

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

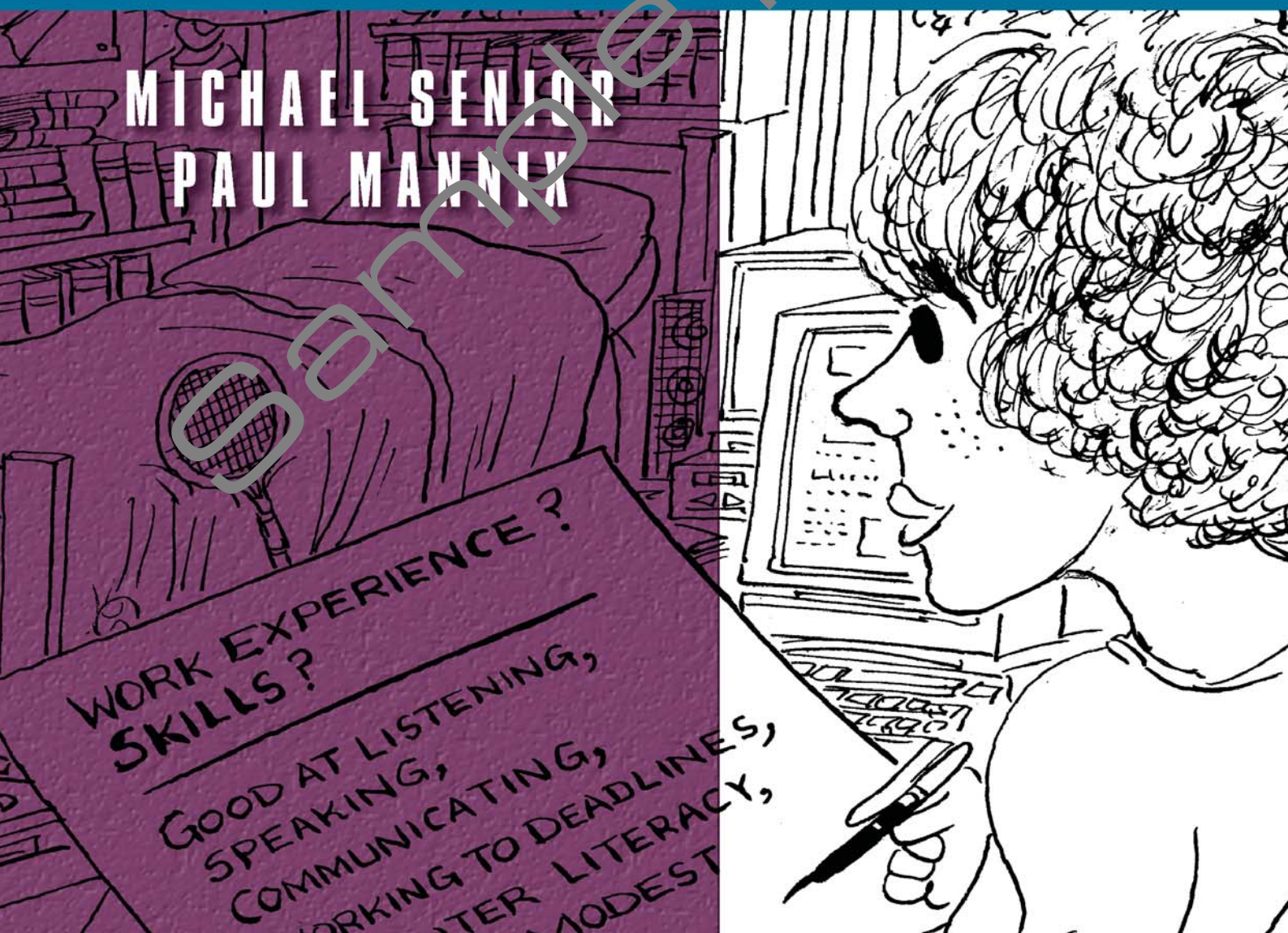
FOURTH
EDITION

A STEP BY-STEP GUIDE

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WORK EXPERIENCE?
SKILLS?

GOOD AT LISTENING,
SPEAKING,
COMMUNICATING,
WORKING TO DEADLINES,
INTER-LITERACY,
MODEST



Contents

How to use this guide	2
ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS	4
How much do you know about the UCAS Personal Statement?	5
Gathering experiences for a UCAS Personal Statement	10
Making your Personal Statement unique	14
Improving a Personal Statement	17
FURTHER ADVICE ABOUT WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT	26
Analysing statements for competitive courses at selective universities	27
Top tips for writing your Personal Statement	32
Key Terms	34
THE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE	36
Writing a Personal Statement - sections to consider	38
THE TUTORIAL BOOKLET	52
Writing effective UCAS Personal Statements - tutorial booklet	54
SUBJECT SPECIFIC ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS & EXAMPLES OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR:	68
Art, Design & Architecture	69
Biological Sciences	71
Business (& Marketing)	73
Computer Science	75
Economics (& Politics)	77
Education	79
Engineering	81
English	83
Geography	85
History	87
Law	89
Mathematics	91
Medicine (& Dentistry)	93
Modern Languages	95
Physical Sciences	97
Psychology	99
Sociology (& related subjects)	101
Sports Science	103
ADDITIONAL SURVEY OF VOCATIONAL COURSES	106
Business Management	107
Hospitality Management	108
ICT	109
Media	110
Nursing and Midwifery	111
Occupational Therapy	112
Travel and Tourism	113

GATHERING EXPERIENCES

1. What is included in a Personal Statement?

1. **Read the Personal Statement which begins 'Although I enjoy...' and underline each experience or key point that appears.**
2. **Count how many experiences or key points have been included in the statement.**
3. **What implications does the answer to question 2 have on the way you plan your experiences ready for your UCAS application?**

TASK 1

Although I enjoy studying Mathematics and Geography, it is Business Studies that I wish to pursue in more depth. I believe a degree in Business will build on my understanding of marketing and financial management. Businesses have to operate within a legal framework and I was lucky enough to shadow a Barrister for a day to gain an insight into the legal profession. I hope to study aspects of law as part of my degree.

A range of school opportunities has broadened my experiences. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme has been challenging and fulfilling: allowing me to work with a diverse range of people. My voluntary work, at Help the Aged, proved to be rewarding and gave me a more caring perspective on life. I have also taken part in the 'Year 7 Friends Scheme' in which I supported young students during their first term at school. Taking part in the school drama club as a technician has been fun and has taught me the importance of working to deadlines. I have further pursued my interest in drama and have so far been fortunate to see 'Twelfth Night' and 'Les Miserables'. My role as Deputy Operations Director in the Young Enterprise Scheme has given me an insight into business life. I am interested in the internet and have helped staff redesign the school website. I hope to learn more about web site design at university. Although no-one could call me a sportsman, I am a keen football player and I regularly visit The City Of Manchester Stadium to watch Manchester City.

Outside school I belong to the Venture Scouts which has offered opportunities such as gliding and weekend camps to the Peak District. I have managed to balance the demands of my 'A' levels with a varied and enjoyable school and social life. I look forward to the opportunities offered at university.

GATHERING EXPERIENCES

2. Writing a Personal Statement using your present experiences

TASK 2

Name

(a) You have no more than 30 minutes to write part of a Personal Statement for an admissions tutor about yourself. You might include:

- your interests / experiences in school,
- your interests / experiences outside school (e.g. hobbies)
- work experience (if relevant)

You do not need to write about course choice at this stage.

Your Personal Statement

(b) Swap your draft of your Personal Statement with a colleague and assess whether you feel your colleague's statement captures your interest - use the headings below to assess your colleague's Personal Statement. If it doesn't, then it will probably fail to interest an Admissions Tutor. You might wish to find out who has written the best statement and ask them if they, or the teacher, could read it to the rest of the group.

What I like about the Statement	What I do not like about the statement

MAKING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT UNIQUE

Complete the following tasks. Your answers should take some time to produce. If you research the answers well, you should not only be able to write a unique Personal Statement, but also demonstrate that you have undertaken thorough research on your prospective course.

1. YOUR COURSE

State the course(s) you would like to study (read) at University

2. WRITE ABOUT THE DEGREE COURSE

Using a university prospectus or on-line course details (see www.ucas.com), identify the course content or teaching method that appeals to you.

Year 1 content

What appeals to you about the course content?

Year 2 content

What appeals to you about the course content?

Year 3 content

What appeals to you about the course content?

Ker Pyne

3. WRITE ABOUT WIDER READING

Choose one article or book relating to your subject area that is not your main text for the course and read it through. If it is a factual book, try to read at least one or two chapters. Write about one area of the book that you thought interesting and describe it in such a way that it provides some detail that shows you have understood the material e.g. if reading a book about Psychology you might read the publication 'The man who thought his wife was a hat' by Oliver Sacks. Each chapter documents case studies of people with brain disorders. Do not write, 'The book was interesting.' Instead, state which case study was most interesting and how you felt about it? What did you learn about brain disorders? What else would you like to read about after this book?

4. WRITE ABOUT YOUR RELEVANT ADVANCED COURSES

For example, AS/A2 or Applied A-Level topics that most interested you and why. Identify skills you have developed that you believe to be relevant.

5. WRITE ABOUT RELEVANT EXPERIENCES

Have you attended any conferences, residential courses or trips which might be relevant? Have you met people, engaged in a hobby, read or observed something that stimulated your interest? Include anything that will convince the Admissions Tutor that you have given serious thought to the choice of course.

Improving a Personal Statement

TASK 2: Imagine you are an Admissions Tutor. Analyse each paragraph by identifying its strengths and considering how it could be improved.

PARAGRAPH 1

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to study the subject at degree level. At university, I look forward to examining the subject in more depth, particularly the British medieval period. I also enjoy French history, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness.

Strengths:

Improved by:

PARAGRAPH 2

As a school prefect I hold many responsibilities: organising and attending school functions, delivering speeches at some of these events, being an active member of the school council, and working effectively with other students.

Strengths:

Improved by:

Improving a Personal Statement

TASK 3: Compare your answers with those provided. Examine each of the improved paragraphs and assess whether the improvement is effective.

PARAGRAPH 1

BEFORE:

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to study the subject at degree level. At university, I look forward to examining the subject in more depth, particularly the British medieval period. I also enjoy French history, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness.

Strengths:

- Does offer a reason for choosing to read history at university
- Each sentence attempts to offer a different point - not waffle

Improved by:

- Spellcheck - spelling error 'histroy' looks sloppy
- More depth in the reason for choosing history - what is appealing about medieval history? How have trips to France broadened historical awareness?
- Limited content to say about the applicant's passion for studying history

AFTER:

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to study the subject at degree level. In particular, for my coursework I researched the life of King Alfred focusing on his early attempts to create a sense of the 'English' by translating texts from Latin and encouraging people to read English. At university, I look forward to examining the subject in more depth, particularly the British medieval period. I also enjoy French history, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness when I visited the site of the Somme: an emotional experience when one considers the number of people who died there during WW1.

PARAGRAPH 2

BEFORE:

As a school prefect I hold many responsibilities: organising and attending school functions, delivering speeches at some of these events, being an active member of the school council, and working effectively with other students.

Strengths:

- Position of responsibility (school prefect) useful to mention
- Examples provided about duties performed
- Student has varied interests

Improved by:

- Sometimes it can be more useful to go into depth about one example than offer a list of several examples

AFTER:

As a school prefect I hold many responsibilities which include organising and attending school functions and delivering speeches at some of these events. I had to prepare and deliver a speech to over 300 parents and students about sixth form opportunities at an Open Evening.

KEY TERMS

The following advice should help you write a Personal Statement which is easy to read and is professionally written. Read the following advice to help you connect your sentences and paragraphs as well as to vary the language you use in the Personal Statement.

- **IN ADDITION**

"In addition to my work experience I have also gained valuable skills throughout my voluntary work."

- **AS WELL AS**

"As well as my involvement in team games I am also keen on playing individually competitive sport."

- **REINFORCE**

"My involvement in the school voluntary programme has reinforced my decision to study a degree in Nursing."

- **STRENGTHEN**

"My decision to study a degree in Economics has been strengthened by my enjoyment and success in my A level course."

- **FURTHERMORE**

"Furthermore, I am particularly suited to a degree in Chemistry because of my love of the subject and my keen interest to further my knowledge of the subject."

- **APART FROM**

"Apart from my involvement with sports I am also involved in amateur dramatics."

- **NOT TO MENTION**

"Being involved in the voluntary work programme, not to mention my work experience, has provided an opportunity to work with a diverse range of people."

- **MORE RECENTLY**

"Although I have taken part in classical music concerts, more recently I have decided to learn to play the piano."

- **ENABLED ME**

"The opportunity to play in the school football team enabled me to work as part of a team."

- **PROVIDED ME**

"The work experience provided me with an opportunity to work with a range of people."

- **OPPORTUNITY TO**

"The opportunity to work with people was provided by my work experience."

ADVICE ABOUT USING 'I'

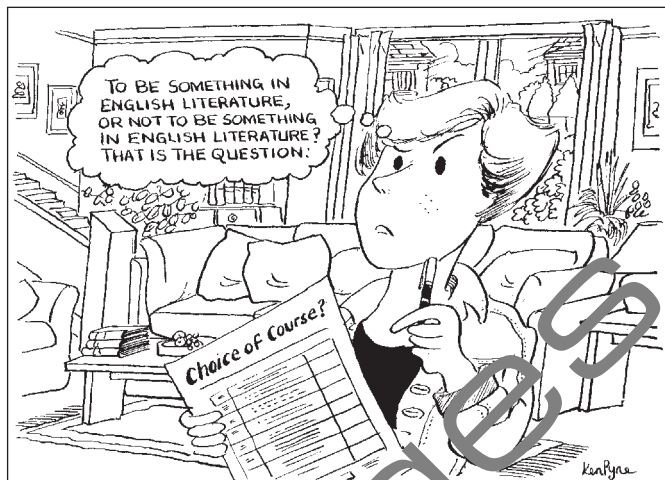
Beginning many sentences with 'I' is very easy to do, especially when writing about yourself. Instead, try to create varied sentences with a range of alternative starting points:

DO NOT WRITE	INSTEAD WRITE
I am Captain of the Hockey Team	Being a Captain of the Hockey team ...
I enjoy playing sport	Having enjoyed playing football ...
I am studying A levels in	My A level subjects have ...
I enjoy socialising	Socialising is important to me because ...
I have taken part in	Taking part in ...
I have gained a number of skills	The skills I have gained from ...

(1) Writing about your choice of course

An example of a candidate applying to read Economics

"Having thoroughly enjoyed the academic study of 'A' level Economics and Mathematics I have chosen a degree that will enable me to pursue my interest in Economics in even greater depth. Attending a specialist Economics conference in London broadened my knowledge of the subject and it should prove useful during my Economics degree."



Stage 1

State your reasons for your choice of course

Write out the reasons why you are applying for your chosen degree/HND. Some suggestions have been made to help you get started.

Reason

Enjoy the subject

Enjoy particular aspects of the subject

Look forward to studying in greater depth

Work experience confirmed interest

Look forward to putting theory into practice

Possess the skills required for the course

Post-degree aim e.g. particular career in mind

Any other reason/s?

Explanation

State why

State which aspects

State specific interests

How did work experience help?

Anything in particular?

Which skills?

Which career and why?

Explanation

Writing about your choice of course is the most important part of your statement so think of plenty of ideas.

**Now use the reasons to begin writing your Personal Statement.
Use Stage 2 to help you.**

Stage 2

Write your own explanation about your choice of course.

To help you, try to adapt the following introductory sentences:

For a vocational or an applied course, try adapting the following introductory sentence:

“Having thoroughly enjoyed the academic study of... *(state subjects)* I have chosen a degree that will enable me to combine theory with a practical application.”

For a teaching course, try adapting the following introductory sentence:

“My subject-based studies along with work experience in... *(state any related experience with children)* have made me suited to a degree in teaching.”

For a more general course, try adapting the following introductory sentences:

“I have chosen a... *(state degree title)* degree because it will enable me to study... *(state any areas which interest you that you KNOW will be covered on the degree course)* in more depth.”

“Success and interest in my... *(state subject)* have confirmed my interest in studying... *(state degree title)*.”

“In addition to my lessons, extra reading including... *(state title or author of a key book you have read)* has confirmed my interest in reading / studying... *(state degree title)*.”

“I am interested in studying... *(state degree)* because it has a practical application as well as a theoretical basis.”

“With my practical experience in... *(state experience eg. work experience)* and my academic achievements in... *(state either achievements such as a good essay or project result or even a modular result or mock/test result)*

I believe I am well suited to a degree in... *(state degree)*.”

“Success in my school/college studies and extra work in... *(state details of relevant experience)* has given me a secure academic foundation with which to approach a degree course in... *(state degree title)* with confidence and enthusiasm.”

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR ECONOMICS, POLITICS AND RELATED COURSES

This section was based on advice from the following tutor:

Ms. Louise Burton, Admissions Officer for Government Courses,
London School of Economics

These courses fall into the category known as Social Sciences. As such, they have much in common with other degrees within this area. The Personal Statement seems to be given a relatively high priority by many admissions tutors within the broad area of Social Sciences. You should show that you are able to reflect on your studies and other experiences and, based on this, produce a piece of writing of a high standard.

HOW SHOULD I PRESENT AND STRUCTURE MY STATEMENT?

A piece of prose of good length is best. Tutors within Social Sciences and Humanities appear to value the statement as an opportunity to examine the quality of your written English. As mentioned above, the ideal statement would contain a good deal of discussion and reflection, related to your studies and to the wider world. Given the nature of Social Sciences, if you can include your own experiences in this reflection in an intelligent way, so much the better.

SHOULD I MENTION MY WORK EXPERIENCE?

It is not vital as these courses are not vocational. However, any work that has an aspect which is relevant to your discussion, or which demonstrates useful skills, should be mentioned.

HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY CHOICE OF COURSE?

This is important, particularly if you have not studied the subject or subjects before. For instance, if you are applying for Politics, you probably won't have followed a subject of that name at school, though you might well have done subjects such as Economics or Sociology: aspects from either of these subjects might have touched on politics. Show that you have undertaken your research well, that you understand the course and its demands, and that you will benefit from it.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN ECONOMICS, POLITICS AND RELATED SUBJECTS

"The scope and breadth of their intellectual interests should be indicated, particularly if new, wider subjects are concerned in the choices."

Areas that tutors found particularly useful:

"Reasons why the applicant has chosen the course applied for, and indications that the applicant understands the scope and demands of the course."

"Comments which indicate that the student is grasping some of the methodical problems involved in any study [and] has an understanding of how the study will be developed in advanced courses."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.

EXAMPLE & ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL STATEMENT - POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY & ECONOMICS -

“If we can keep our heads the long-awaited economic miracle is in our grasp.” Dennis Healey, July 1976

“What I have always said is that no government can produce an economic miracle.” Dennis Healey, December 1976

In the past year, both Economics and politics have inspired me and fuelled my interest. I believe the two go hand in hand, as illustrated in the above quotations. My Economics A-level course has been challenging and engaging and I believe my keen interest in debating and systematic analysis will provide me with the appropriate skills to enjoy the study of both Politics and Philosophy. I hope that university will afford me an opportunity of acquiring a deep understanding of all three subjects and enable me to develop skills and flexibility for the future. My other A-level subjects of History and Geography have enabled me to develop analytical skills as well as my ability to present a well-reasoned argument.

Within school I recently embarked on the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award Scheme, enabling me to develop new skills and friendships and promoting both teamwork and independence. Other extra-curricular activities in School include drama which provides me with a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction as well as supplying me with a wealth of experience on public speaking. At the end of Lower Sixth, I was fortunate enough to be appointed a School Prefect.

Travel is extremely important to me and I hope to increase my experience of the world during a gap year in the Far East, developing my independence and allowing me to obtain further knowledge of our world's people and cultures before continuing my education. It promises to be an unmissable adventure. My other hobbies include the saxophone and especially playing and listening to Jazz and Blues. I also regularly support Stockport County Football Club and I have gained an Open Water PADI Diver qualification. My final great passion is reading, both of fictional and reference books and my favourite authors include Frederick Forsyth and Tom Sharpe. I have aspirations to be a novelist myself in the future.

STRENGTHS:

- ▼ Good quotes to start: states something about the nature of the subject
- ▼ “Keen interest in debating and analysis” is useful, but we should have more detail on this
- ▼ Duke of Edinburgh Award is useful to illustrate team skills
- ▼ Detailed first paragraph explains reasons for choice of course

WEAKNESS:

- ▼ The statement reads too much like a “list”. There could have been a greater degree of reflection about personal experiences and how these relate to the subject area

ADVICE FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

This section was based on advice from the following tutors:

Ms. Patricia Gorman, Admissions Tutor, Occupational Therapy,
University of Teesside

Ms. Olwyn McGarvey, Admissions, Occupational Therapy,
Sheffield Hallam University

Your motivation, commitment and dedication will be vital to an Admissions Tutor for Occupational Therapy courses. Difficulty can arise in conveying these requirements or qualities without sounding patronising or saintly!

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PERSONAL STATEMENT TO THE ADMISSIONS TUTOR?

In a word 'very'. An Admissions Tutor will expect to see solid reasons why you wish to pursue an Occupational Therapy qualification. You should say why you think you would enjoy the course and why it appeals to you. It is useful, if relevant, to link your Post 16 course to your application. Write about your enjoyment of the subject and link any relevant aspects to the Occupational Therapy programme.

WHAT SKILLS SHOULD I EMPHASISE?

Research and logic are important academic skills but interpersonal skills are vital too. Admissions Tutors like to see evidence of teamwork as a qualified O.T will, eventually, be a member of a skilled, multi-disciplinary team. Creativity, flexibility and an ability to deal well with stress will help your application.

WHAT ABOUT WORK EXPERIENCE?

Work Experience can be difficult to organise but, from an applicant's point of view, is desirable to gain a true understanding of the work of an Occupational Therapist. Work Shadowing, two days if possible, talking to O.T's and research on the Internet will help your application. When writing about Work Experience don't forget to mention why you did it, when, where and what exactly you did. If you are planning a period of Work Experience, but have not undertaken it at the time of the application, do mention your plans.

COMMENTS FROM ADMISSIONS TUTORS IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

"Organise Work Experience early, it can be difficult!"

"It's useful to have a voluntary work background."

"Dedication should be obvious, and a commitment to the community."

IMPORTANT

Advice from Admissions Tutors will vary. These comments are a sample of those happy to express their views and give up their time to complete a survey.