



# ACES write 2022 /23

The ACES Tayside  
guide to writing a  
creative personal  
statement

2022-23

# About ACES Tayside

ACES is a nationally funded initiative based across the four art schools in Scotland. Our job is to encourage, educate and empower senior-phase pupils to consider careers and higher education in art, design and architecture.

Our broad programme of events and 1-1 support helps pupils to explore their options, create a competitive application and develop a strong portfolio of work.

ACES advice is always impartial, and we support pupils wherever they want to go.

For more information about our events, support and to see if you are eligible to be a part of aces, please visit our website.

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## The ACES Tayside guide to writing a creative personal statement

This guide offers specific advice and guidance on how to write a personal statement to support an application to creative subjects.

Remember – ACES can help you with your personal statement. Please email us at [aces@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:aces@dundee.ac.uk) anytime.

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## What is the personal statement?

Your personal statement is your opportunity to tell the universities that you are applying to...

- > why you are interested in their course
- > why they should consider choosing you
- > what you are like as a person
- > what inspires and influences you
- > why you will make a great student
- > what your ambitions are

This is especially important for courses that do not offer an interview - e.g. architecture and General Foundation at Dundee, all courses at ECA and more.

You have a maximum length of **4000 characters**.

## How do universities use the personal statement?

Universities will use them in different ways, but generally speaking...

For interviewing courses:

- Admissions tutors will read your statement to get a sense of what you are like in deciding to invite you to an interview.
- They may highlight parts of it to ask you about in the interview.

For non-interviewing courses that require a portfolio:

- Admissions tutors will look at your personal statement at the same time as your portfolio.
- Your portfolio will speak the most about your creative ability.
- Your statement is there to back up everything else.

For non-interviewing courses that do not require a portfolio:

- Admissions tutors will look at your personal statement to get a sense of what you are like as a creative person, and why you are interested in the course you have applied for.

You might be asked by individual universities to write an additional statement to support your portfolio, or write answers to questions as part of your interview - but this is the main one that is sent to all of the universities that you apply to.

# Personal statements for creative subjects

Creative courses look for a very particular kind of statement – it should focus on what you are like as a creative person as well as why you are interested in the subject.

Extra-curricular activities that aren't linked to your course are less important in a statement for a creative course – but you can still include them. Just make sure to give priority to the creative stuff!

## Some key points to think about:

- Why are you applying to study a creative course?
  - Why this subject?
  - What do you hope to try or learn?
  - If you are applying to different creative subjects e.g. architecture and the general foundation course, then you could talk about things more generally – focus more on why you're applying to something creative.
- How do you make work, and what is it about?
  - What materials do you like to use, and how?
  - Why have you made this work, or developed it in this way?
  - It's important to think about your ideas as much as the materials that you use.
  - Do you make work outside of school?
- What or who inspires you?
  - Artists, designers, architects, photographers, musicians, books, rusty things, light, patterns, fashion, insects, bodies, concrete, pavements, biology, origami, found objects, nature, feminism, religion,
- Exhibitions, galleries, shows or work that you have seen.
  - What did you think? Like? Dislike?
  - Have you been to university degree shows?
- Have you taken part in workshops or activities? Tell us about them!
  - What did you do
  - What did you learn? Like? Dislike?
  - Was it a challenge? How did you deal with this?
  - ACES is recognised in university applications – so make specific mention of our workshops if you have been to one.
- Do you know what you want to do in the future? If so let us know (but it's ok if you don't!)

# Getting Started

## Step 1

ACES top tip is to break it down into quick thoughts before building it back up again. Avoid staring at a blank sheet of paper and going straight into full sentences - chances are you'll get writers block or head straight into waffle territory.

### You will need:

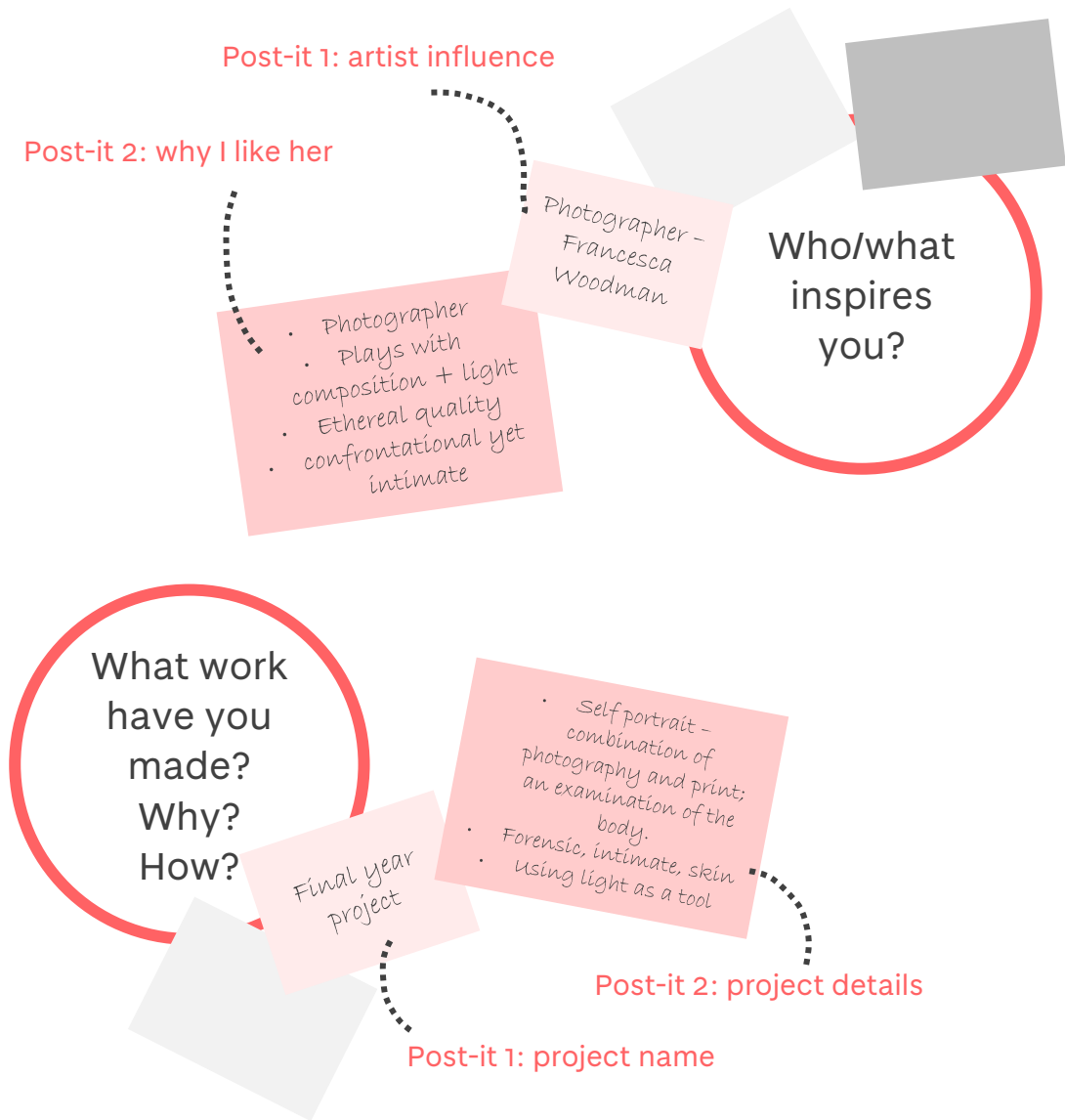
- A big piece of paper (or lots of A4 ones). Create yourself a mind map like the one below (there is a copy at the back of this book).
- Use wee post-it notes and pop your thoughts relating to each one of these really quickly. One post-it per thought - don't add detail just yet. We've included some examples below.
- Don't think too much or worry if it's right or wrong, just get it on the paper. Start with the one that comes most naturally to you.



# Building it up

## Step 2

Once you have lots of thoughts down, you can start to organise and develop them. For each thought add another, larger post-it note with more depth.



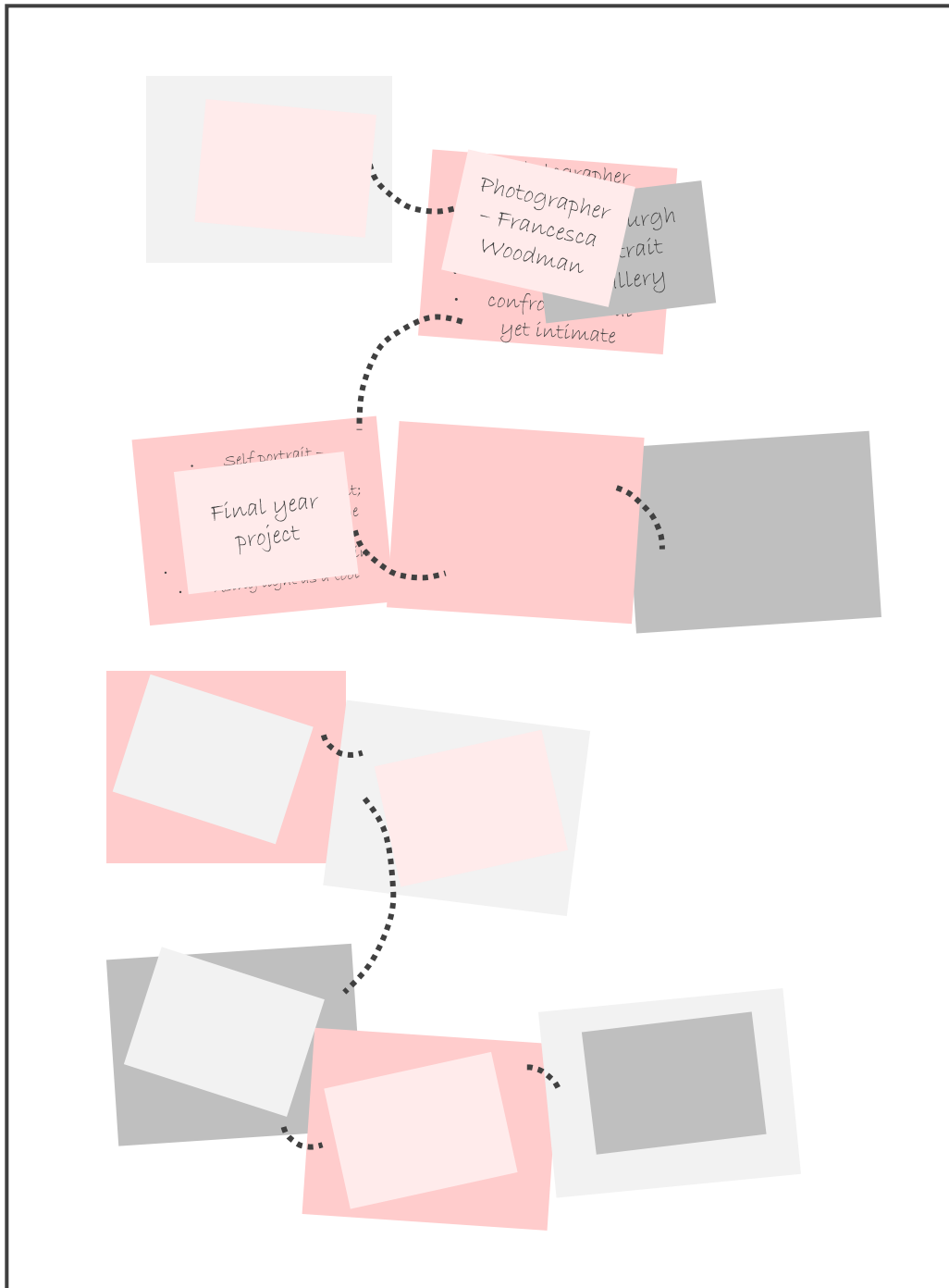
Try to do this for all of your initial thoughts - then we can start to put them in order.

# Creative a structure and making links

## Step 3

There's no right or wrong order, and the joy of working on post-it notes is you can move them around until you have something that suits you and flows really well.

You can start with any one of them - but make it interesting! You don't have to start with why you want to do the course - that can come in later if it feels right.



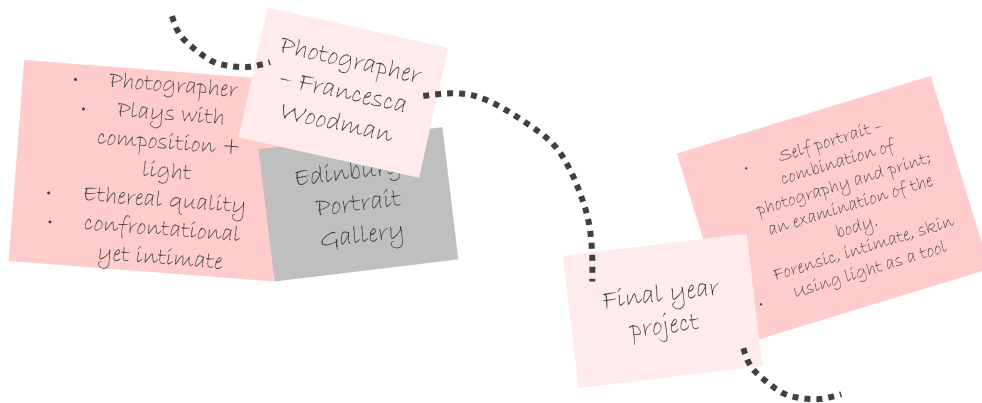
# Writing it up - adding detail

## Step 4

Once you have an order in place you can start to expand and write properly.

- Be sure to write in full sentences.
- You need talk about each thing in some depth. For example:
  - **Why** do you like this artist?
  - **How** have you made this work?
  - **What** caught your eye in that exhibition you went to see?
  - **What** did you learn from that ACES workshop you went to?

A wee example:



You could say...

*“One artist that has inspired me is Francesca Woodman as her use of photography linked well to my final year project.”*

...but this doesn't show **what you like** about the artist, your **understanding** of their work, **how it links** to your project, **why** photography is important to you etc.

Here it is again in more depth:

*“Although my creative practice has always included a range of media and techniques, I'm really drawn towards the use of photography in fine art. One artist that has inspired me in this way is Francesca Woodman, who's playful way with composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is quite confrontational and direct towards the camera, yet retains a feeling of intimacy with the viewer. This is something I channelled in my final year project, exploring the use of light as a medium in photography and printmaking. My topic was self portraiture - and it focused on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”*

Chances are this is too long - 634 characters!

You only have 4000 characters for everything - so we need to edit!

# Writing it up – editing it down

## Step 5

ACES top tip: ignore the character limit. It's better to just write it as you think it – otherwise it's hard to add depth and detail when you are worrying about how much space you have left.

Once you have a completed draft, you then need to edit it down.

**ACES can help you with this** – please email a copy of your statement to [aces@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:aces@dundee.ac.uk).

## Using our detailed paragraph as an example

Here I have scored through words to remove, and added shorter ways or saying things or letters to help things make sense:

~~“Although my creative practice has always included~~s a range of ~~media and techniques~~, I'm really drawn towards the use of **particularly** photography in fine art. One artist that has inspired me in this way is ~~I'm inspired by~~ Francesca Woodman, who's ~~playful way with~~ **use of** composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is ~~quite~~ confrontational and direct ~~towards the camera~~, yet retains an **feeling of** intimacy with the viewer. ~~This is something I~~ channelled **this** in my final year project, exploring ~~the use of~~ light as a medium in photography and printmaking. My topic was self portraiture – ~~and it~~ focusing ~~ed~~ on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

634 characters!

And this is what it looks like once written properly:

“My creative practice **includes** a range of techniques, **particularly** photography. **I'm inspired by** Francesca Woodman, who's **use of** composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is confrontational and direct, yet retains an **intimacy** with the viewer. I channelled **this** in my final year project, exploring light as a medium in photography and printmaking. My topic was self portraiture – **focusing** on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

463 characters!

As you can see – the important information is still there, but we have cut out 171 characters. We can take it even further:

**“I'm inspired by** Francesca Woodman, who's **use of** composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is confrontational and direct, yet retains an **intimacy** with the viewer. I channelled **this** in my final year **self-portrait** project, exploring light as a medium in photography and printmaking; **focusing** on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

365 characters!

## Tips and things to avoid

- **ACES can help you** edit your statement or simply have a look and offer some comments – so please email [aces@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:aces@dundee.ac.uk).
- Pick a point that comes easily to you and take it from there – you don't have to begin with why you want to study this course if it more natural for you to begin with your influences or how you make work.
- Start small and build it up. Get quick ideas down on paper for each point and then begin to add in detail for each one.
- Be flexible – try moving things around and see if they read better.
- Ignore the character limit (4000 characters including spaces) at the start – you can edit it down later. Most first draft statements are at least 6000 characters!
- Write meaningful statements and explain your points in depth.
- Be careful how you word things. Avoid things like:
  - ‘Art is my therapy’ – the practice of art and design is a profession. Art might make you feel good, and you might want to be an art therapist in the future, but for your uni application you need to talk about it seriously.
  - “sketchy drawing style” – try words like ‘loose’ or ‘relaxed’.
  - “doodling” – you’re applying for a formal creative course. We don’t doodle.
  - Slang words – this is a formal piece of writing.
  - Cliché openings such as...
    - *“Ever since I was young I have wanted to study art”*  
or
    - *“Ever since I sold my first painting aged 8 I knew art was the path for me”*
    - *“I have wanted to study art since I was young enough to hold a pencil”*

...if this is the best reason you can come up with for wanting to study a creative degree, then it sounds like you aren't serious about it.
  - “I highly appreciate this artist” – would you speak like this in real life?
- Be descriptive, but don't overdo it. Watch those adjectives!

Who/what  
inspires  
you?

Why Art &  
Design?  
Why this  
course?

Work  
experience  
/extra  
curricular  
activities &  
workshops

## Step 1: Mind mapping

Use this mind map to help you get started

What work  
have you  
made?  
Why?  
How?

Which  
exhibitions  
/galleries  
have you  
seen? What  
did you  
think?

Future  
ambitions

