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Politics at university

How to write a personal statement

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**Are you interested in how the world works? Would you like to study how to make the world work better?**

What is a politics degree like?

A politics degree at university will have a general first year which will look at topics such as political theory, which is similar to ideologies at A2 politics or philosophy papers in religious studies. You will look at theorists including Karl Marx, Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Hobbes and explore how their ideas have shaped the way we govern and make decisions. Most degrees in the first year will also explore international politics or how countries interrelate and the importance and effectiveness of institutions such as the UN and NATO. Comparative politics, looking at Europe and America, will also be covered.

The second and third years are where a politics degree gets really interesting and you will have a lot more choice about what you study. Optional modules tend to include topics such as South Africa, global politics, counter terrorism, China, the politics of the Middle East and conflict and resolution.

If you are interested in studying politics at university there are a number of courses you can apply for. Remember to look at International Relations, Public Policy and European Studies.

Writing about politics in your personal statement

It is important when writing your personal statement to show that you are passionate about the subject you are applying to study. You need to think about your A-level subjects and show how they have prepared you for a degree course, in both skills and content. There is no need to write a long list of all the topics you have studied, admissions tutors know what is on the specifications. It is far better to choose a couple of examples and to develop why you found those topics or issues so interesting.

You must also write about the things you have done outside the confines of the course which demonstrate that you are committed to studying your chosen degree subject. Do not worry about this — not everyone will have interned for their MP or worked with a pressure group. Discussing a book or an article that you have read can be just as effective.

Complete the list below.

**What A-levels are you studying?**

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**Have you written an EPQ? Can you link this to politics?**

You can link any A-level subject to politics:

* If you are taking **history** choose a topic you have studied which involved political change, e.g. Franco’s success in the Spanish Civil War or the use of terror in the French Revolution.
* If you are taking **religious studies**, think of a philosopher you have studied, e.g. Bentham and utilitarianism.
* If you are taking **maths**, **economics** or **business studies**, discuss how you can use the skills you have developed to compare the results of different electoral systems or to interpret trends in voting behaviour.
* If you are taking **languages,** add an example about the politics of another country, e.g. the challenges faced by Francois Hollande.
* If you are taking **English literature** you can discuss how to interpret sources such as political speeches and how your analytical skills have developed as a result of your essay writing. You may have studied a text that has a political element— for example *Antony and Cleopatra* can be linked to feminism.

Now go back to your list of A-levels and add an example next to each of them.

Drafting your personal statement

One way of doing this is to write a list of bullet points first. Don’t worry about the perfect first sentence at this stage. You could follow this structure:

* **Paragraph 1** This is the hardest. Write down what you find interesting about politics. Was there an event in the news or an experience you had that sparked your interest in the subject?
* **Paragraph 2** This should be your longest section, where you develop why you are interested in politics. You comments about what you have read, or places that you have visited that show you have an interest that stretches beyond you're a-level course.
* **Paragraph 3** How do your other A-level subjects link to the study of politics? Think about the examples you have written above.
* **Paragraph 4** Give a brief account of any extra-curricular activities or experiences outside school, e.g. volunteering. Don’t worry if you don’t have much to write here. Your academic studies are most important.
* **Paragraph 5** In your conclusion return to why you want to study politics and what you are most looking forward to about the course. You don’t need to discuss what you may want to do in the future — focus on the degree itself. Your personal statement should show that you are interested in the course for its own sake.

An example of paragraph 2

When I read *Zimbabwe* by Philip Barclay, I was surprised to discover that the fall of minority white rule had pushed the country into a political climate far closer to that of National Party South Africa than its democratic successor. I followed up this discovery by reading Richard Bourne’s *Catastrophe: What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe?* Bourne led me to consider the impact of African ethnic divisions on shaping the country’s unstable recent political climate. I continue to find the clash of cultures between the European, Ndebele and Shona peoples of Zimbabwe fascinating, and I intend to investigate the consequences of these differences on the country’s post-independence politics further in my EPQ.

An example of paragraph 3

My study of politics, which has reinforced my understanding of such ideologies as communism and capitalism, has complemented my study of history. The way in which both ideologies have influenced global history interests me greatly, especially the extent to which major superpowers, such as the USA and Russia, have been able to influence international politics, both in the Cold War and with the use of economic sanctions today.

Paragraph 1

Paragraph2

Paragraph 3

Paragraph 4

Paragraph 5

Good Luck!

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