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Teaching: applications

How do I write a personal statement for teacher training?

This is a crucial part of the application and your chance to stand out from the crowd. You have 47 lines (80 characters per line including spaces) in which to persuade your chosen initial teacher training (ITT) providers to offer you an interview. The statement must be concise, enthusiastic and sell your potential to be a successful teacher.

What you should include in the personal statement

Providers will be looking for evidence that you understand the realities, rewards and challenges of teaching. You'll be asked to describe your reasons for wanting to teach, and should explain the relevance of your previous education and experience, including teaching, school visits and other work with young people. Consider all of the following points when you are deciding what to include in your personal statement.

Reasons for applying for teacher training

Explain why you've applied to be a teacher and why you've applied for your chosen subject and age group. Demonstrate your commitment and motivation through recent examples from your work experience and academic work.

School experience and what you gained from it

Training providers will want to know how much experience you've had in schools, for example:
- areas of the national curriculum you observed
- age groups you worked with
- subjects you covered
- types of schools you visited and for how long

Reflect on what you did during any work experience in state schools, and what you learned from it.

Your work experience and how it relates to teaching

Use the personal statement to give further information on the work experience you listed in the application form. Explain how this experience is relevant to teaching, particularly where you've been working with young people in schools and other contexts. Comment on work experience in other settings, such as voluntary work and extracurricular activities, and show how the skills you gained will help you become an effective teacher.
Reflect on your teaching skills

Think about the skills and qualities needed to be an effective teacher and how your own experiences have helped you to develop these. Again, use examples from your degree and recent work experience.

Don't forget...

If you don't live in the UK currently, explain why you want to study in the UK and, if relevant, provide evidence that your language skills are sufficient to complete the training programme.

Explain anything not made clear elsewhere on the application, such as reasons for restricted geographical mobility, or gaps in your education or working life.

Tips for writing and checking your personal statement:

- Give yourself enough time to write a few drafts.
- Keep it simple and natural in style.
- Personalise your statement by writing in the first person, using 'me', 'I' and 'my'.
- Use action verbs such as 'coordinated', 'established' and 'managed'.
- Provide evidence of your motivation, experiences and qualifications as well as your understanding of teacher training and the role of a teacher.
- As the word count is limited, make sure each sentence contributes something useful.
- Your personal statement should reflect the route/s you have applied for.
- Write your draft personal statement using Word, so you can check it for spelling and grammatical errors and avoid being timed out on the website. When you copy and paste it into the application allow time for any editing needed to fit the online format.
- Show your personal statement to a careers adviser or tutor for feedback.
- Print out a copy of your application, particularly the personal statement, before sending it so that you can remind yourself of the content when going for interviews.
- Make sure the personal statement is all your own work, as all statements are put through the UCAS Teacher Training Similarity Detection Service.

PGCE/PGDE personal statements – some useful information from admissions tutors

Admissions tutors will look for the following key areas in making their decision:

Personal statements must be well presented, with no spelling or grammatical errors. In particular, applicants should think about answering the following questions:

- Why teaching?
- **Why** this particular age range? (Key stage) – training providers are unlikely to offer an interview if an applicant has both a primary and secondary course choices on their application form!

- **Why** this/these subjects? – need to demonstrate a love of subject and want to learn even more about it.

**Experience** is vital! But do bear in mind that the form is not a CV – it should reflect on an applicant’s experience and not simply list it! (“I did X, Y and Z”… great – but what did you learn from it and get out of it?)

**Qualifications** – not necessarily as important as people imagine because enthusiasm and experience are what really matters; however applicants must meet the minimum entry requirements – check with admissions tutors as these can vary. It should be noted that a 2.2 class degree may be considered by tutors on courses in shortage subjects BUT Ofsted look at the proportions of trainees with 1st and 2.1 class degrees so taking trainees with a 2.2 is often discouraged.

**Reference** – check that a referee is available and prepared to write a reference in the prescribed timescale. If they don’t really know you then go and see them, tell them about yourself, give them a CV etc!

**Personal statement examples**

**Personal statement from a successful applicant to ITT (English)**

I have always enjoyed being part of a learning environment, and am eager to develop my own learning and that of others. I gain great satisfaction from sharing my knowledge and experience, and wish to pass on my enthusiasm for English to children and nurture their creativity in a stimulating and imaginative environment.

English was always my favourite subject at school and I chose a degree course that covered all its aspects. Due to my love of both the study of literature and creative writing I studied poetry, prose and drama from their early beginnings to the present day, and took courses on linguistics and critical theory. I loved the language analysis in the TESOL module, relished the challenge of writing my dissertation, and enjoyed extending my knowledge of media studies. I feel that the broad nature of my degree provides an ideal background for teaching English at secondary level.

The time I spent working at my local primary school with a year 6 pupil with special educational needs was very rewarding, and has given me some great insight into the school system and the teaching profession. Despite difficulties with literacy my pupil was a highly creative and spontaneous ‘poet’, and I really enjoyed encouraging his imagination. I also taught clarinet to younger pupils and would be keen to put my knowledge of music, arts and crafts to use in extra-curricular activities.

Further school experience has been arranged. In March, I will spend a day observing classes in a local secondary school, and in May I am returning to my primary school to deliver a talk to year 6 pupils about my recent Earthwatch expedition, and to assist...
with lessons. I am also in the process of arranging voluntary work teaching basic skills to teenagers at Heeley City Farm in Suffolk.

Through my other work experience I have also developed skills that will be useful for teaching. I have been responsible for and enjoyed the training and supervision of other staff. In my summer job at a factory I trained a woman from the Philippines, overcoming language and cultural differences. In my current role I have trained and audited numerous staff members in a variety of tasks. As a deputy team leader I am responsible for planning and allocating tasks, and assessing quality and efficiency. I hold team meetings and maintain order within a diverse group of people. I am being trained to have one to one meetings with team members to discuss performance, and will be taking up this duty very soon. My organisational and motivational skills have been greatly enhanced since taking this job.

Ultimately, I feel that my educational background and experiences have equipped me with the necessary patience, perseverance and enthusiasm required to become an effective and inspirational teacher.

**Personal Statement for PGDE Application**

Below is a ‘typical’ personal statement for teacher training. There is considerable room for improvement and the notes in red, referring to the red numbers in the statement, give advice and suggestions of how to do that.

I am applying for the PGDE course because I have always wanted to be a teacher. I really like working with children and I believe that I have the skills and personal qualities that are suitable. I have a strong belief in the importance of education and I feel that I can instil my enthusiasm in others. 1 During my university course I have had a passion for my subject and I now have a great desire to pass it on to young people. 2

At school I volunteered as a buddy, helping less able pupils with their reading on a one-to-one basis and more recently I have spent one afternoon each week in Strathclyde School offering me the opportunity to obtain an excellent understanding of the classroom environment. I have seen how children learn and been greatly inspired by the skills of the teacher and the role of helping children to develop their full potential. 3

For many years I have helped at a local youth group and this has involved me in a wide range of activities such as sports, outings, crafts and discussion groups and I have developed many of the skills for being a good teacher – such as communication, leadership and organisation. 4

I am a confident and friendly person with excellent communication skills developed at university through making presentations and writing essays. Involvement in a local drama group has given me the opportunity to work with a wide range of people and organise many events and this has further developed my communication skills. 5
1. It is important to have a strong opening statement that makes a real impact. Avoid clichéd phrases such as ‘I have always wanted to be a teacher’ and philosophical statements about the value of education. Think deeply about what attracts you to teaching – this is a tough career and you will need much more than a love of children and belief in education.

2. Having a real interest in your subject is great – and essential if you wish to teach it at secondary level. You will have a positive effect on the selector if you explain exactly what it is you love about it and how your experiences fit the school curriculum. After all, you will not be passing on university level physics to second (or even 6th) year pupils! For example: ‘I am often fascinated by how physics relates to day-to-day things in life such as watching television, as well as immensely complex developments such as space travel, and what we learn from that. In addition to teaching the subject matter, I would strive to have my pupils understand the relevance.’

3. Work experience in a school setting is a huge advantage to your application. However, don’t exaggerate! It is extremely unlikely that an excellent understanding can be developed in a few afternoons, but do write about what the experience has actually offered – for example, an insight into the curriculum, an appreciation of the amount of time a teacher must take to prepare thoroughly, some ideas for dealing with indiscipline, an insight into the use of technology etc.

4. This is just far too general. It leaves the selector to do all the thinking about the learning these activities have provided and how they relate to teaching. This paragraph needs much more insight into what the applicant means by communication skills, leadership and organisation and, more specifically, how these relate to teaching. For example: ‘I know that teachers must be able to communicate very clearly – to give instructions, to give understandable explanations and illustrations, and to use language that suits the age and ability of the class. In my youth work I have had to learn to do this so that ………………’

5. This is an opportunity to develop further, rather than repeat. The applicant could have made more of the organisation of events, noting the ability to plan ahead, problem solve and multi-task, and relate these to the need for forward lesson planning and being able to cope with the everyday classroom happenings. In place of communication, the applicant could have used ‘interpersonal’ skills and talked about understanding that teaching is a people job, from having excellent relationships with the class to a solid working relationship with fellow teachers, and a professional relationship with parents. It was also a great opportunity to say that s/he would use their drama interests in activities such as school shows.

6. And don’t forget that the statement allows for 47 lines. Use them all well. The statement above is too short.

7. And finally, don’t be tempted to copy the above sentences! If someone else does this and so do you, the selector may find you out.
Once you have a good first draft it is a good idea to ask a careers adviser to look over it. Does it read well? Does it really describe you as a person, or does it simply list things you have done? Is your interest and suitability to teaching obvious?