change. This led me to examine links between my own study of green economies and the fieldwork I undertook, and find that it was necessary for us to continue to generate data in order to answer the various scientific questions posed by climate change which the data we currently possess cannot fully resolve. Answering these questions would surely enable us to create policies which are more effective in slowing the rate of global warming.



What good features would you pick out to encourage this student?



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 4: Extra-curricular activities

Outside of the classroom, I have completed the Duke of Edinburgh Silver award. This helped me to develop a number of skills. I am passionate about swimming and have been a member of the school team since Year 11. During my GCSEs I was also a member of the netball team. Swimming at a high level has provided a perfect training in managing pressurised situations. As a school prefect, I help to organize events such as our recent talent show, I also take parents around the school for tours. For two years, I have worked in a busy local shop and this has developed my abilities to work with people. I feel confident interacting with people from all walks of life and backgrounds.



What are the main problems here?

What feedback would you give?



Modelling feedback

Paragraph 4: Extra-curricular activities

In completing my Duke of Edinburgh Silver award, I have developed skills in planning tasks and leading a team. I speak two different languages - English and Portuguese - and this has given me a valuable perspective in understanding different cultures. During my A-Levels, I worked in a busy shop and swam for the school team - by balancing these commitments with my studies, my ability in organising and managing my time has improved significantly.



What features would you pick out to praise here?



Personal statement activity

1. Identify the things you would change
2. Discuss which of these changes you would prioritise
3. Group discussion of feedback



Putting this into practice

- We have looked at what a personal statement should look like
- Now we are going to look at how you can help your student get there.



Academic activities

1. Which of these are academic activities?
2. Which are non-academic activities?



- EPQ
- Sports Clubs
- University outreach programmes
- Subject clubs
- External providers e.g. the “Access Project” mentors, The Brilliant Club and Sutton Trust Summer Schools.
- Wider reading: subscriptions for A-Level magazines; suggested lists for wider reading
- Musical Instrument Lessons
- Work experience placements with a course focus
- Responsibilities e.g. prefects



Topic of interest: Focus

Your student wants to develop a topic of interest.

1. Which materials could you suggest for wider reading?

*Specific chapters in books, authoritative internet sources
e.g. research blogs, university podcasts?*

2. How could you help to structure the process?



Topic of interest: Select

What questions could you ask to encourage analysis of a topic of interest?

1. Can you pick out 2-3 key points to summarise?
2. Can you go into a bit more detail?
3. What do you think are the key issues?



Topic of interest: Reflect

What questions could you ask to encourage reflection on a topic of interest?

1. How has this changed your view of your subject?
2. What surprised you about....?
3. Which aspects would you like to research further at university?

