

The Swaminarayan

Education is that which liberates

Dear Parents, Guardians, Pupils and Friends,

**I am afraid this week's Swaminarayan is all about
Theme for the week**

The theme for next week is "Unity". I have written about it at the back of the newsletter.

Prep Prize Day.

Parents are reminded that the whole school will close at 1pm tomorrow for the Prep Prize Day in the evening.

Writing a Competitive Personal Statements by C Wills

Our L6 pupils will soon be writing their personal statements for University Application so I thought I include some much needed guidance on how best to write a personal statement that will stand out.

This is the part of applying that causes most stress. It doesn't have to be.

What is it?

- A statement of approximately 47 lines or 400 characters about your academic/personal interests and achievements.
- A good personal statement offers more than this (see below!)
- Everyone has to write one
- It is your chance to distinguish yourself from other candidates
- It is read by admissions tutors.

How is it used?

- The PS is the final detail – alongside your UCAS form and my reference - in the profile of your application.
- In many cases, it will *not be read* by admissions tutors: if your reference is glowing with praise and your results and predicted grades outstanding, then admissions tutors may ignore it entirely or only glance at it to check if you are able to write good English. Some universities – Oxbridge in particular - only use PS as a starting point for discussion in interviews and remember, the majority of you will not need to attend interviews.
- *The PS is however, vitally important* because - if your application is anything less than a shoe-in - a good one will give you the edge over your competitors.
- It allows admissions tutors to decide which candidates will be accepted when there is competition for a limited number of places.

Background details

- One PS must cover all choices.

- Cannot use bold/italic or underlined characters
- No embedded hyperlinks possible
- 'Apply' does not have a spell or grammar check.
- It should be a clear, concise, precise and creditable prose document written in plain English, separated into paragraphs. It should have a strong opening and closing.

Apart from providing a picture of your academic/personal interests and achievements what should a PS provide?

- A good PS shows that you are a *reflective thinker*, it shows that in preparing your PS you have engaged in *research*, it shows that you *have made your choices wisely*, it demonstrates that you can provide and handle *detail and supporting evidence*, it also demonstrates that you have *critical engagement* with your chosen subject together with *curiosity and enthusiasm*. All of these qualities are – of course – highly desirable in a university student. Admissions' tutors will 'read between the lines' to discover your academic ability and potential.

What to avoid

- Spelling and grammar mistakes. I shall be correcting these, but I won't be impressed with your first draft if it is packed with errors. I may send it back and that will waste time
- Poor structure – no paragraphing, no beginning/middle/end.
- Poor vocabulary/repetition of words/phrases.
- Sentences too elementary *or too complex*.
- Broad statements – too general - no specifics.
- Too much emphasis on hobbies with no links to course.
- No development/expansion of relevant points.
- No evidence in interests outside the school curriculum.

What to include

Universities and colleges look for evidence of the following:

- Evidence of well-researched, informed, sensible choices.
- Subject enthusiasm/commitment/critical engagement.
- Understanding of the chosen course.
- Reflective thinking skills.
- Ability to work out what is most important in an application.
- Appropriate details and supporting evidence.
- Details of what you enjoy/get out of your present studies.
- Interest and study beyond the curriculum.
- *Relevant* work experience.
- Future aspirations or direction.
- Personal qualities (especially important for vocational courses such as medicine)
- *Relevant* hobbies and interests.

How to begin

By now, you will already have some idea of what to and what not to include in your PS, but how do you actually start?

- Do not start with 'From a young age, I have always been interested in ----' because this is the most common opening sentence used by applicants in the UK!
- An opening sentence has to grab the interest of the admissions tutor. If you begin with 'From a young age---' you will send him to sleep because he will certainly have just read the very same phrase 100 times already!
- Compare the following openings:

a) *'From a young age, I have always wanted to be a teacher ---'*

b) *'Making a rocket style engine from a bottle of lemonade, working with class mates to create a human model of the solar system, explaining in written reports what we had learned: these were the classes that inspired a passion for learning in me and later, a desire to pass on that passion to others'*

- Which opening is more likely to send the reader into the arms of Morpheus? The first, of course. The second example has all the characteristics of a strong opening: it is *original*, it *provokes questions* – what kind of engine can you make from a lemonade bottle? What exactly is a 'human model' of the solar system? it shows that the candidate has done *research* into the qualities required of a student teacher. If you compare opening sentence b) with the list of points in 'What to include' above, you will notice that it already fills a number of the desirable characteristics.

How to continue

If you have been reading this document carefully, you will realise that it would be wrong of me to write out a step by step guide of 'how to write a PS'; this is because as far as possible it has to be your own work. It has to convey your own personality and this cannot be achieved by following a template. Nevertheless, there are clues which can certainly help. Take a look at these details:

Things you should include:

- Why have you chosen the course? You should deal with both the attractions of the subject itself and the attractions of studying this subject at this particular university.
- Relevant information about current studies.
- Outline of academic skills.
- Reading on the subject outside of set texts.
- Experience relevant to chosen subject.

Things you might want to include:

- Personal qualities gained through experience/studies.
- Relevant extra-curricular interests, hobbies and activities.
- Personal achievements.
- Career plans.

Of course, as you will no doubt discover, the internet is infested with advice on how to write a PS and examples of best practice. Look at these by all means, but be sure that they meet the criteria I have outlined here.

How to end

You need to end firmly. Again, compare these two endings:

a) *I am looking forward to becoming a developmental psychologist.*

b) *I am passionate about working with young children in the future and therefore highly determined to make the most of my degree and achieve my ambition to become a developmental psychologist.*

The second of course, is the stronger ending. Again, check it against the list of what to include and you will quickly see why.

Final details

- Plain English is best. Admissions tutors will not be impressed by an abstract, recondite vocabulary employed in convoluted, complex sentences which are difficult to read. They want clarity above all. Remember that admissions tutors will skim through your PS, they will not study it in detail.
- One way to ensure clarity is to read your PS out aloud.
- Always be specific, avoid generalities.
- Support everything you say with evidence.
- Submit your statements to the 'so what?' test. If there is no answer to this question – remove the statement!

Be a team player - Unity

Think

If you are a member of a sports team you will know that the success of the team depends on the trust and support you give to each other. Your school orchestra is an ensemble of many different instruments; each produces its own beautiful sound, yet left to play on their own, they will sound like a disjointed cacophony of tunes that will not be at all pleasing to the ear. It requires a conductor to bring everyone together at just the right time and produce music that you will want to listen to. This is also true for a pop group, where the singer must sing in harmony with the beat of the drums and guitars to produce music that you will want to buy. One raindrop alone can do little harm, but when they all come together and fall relentlessly they send a torrent that will break the banks of rivers and tear down everything in their path. In much the same way, it only takes a small group of thoughtful and committed people to change the world.

Feel

If you are going to succeed in your life you will need the help and support of everyone around you. Yet before they can help you, they will need to know that you are willing to participate in the game. You cannot be a bystander if you want your life to mean something. You will need to join a team who thinks like you and wants the same things. Work with them in mutual support and learn from each other, show gratitude when it is due, forgive each other when mistakes are made and make sure that they do not happen again.

Do

You are a member of the human race and you are here to contribute to the common good of mankind, something which you will not be able to do alone. The success of a company is the result of the combined efforts of all employees, and the success of a football team is the result of all the players fulfilling their role, helping and supporting each other and trusting each other when passing the ball. When they come together the passing is so fluid, the movements so graceful and the final goal inevitable. The combined effort of many brains is more powerful than the brain of a single person, so learn to be a team player. The rise to your own success will be so much easier.

Yours sincerely,

Nilesh Manani