

Improving a Personal Statement

TASK 3: Compare your answers with those provided. Examine each of the improved paragraphs and assess whether the improvement is effective.

PARAGRAPH 1

BEFORE:

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to study the subject at degree level. At university, I look forward to examining the subject in more depth, particularly the British medieval period. I also enjoy French history, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness.

Strengths:

- Does offer a reason for choosing to read history at university
- Each sentence attempts to offer a different point - not waffle

Improved by:

- Spellcheck - spelling error 'histroy' looks sloppy
- More depth in the reason for choosing history - what is appealing about medieval history? How have trips to France broadened historical awareness?
- Limited amount to say about the applicant's passion for studying history

AFTER:

I enjoy History lessons so I have decided to study the subject at degree level. In particular, for my coursework I researched the life of King Alfred focusing on his early attempts to create a sense of the 'English' by translating texts from Latin and encouraging people to read English. At university, I look forward to examining the subject in more depth, particularly the British medieval period. I also enjoy French history, and trips to France have broadened my historical awareness when I visited the site of the Somme: an emotional experience when one considers the number of people who died there during WW1.

PARAGRAPH 2

BEFORE:

As a school prefect I hold many responsibilities: organising and attending school functions, delivering speeches at some of these events, being an active member of the school council, and working effectively with other students.

Strengths:

- Position of responsibility (school prefect) useful to mention
- Examples provided about duties performed
- Student has varied interests

Improved by:

- Sometimes it can be more useful to go into depth about one example than offer a list of several examples

AFTER:

As a school prefect I hold many responsibilities which include organising and attending school functions and delivering speeches at some of these events. I had to prepare and deliver a speech to over 300 parents and students about sixth form opportunities at an Open Evening.

PARAGRAPH 3

BEFORE:

I am a keen sports player and I am a member of the school hockey team, netball team, athletics squad, girls football team, chess team, tennis squad, cross country running team, and volleyball team, earning me the schools Sports Personality of the Year award. I have taught information technology skills to younger students and helped one student to overcome his language difficulties. I have also written, directed and performed a number of short plays in school.

Strengths:

- Wide sporting interests and the award sounds impressive

Improved by:

- Long list of sporting interests - might be better to mention a limited range for a degree that does not relate to sport and spend more time on relevant information such as 'why study history?'
- The claim about overcoming language difficulties sounds a bit too good to be true! Write believable comments in the statement - do not feel the need to be superhuman!
- What plays were performed - try offering one example. Did the plays have any historical significance - if so, mention it.
- Try not to start every sentence with 'I'.

AFTER:

As a keen sports player, I am a member of numerous school teams including the hockey, netball, and the girls football team. I was honoured to receive the school's 'Sports Personality of the Year' award which is given to one person every year who has worked well in a team and has been committed to playing fairly. Finding some time to teach information technology skills to younger students was rewarding, along with an opportunity to write, direct and perform a number of short plays: one of which was based on the rise of Nazi Germany.

PARAGRAPH 4

BEFORE:

I have always enjoyed reading novels and recently I have explored some foreign literature. I also play music. I appeared in a school concert with the keyboard orchestra when I was in year nine.

Strengths:

- Given that history requires lots of reading, interest in novels and foreign literature is a useful part of the statement.

Improved by:

- Why not delete the reference to music in year 9 (too long ago to be of any significance) and use the space to mention a favourite author or book and certainly cite examples of the foreign literature and perhaps, in one sentence, offer a reason why you like a particular book / author.

AFTER:

Authors such as Stephen King and traditional writers such as Emily Bronte I find enjoyable. I have just finished reading 'Wuthering Heights'. I am also trying to read Les Misérables by Victor Hugo - this is a challenge, as I am reading the French version. Reading is a passion and one book I enjoyed was Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' which explores reactions to British colonisation in Africa.

PARAGRAPH 5

BEFORE:

Currently, I am involved in the European Youth Parliament Competition in which I will be representing my school at a residential debating conference. The winner will represent the United Kingdom at a future event.

Strengths:

- The competition sounds impressive and suggests a broad interest in learning and world affairs. It also shows some ability to construct debates - useful for history.

Improved by:

- Why not mention a title of one of the debates at the residential conference to add more interest? Given that studying history involves research, perhaps mention a few details about any research undertaken to prepare one of the debates.
- The statement does not need to 'conclude' but the example could try and relate back to studying history given that the debating conference lends itself to skills used in history.

AFTER:

Currently, I am involved in the European Youth Parliament Competition in which I will be representing my school at a residential debating conference. The winner will represent the United Kingdom at a future event. This venture is enhancing my general knowledge, particularly with respect to genetic engineering and drug legislation which I researched using the internet and some medical journals at a local university. Conducting research I find enjoyable and I look forward to exercising this skill at university.