

What Marshall Selection Committees Like—And Don't Like

Observations on the Personal Statement

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Committees look for the following:

- Strong writing skills
- A reflective personality plus an outward looking disposition
- The capacity to express thoughts and values in an efficient, yet comprehensive essay format
- Some originality or freshness of voice and perspective

And they discourage the following:

- Merely adequate, poor or unimaginative (literal) writing
- An abrasive, pretentious, or self-absorbed tone
- A pattern of writing sentences that begin with "I"
- An essay that reads like a resume of achievements and goals
- Cliches indicating very early promise ("when I was ten I was already studying calculus"); the link between oneself and the United Kingdom (such as: I studied there before and want to go back; my passions are so British I'm practically a subject!); one's drive and energy, etc.

Committees read the personal statement in the context of several other parts of the application:

- The academic major: does the candidate show a sensibility that indicates an informed and intellectually sophisticated point of view consistent with training in this major?
- List of activities, practical experience and statement of goals: do these manifest themselves as values somewhere in the essay?
- The university's letter of endorsement: does it give a portrait of the candidate that resounds with what the candidate says about him or herself?

Observations on the Proposed Course of Study

Committees look for the following:

- Evidence of intellectual breadth as well as depth
- A rigorous undergraduate curriculum
- Evidence of researching relevant U.K. institutions
- Solid justification for choosing the program cited

And they discourage the following:

- Too narrow an academic focus
- A less than consistently demanding undergraduate curriculum
- Citing an institution on the basis of prestige or general merit
- No genuine argument for choosing a program
- No second choice U.K. university mentioned or discussed

Committees read the proposed academic program in the context of several other parts of the application:

- **Transcript:**
Does the applicant's level of preparation match the British program selected? Often American students apply for postgraduate programs without suitable depth of experience in the subject area.
- **Experience:**
If a postgraduate degree program is cited, has the applicant undertaken independent research prior to applying? If an undergraduate degree is cited, does the applicant have sufficient background in the subject to complete the degree in two years?
- **Letters of recommendation:**
Do these letters corroborate the applicant's own assessment of his/her readiness to undertake the program cited? Do they give precise reasons for the applicant's excellence?