Insider’s Guide to Dentistry
UCAS Personal Statements & UKCAT

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a) **Advice about writing a personal statement from the drafting stages to how it was constructed.**

**Author: Akhila Kotta**

**Writing the personal statement**
I started drafting mine in July and went through several versions until I was happy. I changed a couple of words even just before it was submitted. The earlier you start though the better as it can be changed around and altered with plenty of time to make sure you say everything you want.

**Construction of personal statement**
The first paragraph I focused on was what made me interested in dentistry and what I found so fascinating, and why I wanted to be a part of it.
The second paragraph I talked about what I had seen, how this impacted the patient’s life and why I appreciated it so much and how I had personally felt that dental treatment had made a difference to me, as I had braces so I could empathise with the patients.
The third paragraph was about my extra curricular activities, sports, teams, hobbies, interests, fundraising, how I’ve taken part in school activities and help enrich the school community etc. I then related this all back to how it ties in with dentistry where you are an integral part of the community and why I found this important.
The final paragraph was just a summary of why I thought I would be the best candidate for a place in dental school and how well I was suited for it.

**Author: Alia Rizvi**

Personal Statement is another key factor in UCAS applications, even more so now as everyone is achieving high grades.

When you start your personal statement, make sure it is structured well. This can be done by creating an essay plan and bullet point the main headings and write down what you want to discuss under each of those headings. I started mine with my reasons for choosing dentistry as a career, moving onto work experience and then my extracurricular activities and finally why I would be the perfect choice for the dental school I was applying to.

More hints:
- Try to relate your work experience to what you learned about dentistry and why it strengthened your resolve to be a dentist.
- Get a variety of people to read through your statement
- Try to show you have other interests apart from dentistry
- Do NOT lie about any of your interests, or you might get a nasty surprise if your interviewer happens to have a common interest in a particular subject.
- Always try and back up your statements e.g. if you say you are a good leader, give an example about have you done where you have been a team leader and how this is important in dentistry.
The personal statement for your UCAS application may be one of the most important documents you ever write. You have the chance to make it captivating and uplifting. Rather than having it binned due to its dullness, craft a statement that instantly persuades the admissions panel to select you. If your academic record is not so strong, your personal statement may need to be top notch in order to compensate.

Treat the statement like one of those important GCSE English essays you wrote. It must be formal, structured and organised, with a good flow. Each paragraph should have a particular theme. There must be no spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors; it must be perfect.

Getting started is often the most difficult part! Whatever you do, do not leave it until the last minute. Starting it a few months in advance will enable you to document your ideas, where you can continually supplement these and edit them. This will help boost its overall potential.

My personal statement was drafted during the summer months before the autumn deadline. By this time, all my work experience had been completed and I could reflect on everything I had achieved and experienced in the past few years. Do not be afraid to start it. It has to be done and no matter how bad it may initially read, it is important to form the preliminary framework.

My first paragraph focused on my reasons to pursue dentistry. This formulated the second paragraph, which discussed areas of my dental work experience. Hereafter, there needed to be discussion of me, as a person. Hence, a summary of my community activities and areas of responsibility followed, which also incorporated my personal skills and attributes. This prepared the subsequent paragraph which focused on hobbies, sporting, and team activities. The final paragraph summarised why I should be selected as a potential dental student. It was finalised by early-September.

Your personal statement will encounter many cyclical changes, thus there may be many subsequent drafts. Ask numerous people to read it such as a dentist, dental student, parent and if possible, an English teacher. Beware of your fellow classmates or colleagues that are applying for dentistry, as this is a very competitive process. Appreciate everyone’s views and do not be disheartened by negative comments.

You may come across examples of personal statements found on the Internet, as well as in books. You may feel inclined to cut-and-copy or paraphrase their ideas. However the golden rule is to never replicate anyone’s personal statement, yet anyone’s work under any circumstance. Not only is this plagiarism but it is also deemed unethical.

UCAS historically archives each and every personal statement, thus, the organisation’s employees are able to utilise plagiarism detection devices on candidates’ personal statements. This method is able to identify the smallest of phrases such as: “...a fascination for how the human body works,” which was found in over 370 personal statements, as reported in the media. UCAS will alert the university’s admissions department about the plagiarism, which will most certainly result in rejection.
As there are a limited number of lines available on the form, ensure that the statement is concise and contains the most important facts you wish the admissions panel to know. If there are certain issues with your application, such that you have extenuating circumstances or gaps in your education, you may need to explain these carefully in your statement. You must be able to fully justify what you have written.

The interviewers, barring The Peninsula Dental School will most definitely have a copy of your application at hand, with highlighted segments of the personal statement to focus their questioning.

Author: Helen Moynihan

The best thing you can do is start writing your personal statement as early as possible. I started mine just before the end of the summer term in year 12. This way you have plenty of time to draft and re-draft to get it perfect. It’s a really good idea to get as many people as possible to read through it and offer their input (my careers advisor was really helpful, but you can also ask your form tutor or any of your subject teachers who hopefully will be willing to help).

I tried to divide my personal statement up into different sections so there was some structure. I ordered it like this:

1. General overview about why I wanted to study dentistry (trying to sound as enthusiastic as possible!)
2. Academic achievements
3. Personal qualities that I thought were applicable
4. Extra-curricular activities

Save each draft separately as you go along, that way you can change things back if you decide you liked a previous draft better. I wrote my first draft without really thinking about the length, and then cut it down, making it more and more concise each time until it was the correct length. It does take time to get it right but it’s definitely worth it – the admissions tutors have hundreds to read through, so the more interesting you make yours the more likely they will invite you for an interview.

b) Some successful personal statements

Author: Bhaven Modha

I am inspired with how dentists contribute a great deal to the promotion of good oral health in the community, possessing high levels of expertise and skill. I wish to become part of this profession to unite my caring nature for people with my deep interest in science, art and the human body. Whilst I remain determined to enter the field of dentistry, my time spent studying to date has certainly proved to be invaluable. Not only has optometry trained me to become a healthcare professional, it
has allowed me to interact with the public, grasp core fundamental theory, enhance practical and investigative skills but most importantly, provide patients with care.

My degree has led my development into a professional, responsible and compassionate individual, with excellent time management, organisation and communication skills. From direct observations, I can say that the greatest appeal of dentistry for me is the highly analytical and artistically skilled work involved, as well as its endless avenues. Watching practitioners perform common procedures has taught me a great deal about oral anatomy, technicalities of treatments, as well as the profession in general. During a surgical implants procedure, it was impressive to see how the dentist and dental nurse had to work together to reassure the patient. I was able to appreciate how intricacy, attention to detail and manual dexterity are vital, as is good communication. I have also observed the work of orthodontists and dental technicians, and assisted a dental hygienist. It has been fascinating to observe consultations in the oral-maxillofacial surgery department of a local hospital. There were several intriguing cases including a patient with tongue cancer and patients presenting with oral lesions such as leukoplakias. I have learnt that many members of the dental team play an integral role in dentistry, and these experiences have made me even more eager to become a dentist.

Each week, I have been providing company to an elderly man who is housebound and almost blind as part of voluntary work with Age Concern. It was rewarding to learn that a form I had completed on his behalf secured him a motility buggy. I also take part in the charity World Vision’s annual Orange Appeal day, where we attempt sponsored fasts to help raise money for the third world. During my time as a volunteer hospital ward assistant, I have been more than willing to run errands for patients and nurses. It has been worthwhile to see the patients’ spirits lifted as a result of my friendliness and enthusiasm. I also help out regularly at a Hindu temple where I assisted in catering for worshippers at a religious festival. Teamwork was essential as were key listening and interpersonal skills.

I recognise the need of a healthy lifestyle to counterbalance my programme of study. During the week I partake in sports such as badminton and tennis and go swimming. Football and basketball have allowed me to become more confident in leading a team, offering support to others and being decisive in pressurised situations. I also enjoy using my hands creatively in art and design, and in DIY activities. These strengthen my patience and ability to solve problems and think logically. Overall, through academic study, independent research and practical observation I have realised the commitment and motivation it takes to become a dentist and I am truly dedicated. From my past and current experiences I have developed attributes that I am sure would serve me well on the dental course and beyond. By entering dentistry I understand I will need to perform at the highest of standards to give patients the best possible care. This is a challenge I am prepared to take and relish the chance of becoming part of such an advancing and worthwhile profession.

Author: Helen Moynihan

Dentistry is not just about teeth, dentists are carers and they are artists; they are teachers as well as enthusiastic learners who are continually applying their knowledge in real life situations. I want to be
a dentist because I know I will enjoy the mix of practical and intellectual challenges it will open up for me and I am eager to embark on a degree that will encompass all that I am passionate about.

I am fascinated by science and the way that it impacts on every aspect of our lives today. I am intrigued by the biology of the human body and particularly enjoy fields where chemistry and biology overlap (such as my A-level topics ‘What’s In a Medicine?’ ‘Biological Molecules’ and ‘Engineering Proteins’) and I look at the world around me with curiosity and wonder. My enthusiasm for sciences is evidenced by achieving 100% in four AS modules; I was also awarded a Silver Certificate in the Intermediate Maths Challenge and I received the school Chemistry Prize for achievement. I am a diligent and determined student and believe my ambitions can be fulfilled by a career in dentistry.

I have been lucky to observe three GDPs, a hygienist, a periodontist and two specialist dentists, who helped me to gain a real insight into the exciting prospects of the career and reinforced my desire to become a dentist. I observed procedures including root canal treatments, extractions, tooth implants and orthodontic treatment. Watching surgery was fascinating and I was inspired by the way simple operations can relieve pain and trauma. I noted the daily challenges that dentists face, from angry patients to complications in surgery, but I realised how challenges add to the excitement of the job. Being in the surgeries gave me a taster of the breadth of knowledge and skills that a dentist requires and made me eager to learn more. (As a result, I borrowed several BDA magazines, which I found very insightful.)

I recognise the importance of team work and leadership. My work experience employer praised my ‘confident, pleasant demeanour, attention to detail and mature attitude’. I have built a good rapport with younger students both at school, through my work as a Senior Prefect and maths tutor for years 7 -11, and outside of school as a Kumon teaching assistant. I have discovered that a calm tone, gentle manner and clear, simple explanations can put anxious children at ease. Last year I led a group of my peers in an Engineering Education Scheme Project, which gave me the opportunity to apply my scientific knowledge in addressing a global issue - Clean Coal Technology. I thoroughly enjoyed guiding my team through a long-term project, and the experience tested my resourcefulness, problem solving and time management skills. I received a prestigious Platinum Crest Award as well as 15 CATS points for leading the team.

I strive to gain success in all that I do and feel I strike the balance between my academic studies and extracurricular activities. As a keen musician and through hours of practice, I have attained distinctions in flute and saxophone examinations as well as in the theory of music. I am an enthusiastic artist and love painting as a creative outlet; I developed my manual dexterity in this way and will apply my patience, steady hand and perfectionist nature to the practical side of dentistry. I enjoy being part of a 'Circle of Support' for a Down’s syndrome teenager in my spare time; I feel I have gained a lot from this. In doing volunteer work I received a 'Millennium Volunteers' certificate for 75 hours community service. My involvement in the 2007 Chinese Summer School in Shanghai gave me the opportunity to expand my communication skills as I learned Mandarin to 'Breakthrough
GCSE standard and developed my language skills further by making friends with several Chinese students.

I know I have the potential in terms of personal qualities and skills to be a successful dentist. I feel strongly drawn to dentistry and the career opportunities it can open up for me.

Author: Nausheen Siddiqui

The intricate work of my orthodontist in correcting my teeth gave me a new-found confidence and I realised the positive impact a dentist has on a person's life. This inspired me to look further into the field. I spent a week with an orthodontist and considerable time in various other dental subspecialties. The more work experience I gained, the more convinced I became to pursue it as a career. Dentistry would be the ideal way to combine my enthusiasm for science with my desire to work with patients, within a team and doing precise manual work.

My extensive work placements have given me an insight into the diverse areas of Dentistry. Through two weeks at a private practice and regular visits to an NHS surgery, I have seen a wide variety of restorative dentistry, for example, bridges and crowns, and also the work of a hygienist. I was impressed by the immediate impact dental treatment can have on a patient, for example, in relieving pain through fillings and extractions. I realised the importance of financial and time management when running a practice, concepts I have studied in Economics and Business A level. At the Dental Hospital I saw paediatric dentistry and oral surgery. I shadowed a dentist in a community practice, who treated children and adults with special needs. This taught me the importance of communication when dealing with such patients, as a primary focus was to treat people's psychological needs. I have also seen the treatment performed by an Implantologist and Endodontist. All of these placements emphasised the diverse range of people and demands which a dentist faces, in different practice environments, and the need for treatment plans to be tailored for each individual. Working with a dental technician enabled me to understand the importance of teamwork in order to achieve the best results for the patient and I was complimented on my ability to wax up a denture.

I attended a course at UCL covering areas such as maxillofacial surgery, dental pathology and dental research. I also did medical work experience, where I again enjoyed the patient contact, and it reinforced the importance of knowing about certain medical conditions as a dentist, such as oral cancer. Reading the BDJ has broadened my knowledge and emphasised the importance of keeping up-to-date with professional developments.

Helping elderly people in a home for 6 months, and tutoring a young girl from a local primary school weekly, improved my communication skills and helped me to show compassion. It was rewarding to see her blossom over the year, academically and socially, and it taught me to be patient and to persevere.
My Community Sports Leadership Award and being selected as a form prefect enhanced my leadership skills, as I had to deal with large groups of people.

Working with two of my peers to achieve a distinction in grade 8 Speech and Drama stressed the importance of co-operation to achieve success and has allowed me to be creative.

My mind has been opened to world affairs through my involvement in Model United Nations. This has increased my confidence in public speaking, which has come in useful for my role in the Student Council. I have also written articles for the science section of the school magazine.

I have organised events for fundraising and raising awareness for charities such as Genesis, Amnesty International and Human Appeal International. I helped to promote a charity dinner for health professionals and collected redundant dental and medical equipment for developing countries. To help me relax I regularly play tennis and I enjoy sewing, which improves my manual dexterity. Dissecting a rat at Dissection Club also requires great technical precision.

I am enthusiastic and determined, and I am optimistic that I have the qualities to make a good dentist. I would feel privileged to be given the opportunity to fulfil my ambition in this stimulating and rewarding profession and I am ready for the challenges that await me.

c) UKCAT scores, advice on how to prepare for it & useful tips.

Author: Akhila Kotta

My UKCAT score was 580 (average was 600). The preparation was the hardest part. I bought a few books and did the online tutorials. The best thing to do is to work through worked examples and time yourself, as I found time the hardest part of the UKCAT, especially in the maths section. Most importantly don’t stress. Going into the exam stress will prove worse because you have what seems like an unlimited amount of questions to answer and only a short amount of time to do them in, going in stressed will cost you marks that you could have easily avoided missing out on.

Author: Bhaven Modha

With the growing increase in medical and dental applicants, certain universities are utilising the UKCAT examination as an additional assessment tool in selecting applicants for interview. If your academic results are average, you may need to aim high in this test. Regardless of how good your academic background is and how powerful your personal statement may be, certain universities such as Queen Mary University of London have cut-off points. The applicant’s result must reach a certain threshold in order for their UCAS application to be fully assessed.
I would advise getting a book with example questions for the UKCAT. It is the style of question that you need to get your head around, and once you’ve got used to answering them they become much easier. That said, when it came to the actual test, I found the time limit very off-putting and seem to remember getting quite flustered and guessing a lot of them. I think my score was in the high 600s and I got four interviews and four offers.
d) Additional advice

Author: Bhaven Modha

GAMSAT

Up until 2008 entry, The Peninsula Dental School mandatorily required all of its applicants to sit an examination known as The GAMSAT (The Graduate Australian Medical Admissions Test) which is held in September of each year. At the time I had applied, the threshold mark to achieve an interview was a generous 45. However, with increasing applications, the expected score is liable to increase and you must make enquiries with the dental school. The examination tests scientific reasoning, and problem solving skills, as well as the ability to communicate written work coherently. More information can be found on the website: www.gamsatuk.org.

I prepared for this exam during the summer months, using preparatory booklets that I had purchased from UCAS: www.ucasbooks.co.uk/acatalog/GAMSAT_Preparation_Material.html These are highly recommendable mock exams, where you can test yourself under examination conditions; it would be important to treat these like the actual assessment.

During my research, I found a helpful organisation known as Des O’Neill’s GAMSAT Preparation: www.comptext.com.au/index2.html They have an array of services to assist you in preparation. I enlisted their “Free Mail Out” service, where I received a Prognostic Preparatory Test of 50 multiple-choice questions, and a document on essay writing. I found these very informative and helpful. A lot of the GAMSAT material encompasses the A-Level syllabuses in Biology, Chemistry and Physics, thus I borrowed relevant A-Level study guides from a local library. GCSE Mathematics skills are required, particularly algebraic. For the comprehension, verbal reasoning and essay writing preparation, I found my old GCSE English textbooks to be more than helpful. Additionally, you may wish to invest in a GAMSAT study course, which may be as part of a taught class or through self-study. GRADMED is an organisation which operates such courses: www.gamsat.co.uk and several more companies and opportunities are available.

The format of this examination includes Section I, which is a multiple choice paper (MCQ), assessing verbal reasoning and comprehension. However, some of the prose and poetry can be very confusing. Tackle this logically and look for keywords and key themes; read questions carefully. Section II involves writing two well argued essays which are well-balanced and articulated. You are given a selection of philosophical quotes, some which have been made by historical persons. Consequently, you are expected to write an essay based on one quote, and a second essay centred on another. Finally, Section III, which is the lengthiest of all, was an MCQ paper containing scientific reasoning questions. The majority of questions focused on organic chemistry.
For 2009 entry, the dental school’s admission requirements were altered so that The GAMSAT examination is now only required for those applicants, such as certain healthcare professionals who do not hold a degree.

**Author: Helen Moynihan**
- Keep calm during the test. Remember that it’s not the most important part of your application.
- There isn’t really any way you can “revise” for the UKCAT. You should try to do as much practice as possible, using books as well as the online example questions e.g. Ace Medicine’s question bank.

**Author: Nausheen Siddiqui**
- If you don’t do so well in the UKCAT, consider applying to more universities which do not look at it e.g. Leeds.
- There is a fifth section at the end which does not contribute towards your score but just describes you’re personality from the way in which you have answered the questions.
- Do practised timed questions online and from practice books so you know what to expect.
- Do not worry if you are unable to complete all questions in the time frame, many students do not and still get a good score- I don’t think you are expected to be able to finish comfortably.
Advice for writing the personal statement.

- Allow yourself lots of time to draft and re-draft.
- Keep coming back to it at different times over the next few days and weeks to see how it reads after time has passed – what made sense at the time now may not!
- Be honest and at times slightly emotive, this makes you a person not another name on a list.
- Never say ‘I think’, ‘I believe’ etc. Always say ‘I am’ and ‘I do’ etc.
- Get several other people to read it.
- Plan the structure and link in strengths with attributes.
- Every sentence should make a point.
- BE SUCCINCT/CONCISE!

I used only about half the word count allowed and in so doing it was punctual and only stated what was necessary.

My personal statement

The focus of my career has always been to care for people within the health care setting as well as to attain the highest level of academic qualifications and medical skills. Having achieved a degree in physiotherapy, which has given me great pleasure and a strong sense of achievement, I now wish to pursue a career in Dentistry. With over a thousand hours spent on clinical placement in many hospitals, I feel confident when managing patients in challenging situations. My communication skills are established and effective due to the diverse socio-economic and multicultural population of East London where I have worked. Having experienced working within large multi-disciplinary teams I believe that co-ordinating between various health professionals is a skill which comes naturally to me. However, I see the advantages of working within a small team where gaining a patient’s trust is paramount to alleviating symptoms and making a difference to the patient’s life. During the last five years I have combined further education and part time work with a full time commitment to the sport of eventing, which is a real passion in my life. Caring for and managing the fitness of competition horses requires dedication, compassion and a calm personality, qualities which are also vital within the healthcare profession. I consider the qualities of loyalty, sensitivity and reliability to be essential and wish to bring these, as well as a high level of medical expertise, into my everyday professional life.
I am aware that patient education is vital to the prevention of many health problems and oral health care is paramount to the prevention of gingival and periodontal disease. Through local contacts I am only too aware of the oral health care problems within my local community in the South West. There are many areas of low socio-economic status in Britain and the links between this and poor health care clearly indicate the need for general dental practitioners to be working within the local community.

This is where I wish to be, working in my local area, gaining the trust of patients and contributing to solving these problems. General dental practitioners are often the first to notice the signs of cancer as they can be the most regularly attended health care practitioner. Whether dental treatment is required or not, dentists play a vital role in referring on to other health care professionals. Major problems such as alcoholism and smoking can be reduced or ceased by advice and education that is initiated by dentists.

Ultimately, my aim is to develop a good rapport with all my patients, and through education I would like to encourage self-empowerment, giving patients a feeling of control over their own health. Having spent a considerable amount of time work shadowing both at local dental practices and within dental schools at undergraduate level, I now know that this is the career for me. I am spending the forthcoming year working in an opticians and pharmacy as well as work shadowing in a local dental practice one day per week. I also spend time doing voluntary work in both local community projects and within medical research clinics. Combining these learning experiences with the skills I have obtained during my physiotherapy degree has provided a sound basis on which to develop new skills and enable me to become a successful dentist.

**UKCAT**

There are certain forums on-line which give you an idea of how the questions are laid out so that you do not waste any time getting to understand the format (time is pretty tight in the UKCAT). I am sure you will do well if you are a quick thinker, bright, and able to make decisions. (Note – these attributes are necessary for this course!)

**My scores**
- Verbal Reasoning 570
- Quantitative Reasoning 630
- Abstract Reasoning 600
- Decision Analysis 710

Additional advice

I would have looked into the way the courses are run initially. For example, as I am a graduate entry, the Queen Mary’s university gives you certain key modules from the year one and year two syllabuses, then in your year two you join the other students that are year three. Whereas at Kings University you start a month ahead of the year, do an intensive catch up of key lectures.
from year one modules, then you join the year twos as term starts. Peninsula obviously only takes on graduate entries so you all start as normal and there is no year swapping!

Author: Sajedah Shubib

Personal statement

I started mine in the beginning of September, this is a little late for an early candidate, but it’s because I’m a person that needs the pressure to get the job done, and I did. I drafted it probably 8 or more times. The more you draft the better, till you reach near perfection and self satisfaction. Advice I would give is; get as much feedback from different people at each stage of writing it up. Get a teacher or career advisor to have initial input on your content, then maybe a dental student, and then an English teacher or a friend who’s good with their English to work your grammar, vocabulary and wording.

Be organised.

I started by writing bullet points of everything I had to say. I kept adding till I had sufficient information. Then I set a format. I personally started off with why dentistry, then work experience, and how it helped me chose dentistry, as well as what it taught me, then about me and what makes me suitable for such career.

I was straight to the point and descriptive enough without being boring. One last thing I would say about writing your personal statement is to let your personality come across throughout it. Never make anything up… because if you do you will pay for it (most likely) and it’ll be embarrassing!

Advice: Know your personal statement inside and out, you may well be asked about some of the things you mentioned in it.

Author: Vinay Mistry

Drafting a personal statement is never easy; it is a continuous, arduous job that is essential not only in applying for dentistry, but also for any course that a university offers. Certainly write the first draft of your personal statement in the summer holidays before applying in the forthcoming October. The crucial factor is to constantly evaluate and rewrite your drafts, and attain the opinions of as many different people as possible – preferably those with experience of personal statements, and also those within the profession.

The method of construction was originally based on a previous student’s personal statement for dentistry (with his permission), in which I deciphered the structure and began to assemble my
Confidence drives those who wish to succeed. As a young man who wore Hawley wire retainers and fixed braces, I can recognize the change in a person’s confidence due to an improvement in their mouth’s aesthetic appearance. Having gained immeasurably from this myself, I wish to acquire the necessary skills to help other people by assisting them in attaining the confidence they may sometimes lack, and provide the opportunity for an improvement in their lives. This cosmetic experience initiated my interest in Dentistry, prompting me to learn more.

During the summer of 2007 I spent three weeks shadowing a range of dentists in a number of surgeries and practices, which helped greatly to expand my understanding of Dentistry and its complexity. I am currently taking a gap year and have acquired a full-time job working as a student dental nurse at an ‘Oasis’ dental surgery, providing me with priceless work experience and intensifying my commitment to becoming a dentist. Working with an array of practitioners has highlighted the different ways surgeries are run, and how the dentists provide their expertise to a diverse set of patients. Not only have I seen the range of simple and complex treatments that occur at a dental practice, but I have also been fully involved in helping to manage the obligation.

On my third day of work I encountered a fascinating moment, when a palatal root fractured during the extraction of a woman’s upper lateral tooth. When the dentist tried removing the fractured portion, it was dislodged into the maxillary sinus. X-rays were taken to establish the root’s location, and using a small suction tube, a special type of flap was raised to pack and suture. The concern was oro-antral communication and so an immediate referral was made to a maxillofacial surgeon.

Evidence of manual dexterity is provided by my A*s in GCSE Art and Electronics, where I strived for precision in all of my work. Art allowed the freedom of creativity and flair, and Electronics involved arranging and soldering miniscule components onto a tiny self-designed PCB, in aid of building a working safe for my GCSE project. I believe my manual deftness would complement the necessary dexterous requirements for Dentistry.

Having previously attained a certificate of appreciation for my voluntary contributions to British Heart Foundation, I decided to continue my voluntary services but in another field of work. I have always had a passion for teaching, and have undertaken a role mentoring students to improve their ICT, literacy and numeracy skills; build their confidence, and support their learning, as well as developing my own communication skills with young people, with this inspiration originated from helping tutor a student at school through his GCSEs.

At school I was appointed to the role of a prefect, illustrating my sense of responsibility, maturity and reliability; and was also elected by my peers as form representative on the school
council to raise issues on behalf of the student body, both of which accentuate the leadership skills I have to offer.

As well as leadership skills, a dental team requires all members to unite for a day to run efficiently; and my part-time job at Currys.digital has taught me that a cooperative team is essential to provide a good service to customers. Learning the methods of communication through training and experience has developed my ability to interact with customers, improving my interpersonal skills. My hobbies include: cardiovascular & weight training and football to keep healthy; developing new culinary skills in Indian, Italian and Thai food; a strong passion for music, taking me to festivals and gigs; and travelling the world to experience different cultures.

I have a keen sense of humour, an outgoing personality and a desire to integrate wholly within both academic and social life. My self-motivation and determination to succeed will enable me to fulfil my aspiration of improving oral hygiene.

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Here is a basic template of it:

- Introduction – why you want to do dentistry
- Work experience acquired
- An interesting moment during work experience (optional)
- Manual dexterity
- Voluntary work
- Teamwork, leadership & communication skills
- Hobbies & interests
- Conclusion – what can you offer?

By using a simple structure such as this – or one of your own – forming your personal statement will be much easier. It may also help to write a list of items that could be included in the template above, or thinking more deeply to make other achievements more relevant. If you are struggling to note a sufficient number of aspects to fill your personal statement, you need to get involved more with activities, or at least show your intent on implementing this (which may consequently be asked about at interview).

The majority of universities do require you to sit the UKCAT, which has now become a major factor in deciding whether or not an applicant is invited to interview, or even given an offer. Preparation is difficult but still possible, and it is imperative you familiarise yourself with the types of questions they ask. The UKCAT website has some sample questions for the night-before.

I believe the most difficult aspect of the UKCAT is the speed required to answer all of the questions, and the majority of candidates sitting the exam would probably agree that the time allowed is insufficient. I personally found the ‘Verbal Reasoning’ section difficult for this reason, though fortunately other sections require less conscious thought and time. In the end, I averaged a
score of ~590 (near average), in which the ‘Quantitative Reasoning’ lowered my mean – despite achieving an A in A-level maths.

For any universities that do require the UKCAT and you are considering applying to, once you know your score contact the relevant admissions departments to ascertain whether it is worth applying for that particular university or not (for example, Queen Mary, University of London, have an annually-changing cut-off score for the UKCAT that must be achieved before your personal statement is even considered).

When obtaining work experience, the best basis would be to gather it in as many varied environments as possible, ranging from: general dental practice, hospital (e.g. maxillofacial unit), dental technican’s laboratory, community dental practice and so forth. Universities judge an applicant’s work experience based on these scenarios and the time spent, with the highest tier possible for recognition being a permanent involvement within one of these sub-focuses – highlighting their commitment; for example, working as a receptionist in a dental practice.

Ultimately, I must emphasize that preparation is the key. When I applied for dentistry in October 2007, I was invited to two interviews, but received no offers; but then strengthening my application and focusing more on the task-in-hand provided me with three interviews, and four unconditional offers (I had surpassed the grade requirements). The contrast of feelings between the years is astonishing, but by taking heed of the advice given, you will get there.

Author: Andrew Geddis

The personal statement is your chance to sell yourself to every dental school you apply to. It is the place to display what sets you aside from other applicants. It is crucial to mention your work experience – if none is mentioned, a rejection will soon follow.

Don’t sit down and expect to write the whole thing easily in one go. Write down everything you think would look good to admissions tutors, whenever it pops into your head. Even if the sum total of these thoughts is vastly in excess of the personal statement word limit, it can be cut down quite easily. Begin early in order to get as much good material down as possible, and then fine-tune it as the UCAS deadline draws nearer.

Clearly explain why you want to study dentistry: describe what prompted you to apply to dental school and then how you followed up this idea through work experience, reading, and conversations with current students or dentists and so on. With clinical exposure at a young age, maturity is an essential character trait that is being looked for. Think of examples of times you have grown in maturity and develop maturity and work it in to your personal statement.

Outline your interests outside of dentistry, especially if they are relevant (e.g. playing a musical instrument or painting, which show good manual dexterity).

The range of people a dentist may be exposed to is enormous. Try to show the admissions team at the Universities you apply to that you have experience working or communicating with old
and young, male and female, disabled and the able, healthy and ill, as well as people from other cultures and other countries. This experience is key for any career working directly with people.

If you are applying for dentistry, don’t talk about other subjects. Don’t talk about applying for both medicine and dentistry (and don’t apply to both at the same time!). If you are applying for insurance options, don’t talk about them on your dentistry application form. Be clear with your strong desire to study dentistry and remember that offers may be given for other subjects, even with an entirely dental personal statement.

Show the personal statement to as many relevant people as possible. Tutors can help you to proofread and refine what you have written. Your dentist (possibly a dentist you did work experience with) is likely to be happy to read over it for you, from a point of view more in line with those who ultimately decide whether you will be interviewed or not.

Author: Krinal Kausik Patel

I made a list of all the activities I had done over my school and university life, before drafting my personal statement. I then picked the relevant and/or beneficial ones for dentistry, much like writing curriculum vitae (CV). For example, I wrote about part time jobs I did alongside school and university. This was to show that I could time manage effectively, this of course being an important skill in dentistry.

You need to mention all the dental related work experience and any other medically based experience if relevant. As you read your statement, your enthusiasm and reasons, why you want to do dentistry should be obvious to the reader. The statement is the opportunity to sell yourself to the institutes before they have even met you. If you can get this right, you automatically have an advantage over other candidates. I managed to get an interview from KCL in December after mentioning that I had work experience with 12+ dentists. The statement in general should first describe why you want to do dentistry, or what you like about the subject. Then you should go on to say what work experience have you done to support your passion of dentistry. Finally, you should describe any extra-curricular activities or employment that you have undertaken. This is an opportunity to show your personality as a dental candidate. When writing a personal statement try not to use predictable sentences e.g. “when I did my work experience I saw fillings, extractions and crown preparations.” In essence, try to summarise who you are, what you have done and why you should be selected, in a unique and interesting way.

I prepared for the UKCAT test with online material provided from websites. Google is a good search tool to find plenty of resources for it. On the day, time was limited per question so you need to answer quickly or you will lose your marks. The UKCAT is all about speed so keep practicing.
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