The ACES Tayside guide to writing a creative personal statement 2019-20
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.

www.dundee.ac.uk/aces
aces@dundee.ac.uk
01382 384030
@acestayside

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 anytime.

Contents:

- What is the personal statement and how is it used .............. 2
- Personal statements for creative subjects ...................... 3
- Getting started ......................................................... 4
- Building it up .......................................................... 5
- Creating a structure and making links ............................. 6
- Writing it up - adding detail ....................................... 7
- Writing it up - editing it down ..................................... 8
- Tips and things to avoid ............................................ 9
- Mind map template .................................................. 10
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.

---

Who/what inspires you?

Why Art & Design? Why this course?

Work experience /extra curricular activities & workshops

ACES Explore days

What work have you made? Why? How?

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

Future ambitions

---

Artist – Cy Twombly

Painter – Alice Neel

Photographer – Francesca Woodman

Fine art

Multi media, opportunity to try things

Final year project

Life Drawing

I don’t know yet
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.

Post-it 1: artist influence

Photographer - Francesca Woodman

- Photographer
- Plays with composition + light
- Ethereal quality
- Confrontational yet intimate

Who/what inspires you?

Post-it 2: why I like her

Final year project

- Self portrait - combination of photography and print: an examination of the body.
- Forensic, intimate skin using light as a tool

What work have you made? Why? How?

Post-it 2: project details

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 to 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...”
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.

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 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 ethereal quality to her work. She is quite confrontational and direct towards the camera, yet retains an 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 focused on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

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 ethereal quality 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...”

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 ethereal quality 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...”
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.

• 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:
  - “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!
Step 1: Mind mapping

- What work have you made? Why? How?
- Future ambitions
- Which exhibitions/galleries have you seen? What did you think?
- Work experience/extra curricular activities/workshops
- Why Art & Design? Why this course?
- Who/what inspires you?