**Navigating Writing with Students: Helping Students Build Strong** Personal Statements & US Essays: **Transatlantic Differences** 

Augusto Neto & Chris Rucker



## **Augusto Neto**



**Associate Director of Careers** & University Guidance

## **Chris Rucker**



## **English Teacher & Coordinator/AP Capstone Coordinator**



# **Joining for Q&A**

## **Emma Palfreyman**



**Liaison & Recruitment Officer** Latin America **Student Recruitment & Admissions**  **Christie Culp** 



**Associate Director International Admissions** & Outreach



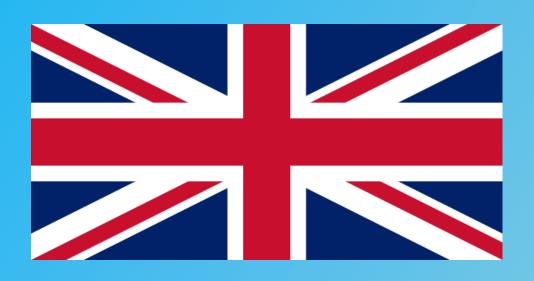
## **Ana-Maria Costea**



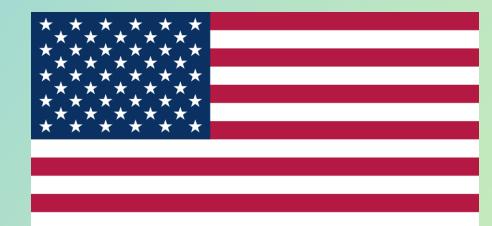
## **Regional Manager** Latin America & Sub-Saharan Africa)



# **Worlds** Apart



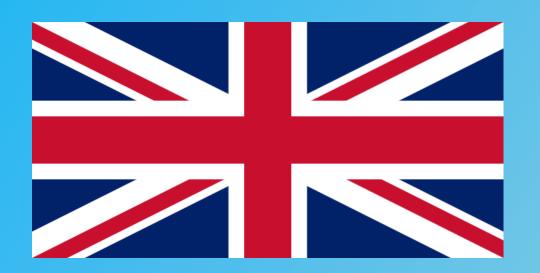
It's often said that Britain and America are two countries separated by a common language and nowhere is that more true than in university applications. In the UK, students write to impress an academic; in the US, they write to charm an admissions committee. Wildly different expectations!







# **Worlds Apart**



"The US is after your heart, the UK is after your brain."

Speaking to St. Paul's Junior & Senior Class August 2024

> **Rachel Bannister International Student Recruitment** University of Warwick

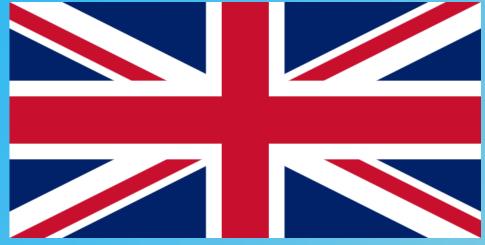






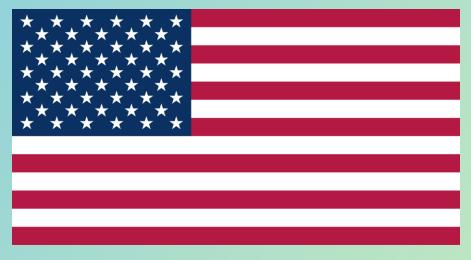


# **Differences in Application Review Process**



focused academic argument."

Academic merit is the cornerstone	Academic perfo
No holistic review in the US sense	Essays, recor
Students apply to a specific course within a university.	ba
Universities make offers based on subject fit and (predicted) grades	in most cases, A
"The personal statement is essentially a subject-	"The college



Holistic review is the foundation

erformance is important, but not the whole picture

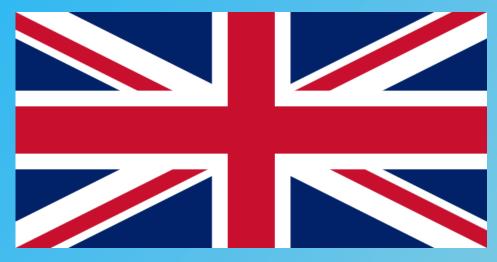
commendations, extracurriculars, and personal background carry significant weight

s, Applicants apply to the *institution*, not a specific course

"The college essay isn't just about what you've studied. It's about who you are, what you've lived, & how you'll shape the campus community."

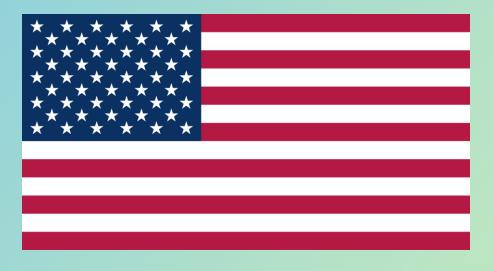


# Who Reads Personal Statements & Essays



Admissions Tutors from the faculty/school to which student is applying.	Direc geograp
Essentially someone who will be teaching the very	
people they recommend for admission.	No con
These are academics who do not work for the office of admissions.	May
The institutional priority is to admit applicants who meet entry requirements and who can demonstrate they will be good academics.	





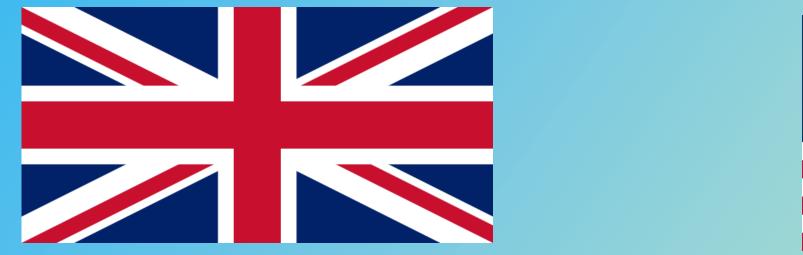
ectors of Admissions in charge of a specific phical area, admissions committees, and other members of the admissions team.

nnection with academics who will be teaching those they admit.

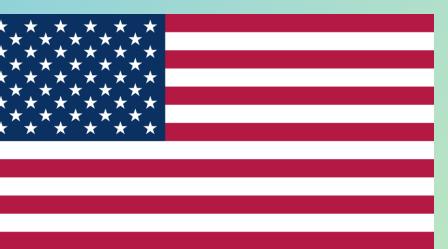
be influenced by institutional priorities and shaping policies.



# **UCAS Personal Statements & US College Essays**



Feature	UCAS Personal Statement	l
Tone	Academic, formal	F
Focus	One subject	
Audience	Academic admissions tutors	(
Length	4,000 characters (≈650 words)	-
Purpose	Why this subject	



## **US College Essay**

Reflective, personal, narrative

The applicant's story or identity

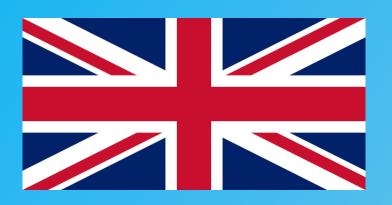
General admissions readers

~650 words (Common App)

Who you are & why it matters



# The 80/20 Rule used at St. Paul's



The Golden Ratio: 80% Academic, 20% Relevant Extras

- Avoid personal stories unless they clearly link to subject interest
- 'Extras' (e.g., volunteering, sports) only if skills are transferable to academic study
- "They don't care if you were head of the chess club—unless you're applying for Computer Science and can link it to strategic thinking."

# **Structure of a Strong UCAS PS**

**Academic motivation** – Why this subject?

**Evidence of commitment** – Super-curriculars, academic reading, research

**Relevant experience** – Work shadowing, projects, summer schools

**Concluding remarks** – Future ambitions or a final nod to subject enthusiasm



# A Sample from the St. Paul's Class of 2025

Navigating the dichotomy between privilege and exclusion as a Spanish expatriate in Brazil highlighted the stigma of inequality. Despite redistributive policies, a minority elite thrives alongside impoverished masses, echoing Sandel's view that meritocratic systems overlook people's inherent worth. By reducing individuals to data points, economic models may neglect human complexity, hindering justice in governance and underscoring the need for interdisciplinary study......

Acceptances: Durham (Economics & Politics), LSE (Politics & Economics), St. Andrews (Economics & International Relations, and UCL (PPE).

Level	<b>B</b> Diploma Programme	Upper 6 (12 <sup>th</sup> Grade) Term 1 Aug - Nov 2024
	Subjects	Predicted Grades
HL	Economics	7
HL	Global Politics	7
HL	Mathematics: Analysis & Interpretation	7
SL	Chemistry	7
SL	English Language and Literature	7
SL	Portuguese Language and Literature	7
Points fro	m Subjects	42
Theory o	f Knowledge (ToK)	A
Extended	d Essay	A
Bonus Po	pints	3
TOTAL POINTS		45

Scan for full version



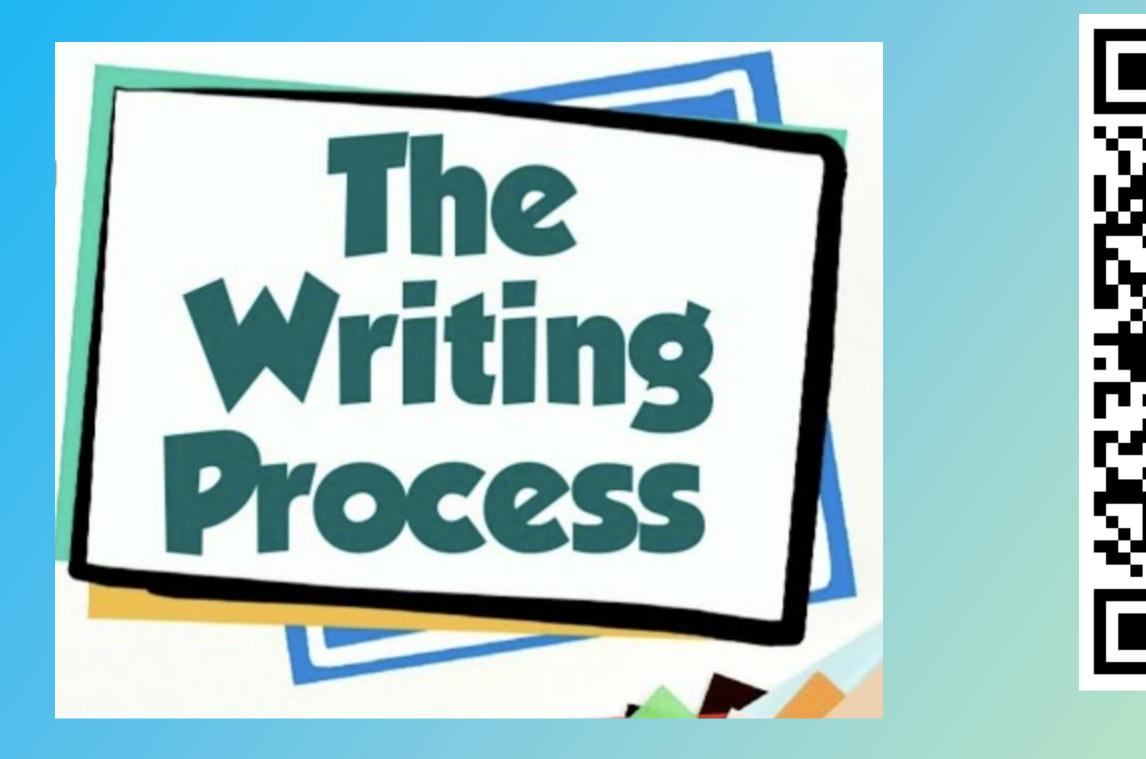


# Writing UK Personal Statements:

- Academic focus is essential 80% should be the state of Sontent
- UCAS limits applicants to 5 courses (only 4 for Medicine; Oxbridge = either/or)
- No room for fluff concise, factual, and tailored to one subject are
- Super-curriculars over extracurriculars show deep engagement with the subject
- Same statement goes to all choices no university names allowed
- **Structure matters** recommend starting with a 12-bullet plan: 1st bullet: what sparked the subject interest Final bullet: future goals
- 80-20 rule
- **Encourage multiple drafts** review for tone, relevance, clarity, and conciseness
- **Final statement must be within 4,000 characters / 47 lines**



**Writing Personal Statements for UK University Applications: A Guide for Counsellors Supporting Students Applying to UK Universities** 







# **US Personal Statements**

# Writing is a

# Process







## Presentation

# Brainstorm

Drafting

Writing

Editing



# Presentation

## Practical Tips for Helping Students<sup>•</sup>

**Develop Strong Topics** 

**Important Experiences** 

Things that matter to them

Important Lessons they have learned

**Accomplishments and Achievements** 

Challenges they have faced

Interesting Talents

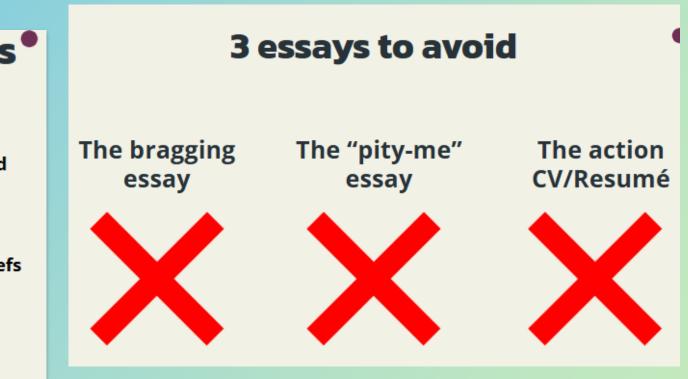
Moments of questioning beliefs

**Hobbies or Interests** 

People or ideas that inspire them

# Practical Tips for Helping Students \* More on topic choice and why some rules are meant to be broken • The Personal Statement is an introduction to the Admissions officials • Convey to your students that they would not introduce themselves to a new person as mean spirited, depressed, cynical, or arrogant • Students should put themselves in the best light

- Use your relationship with them, conversations, and data to show them the positives of themselves. Help them to see that they have a good story worthy of sharing
- They should show they have depth
  - The world is a complex place. If they tell stories that focus on their privilege without acknowledging that or solutions that show they are not thoughtful, they are not putting their best food forward
- Different from the data, the Personal Statement allows students to have some control over how they are perceived
  - They have already read your CV. They know your grades and activities. Use this space not to convince them that you actually earned those grade or did those activities, but show them a deeper dimension of who you are.
- Why I never say never
  - Sensitive & polemical topics



## **Practical Tips for Helping Students**•

**Topics to Avoid\*** 

Death of a Pet

The "Big Game"

Death of a grandparent

Death and Grief

**Big Epiphanies or Philosophies** 

Vulgar/Explicit Topics

Simplistic Solutions to Complex Problems

Cynicism and negativity

Troubles with Parents

Problems with Teachers



## Brainstorm

## Have students start writing to prompts.

- What's something you're passionate about?
- What is something that matters to you?
- Who is someone important to you?
- What is something (that doesn't necessarily impact you) that is important to you?

Tell me a story

**Share Johns Hopkins website.** Why models?



# Drafting

• Come up with 3-5 stories, 3 being a minimum • Come up with a list of 5 qualities • Introduce prompts.



# Writing

**Choosing a story** 

**On narrative structure** 

- Think about the point of the essay (connected to the prompt)
- Think about the qualities

Now it is time to write





# Editing

**Second most important phase Everyone needs a good editor** Think back to the brianstorm Think back to the qualities (highlighting exercise) Ask questions. Style How do you know when you're done?





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# **Thank You**

&

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