

Activity 1: Business Studies

- Read the following personal statement and underline each key point or experience that appears
- Count how many key points or experiences have been included in the statement
- Is the balance between academic and non-academic correct?
- How might the statement be improved?

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 have 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 Maine Road 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.

Activity 2: Mechanical engineering

- Read the following personal statement
- Put a line through anything that you think should not be included i.e. that does not sell the applicant
- Decide why the personal statement does not sell the applicant

Having systematically going through each stage of choosing a suitable degree, I started by choosing a 'science' subject rather than an 'art' one. Moving on through the field of Physics, relating heavily with Mathematics, I researched the different topics possible in Engineering. With every prospectus I read, I became even more devoted to the course: Mechanical Engineering. Studying in these fields (Mathematics and Physics A levels) will help me kick start my degree campaign with enthusiasm and challenge, increasing chances of fitting in well with the course. Aiming to use this study to progress into the world of work with the manner of a fully equipped Engineer, I know that this degree will present myself to the employer as a person of qualities efficient enough to produce upright results from a degree which requires intellectuality, initiative and common sense (in scientific terms). Working for a multinational company I have had a taste of the responsibilities of these personal qualities; listening to management, working independently to complete the tasks, working to deadlines, using initiative towards problem solving for customer service ... etc. Studying these aspects in the management segment of Business Studies A level helps me to understand this more clearly, with ways of innovation and motivation for work. Throughout my last 5 school years, using the computer and the Internet has been momentous. From designing programmes (for I.T. coursework) in Microsoft Access to using the internet to inquire about flight arrangements, and with 40 words per minute I have gained sufficient computer skills to use it as a surplus for my future. As a sociable person, I have shown that I can fit into a community new to me (my sixth form). This overlaps the personal qualities' aforementioned. I have also worked with children in a nursery, helping teachers. Furthermore, mentoring high school student in preparation for the end of their GCSE's has given me a differing sensation of tutoring. An important point for a student thinking of entering university is willing to be part of that community. This point will make a difference in the productivity of the student towards the community of the university. For five consecutive years now, I have joined the school football team, playing in most cup and league matches. Having represented my school in domestic competitions, I have enjoyed the essence of teamwork, winning and losing. More recently, being trained to be a Junior's coach by the Football Association has strengthened my management skills. The encouraging factor of sport for me is the social aspect, which I enjoy extensively. An exclusive ubiquity of mine is that I am contented with mixing my social with my educational life at length making the two important factors in my life none the less unabridged.

Activity 3: Psychology

- Read the statement and identify its strengths and weaknesses.
- What questions might an admissions tutor ask?

The human mind and the way it works have always interested me. This fascination was confirmed when I went on to study psychology at A-level and continued my enthusiasm in the subject. At university, I look forward to studying atypical development and abnormal behaviour in greater depth.

I gained valuable knowledge of the way children act and behave and experience in teaching whilst working as a classroom assistant during year 12 at Brownlow Primary School as part of a voluntary community action project. As well as providing practical experience in a primary school, this opportunity also allowed me to develop skills in communication.

Success in my school studies and extra work experience in a drop-in centre for people with mental health problems for three hours every Monday afternoon, has given me a secure academic foundation with which to approach a degree course in psychology with confidence and enthusiasm.

My part time job as a customer service assistant in Tesco has provided an opportunity to work as a team co-operating with others and at the same time being independent. Often, I have been able to work on my own initiative, which I have enjoyed immensely as it has allowed me to use my own ideas and thoughts.

As well as my part-time job, I have also enjoyed looking after children when babysitting and it has provided an opportunity to prove myself to be responsible and trustworthy.

Outside of school, I enjoy socialising and meeting new people. I believe myself to be an honest, reliable and friendly person. In June I achieved one of my ambitions by passing my driving test at the first attempt, and this gives me much more independence by giving me more freedom to do other things that I normally could not do.

My experiences during my post-sixteen studies have enabled me to be independent, organised and self-disciplined which should prove invaluable preparation for life at university. I am a very sociable person who enjoys an entertaining night out but at the same time I understand the importance of studying, and will not let the fact that I am away from home interfere with my lectures or work.

At university I look forward to building on my existing experiences of studying mental health disorders, especially focusing on childhood and the chances to further my knowledge in psychology.

Activity 4: Drama

- Read the statement and identify its strengths and weaknesses.
- What questions might an admissions tutor ask?

I have chosen to apply for a degree course, which combines theoretical and practical drama, with an emphasis on practical work. I am anticipating this will lead to a post-graduate course of further intensive training; ultimately leading to a career in acting. With this in mind, I am taking advantage of a GAP year, to gain further experience in the theatre. As an A level theatre studies student, I am involved in studying the practitioners behind contemporary drama and this I enjoy. However, I find that I am drawn towards the aspects of the course that involve working as a group to produce our own pieces. I find that this is very helpful in developing my skills in group-work, and I also feel a sense of achievement at the end of these projects.

Psychology A level contributes to furthering my understanding of the theatre, through the study of people. This helps me to gain a greater empathy when creating characters, and judging reactions to certain situations. I am also taking English A level. I find that the continual study of texts enables me to gain a very quick basic insight into characters when first looking through a script, or when simply forming an idea in my mind.

Throughout my school-life, I have been heavily involved in theatrical productions, often taking influential or leading roles. This year, I was Sadie in a production of 'Across the Barricades'; a modern day 'Romeo and Juliet' set in Belfast. I felt that this gave me an excellent opportunity to develop the character because the director allowed principal cast members to largely make their own decisions on their individual character and their relation to other members of the cast. Other plays that I have taken principal roles in have included; 'The Royal Hunt of the Sun' in which I took the role of Young Martin, and 'Animal Farm', in which I played Napoleon.

My other school commitments include various bands and choirs inside the school. As a keen singer, I have been involved in a harmony choir since I started the school. This led to a production of a musical called 'The Spirit of Freedom', and a world premiere was held to raise money for Bosnia. This was also made into a C.D. and sold in the local area. The other band that I sing in is the school Soul Band, which plays modern and older style songs, particularly blues and soul, at all school associated functions.

I have been involved in the Gasleak Theatre Company in Barchester for many years, taking mainly choral parts in their productions. I have also helped during the summer holidays with the local Mencap group, helping with their play-scheme for disabled children to give parents a break during the holidays. This summer, I also went back to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for the third time. I always find this an excellent opportunity to expand my knowledge of theatrical styles, and this time, I even got an insight into the life of Antonin Artaud.

Activity 5: Information technology

- Read the statement and identify its strengths and weaknesses.
- What questions might an admissions tutor ask?

An old IBM PC brought home from work by my father, when I was ten, started my keen interest in computing. My decision to study a degree has been strengthened by my enjoyment and success at A-level and the belief that the use of information technology will continue to expand, it being the means through which modern commerce and industry will be organised. Wanting to work in the field of computing in the future, I am keen to achieve a good degree in that area and extend and deepen my knowledge.

Last summer I used my initiative to organise work experience at ITEC in Barchester a computer training group, which I found interesting and an exciting opportunity to develop my skills further. Currently I am part of the brainstorming and planning committee for an international Information Communications Technology conference due to take place next year.

I have been actively involved with 6th form life. I joined the Student Council in the start of year 12 and have been an eager member ever since, helping with the organisation of various events and the running of the common room. When the senior staff staged 'roadshows' in the feeder schools I was chosen to address an audience of several hundred parents and students.

I was also a founder member of a Young Enterprise company and held the position of sales director. This gave me the opportunity to gain a real insight into the workings of a successful company. Being a team player was of the utmost importance and critical to the success of the company, a skill which we learnt fast. Presentation skills were also key as the company was judged on a number of presentations. This experience has taught me adaptability and developed my skills of public speaking and diplomacy. In the Young Enterprise examination I achieved a merit.

My other A-level subjects, Economics and Geography helped me to develop analytical and reasoning skills. In May I attended a conference on sustainable development from which I gained an understanding of the feasibility of profitability combined with 'green' policies.

Having always enjoyed modern languages I took both French and German at GCSE, following that I studied a vocational FLAW French course and helped to create a European newspaper as part of a national competition and cooked for a 'European' feast.

Ice-skating was my main sport for eight years; I skated in seven large pantomimes, graduating from and elf to a scary pirate! It was during this time that I first learnt the importance of commitment and working successfully as a team member when under pressure.

In my spare time now, I make use of the local gym. I also enjoy swimming and to continue my interest in the sport I have joined the Barchester Life Saving Club where I am working towards the bronze medallion and preparing to take the National Pool and Lifeguard Qualifications which will enable me to become a lifeguard. In addition I also like cycling, badminton and have recently started playing squash. As well as sporting activities I delight in music, play the drums and am looking to form a band.

Possible responses to activities

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- 10 key points or experiences – but applicant does not make the most of them
- Too much non-academic and insufficient academic
- Poor start – applicant is applying for business studies, so more detail on which aspects of business interest the applicant, more detail on what applicant learnt from work experience and Young Enterprise, how experiences and skills developed through co-curricular activities are preparing applicant for university and career

Activity 2: Mechanical engineering

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If you overcome an initial reaction to put a line through all (or virtually all) of the statement, it is possible to identify points in the statement which support the applicant. Eg: careful research, appropriate A levels, work experience, skills developed through co-curricular activities and motivation for university and career.

However, the applicant does not make effective use of these points, so the statement reads as a poorly written 'stream of consciousness' rather than a structured rationale of why the applicant should be accepted to study mechanical engineering.

How much help should a school or college give an applicant when writing a personal statement? Should some applicants receive more support than others? Does this mislead admissions tutors and give some applicants an unfair advantage.

Activity 3: Psychology

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear and simple opening• Relevant work experience• Identifies transferrable skills• Strong penultimate paragraph and final sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spelling and grammar – ‘my enthusiast’• Virtually no academic content• No explanation of enthusiasm for psychology• No mention of other subjects• Links between work experience and psychology could be much more explicit

Summary: Too little academic content, so despite a good case that he/she is ready for higher education, the applicant is unlikely to be offered a place unless the reference has provided all the academic evidence required.

What questions might an admissions tutor ask?

- Has studying psychology helped you understand how the human mind works?
- Which parts of the psychology course have you especially enjoyed?
- Why?
- Tell me about atypical development and abnormal behavior?
- Which theories and psychologists have you studied?
- Tell me about ... whichever theory is suggested ... somatogenic or psychogenic
- Tell me about ... whoever is named ... eg: Kraepelin, Mesmer, Freud, Rogers, Maslow etc
- Did you observe examples of atypical development and abnormal behavior during your work experience?
- How should society deal with atypical and abnormal behavior?
- How effectively is mental illness reported in the media?
- What are your views on the government’s current mental health policies?
- What are your career plans?
- In what ways have your sixth form studies prepared you for higher education?
- What study skills have you developed?

Activity 4: Drama

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear start – outlines course choice and career plans• Gap year to support application and career• Uses A level theatre studies to explain course choice• Links psychology and English to drama• Impressive list of co-curricular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not specific about gap year plans• No detail of which drama practitioners studied and what learnt• No explanation of working as a group to produce own pieces• Vague on how psychology links to drama• No examples of English texts studied and simplistic view – ‘very quick basic insight into characters’• Little indication of skills developed through co-curricular activities• Blunt ending – no summarising statement

Summary: Too little on academic and drama skills and too much detail on co-curricular activities.

Insufficient reflection on what has been learnt from activities and how this would be good preparation for higher education and a career in acting. The applicant seems content to let the admissions tutor draw conclusions about her suitability for higher education rather than present the case herself.

What questions might an admissions tutor ask?

- What attracts you to a career in acting?
- Elaborate on your gap year plans
- Which drama practitioners have you studied?
- What have you learnt from the study of these practitioners?
- What group work skills have you developed?
- Were there any problems working with your peers and if there were, how did you individually and collectively overcome them?
- Give examples of studying how psychology helped you develop in theatre studies?
- Tell me about an English text that you have studied that has helped you develop a character
- What have you learnt from involvement in theatrical productions?
- Explain the challenges of developing Sadie's character
- What skills have you developed from your involvement in co-curricular activities?
- What did you learn from your visits to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival?
- Tell me about Antonin Artaud (Born 1896 died 1948; [French playwright](#), [poet](#), [actor](#) and [director](#), famous for the Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud believed that the theatre should affect the audience as much as possible, therefore he used a mixture of strange and disturbing forms of lighting, sound and performance. In one production that he did about the plague he used sounds so realistic that some members of the audience were sick in the middle of the performance.)

Activity 5: Information technology

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good opening• Clear reasons for choosing course and career• Identification of study skills• Relevant work experience• Impressive co-curricular activities, some of which are directly related to course and career• Identification of transferrable skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paragraph order – academic paragraphs should be at the start• Check grammar• Insufficient detail on why and which aspects of IT are interesting• Work experience and IT conference not fully explained• Limited reflection on the importance of study and transferrable skills• No summarising statement

Summary: All the correct ingredients for a successful application, but the applicant fails to make the most of his/her strengths and experiences to persuade the admissions tutor to offer a place. More detail on academic interests and skills, plus greater reflection on the importance of study and transferrable skills as preparation for higher education would strengthen the application.

What questions might an admissions tutor ask?

- What did you do with the old IBM PC?
- Which aspects of IT especially interest you?
- What did you gain from your work experience placement at ITEC?
- Elaborate on your role in the ICT conference
- How have you benefitted from being on the student council?
- How did studying economics help you with Young Enterprise?
- Do you think that Young Enterprise is a realistic introduction to business?
- Which newspaper do you read?
- How effectively does it cover IT and commerce?
- How do you expect IT to influence the commerce over the next 20 years?
- What sort of music do you enjoy?
- What study skills have you developed?
- In what ways have your sixth form studies prepared you for higher education?