



ACES write 2023 /24

The ACES Tayside
guide to writing a
creative personal
statement
2023-24

About ACES Tayside

ACES is a nationally funded initiative based across the four art schools in Scotland. Our job is to encourage, educate and empower senior-phase pupils to consider careers and higher education in art, design and architecture.

Our broad programme of events and 1-1 support helps pupils to explore their options, create a competitive application and develop a strong portfolio of work.

ACES advice is always impartial, and we support pupils wherever they want to go.

For more information about our events, support and to see if you are eligible to be a part of aces, please visit our website.

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The ACES Tayside guide to writing a creative personal statement

This guide offers specific advice and guidance on how to write a personal statement to support an application to creative subjects.

Remember – ACES can help you with your personal statement. Please email us at aces@dundee.ac.uk anytime.

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How can ACES help me?

ACES is here to guide and support you through the whole process of thinking about and applying to creative courses.

We'll help you get there – whether that's straight to university from school, or via FE college.

Even though ACES Tayside is based at the University of Dundee, you don't have to be applying to Dundee to come and take part, or to gain our advice. We will help you get to wherever is right for you.

Come to our on campus events

Our on campus events are the best way to explore your options and make work for your portfolio.

Plus you'll meet other people who are applying to a creative course too. ACES friends are the best!

- **All our events are listed on our website:** www.dundee.ac.uk/aces
- They are always free, and we provide all materials!
- Options include: Explore Days, Life Drawing Courses, Portfolio Preparation Courses, Skills Days, Gallery Trips – and more!

Come to our online application info sessions

Whether it's finding out where to apply, what a university is looking for, how to write a creative personal statement or start your digital portfolio – we've got you covered.

Our online sessions are listed on our website: www.dundee.ac.uk/aces

Book a 1-1 chat with us

Our ACES staff have a wealth of knowledge about all the creative courses and universities in Scotland – and beyond!

Having a chat with us means that we can get to know you and your aspirations in more depth, and can make recommendations for courses, universities, portfolio ideas and more.

You can get in touch via email: aces@dundee.ac.uk

Our chat can be in person – in school or at the University – or online

What is the personal statement?

Your personal statement is your opportunity to tell the universities that you are applying to...

- > why you are interested in their course
- > why they should consider choosing you
- > what you are like as a creative person
- > what inspires and influences you
- > why you will make a great student
- > what your ambitions are

This is especially important for courses that do not offer an interview

You have a maximum length of **4000 characters**.

How do universities use the personal statement?

Universities will use them in different ways, but generally speaking...

For interviewing courses:

- Admissions tutors will read your statement to get a sense of what you are like in deciding to invite you to an interview.
- They may highlight parts of it to ask you about in the interview.

For non-interviewing courses that require a portfolio:

- Admissions tutors will look at your personal statement at the same time as your portfolio.
- Your portfolio will speak the most about your creative ability.
- Your statement is there to back up everything else.

For non-interviewing courses that do not require a portfolio:

- Admissions tutors will look at your personal statement to get a sense of what you are like as a creative person, and why you are interested in the course you have applied for.

You might be asked by course courses to write an additional statement to support your portfolio, or write answers to questions as part of your interview. That is separate to the UCAS personal statement and focuses purely on your work.

Personal statements for creative subjects

Creative courses look for a very particular kind of statement – it should focus on what you are like as a creative person as well as why you are interested in the subject.

Extra-curricular activities that aren't linked to your course are less important in a statement for a creative course (for example, being a prefect, Duke of Edinburgh) – but you can still include them. Just make sure to give priority to the creative stuff!

Some key points to think about:

- Why are you applying to study a creative course?
 - Why this specific specialism?
 - What do you hope to try or learn?
 - If you are applying to different creative subjects e.g. architecture and the general foundation course, then you could talk about things more generally – focus more on why you're applying to something creative.
- How do you make work, and what is it about?
 - What materials do you like to use, and how?
 - Why have you made this work, or developed it in this way?
 - It's important to think about your ideas as much as the materials that you use.
 - Do you make work outside of school?
- What or who inspires you?
 - Artists, designers, architects, photographers, musicians, books, rusty things, light, patterns, fashion, insects, bodies, concrete, pavements, biology, origami, found objects, nature, feminism, religion,
- Exhibitions, galleries, shows or work that you have seen.
 - What did you think? Like? Dislike?
 - Have you been to university degree shows?
- Have you taken part in workshops or activities? Tell us about them!
 - What did you do
 - What did you learn? Like? Dislike?
 - Was it a challenge? How did you deal with this?
 - ACES is recognised in university applications – so make specific mention of our workshops if you have been to one.
- Do you know what you want to do in the future? If so let us know (but it's ok if you don't!)

SOS – I'm applying to lots of different creative subjects

Don't stress! We'll make it work.

If you're applying to a few different creative specialisms it can be hard to see how to fit them all into the character limit. But sometimes these are the most interesting statements!

The ACES advice is to focus on the common principles that you'll find in all of the courses.

For example – you are applying to the following courses:

- Architecture
- Interior Design
- A more general art & design course

On the surface these may seem really separate. Architecture focuses on structures and the design of buildings. Interior Design is more focused on spaces and how we use them – repurposing more than creating new ones. A general course covers everything from communication design through to painting.

But the common thing for all of them might be the following:

- **Structures, spaces and how we design them**
 - This works just as well for fine art, fashion and textiles (etc) as it does for architecture and interiors
- **Storytelling** – how do we tell stories via creative and structural practice
 - Spaces and places have histories – but so do animation, illustration and graphics
- **People** – how they engage with spaces both functionally and creatively
 - Again, this works for architecture and interiors in an obvious way – but could apply to the kind of installation and gallery work you see in fine art

These are just some quick examples!

Whatever it is that you're interested in – it will translate in some way to all the creative courses that you apply to.

Getting Started

Step 1

ACES top tip is to break it down into quick thoughts before building it back up again. Avoid staring at a blank sheet of paper and going straight into full sentences – chances are you'll get writers block or head straight into waffle territory.

You will need:

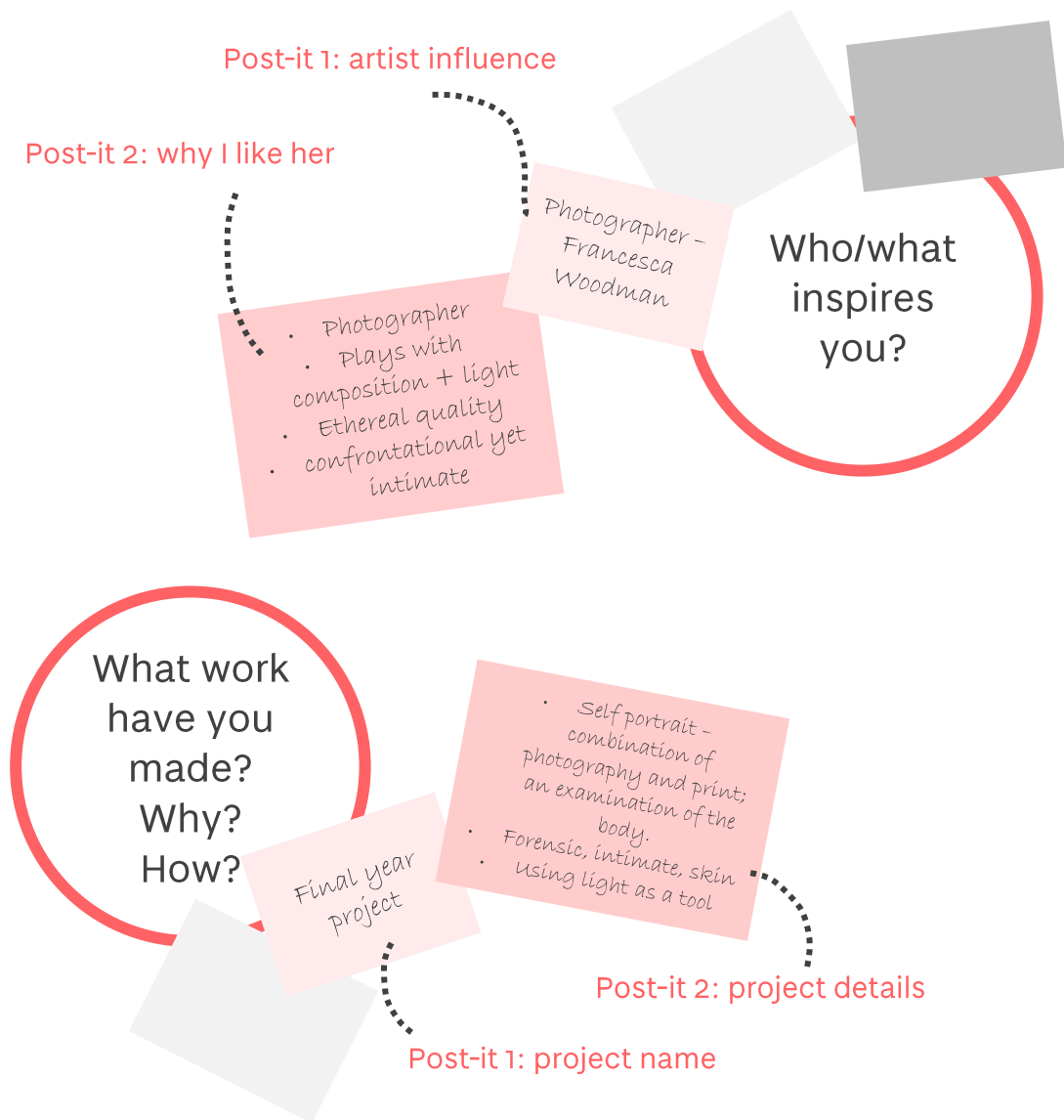
- A big piece of paper (or lots of A4 ones). Create yourself a mind map like the one below (there is a copy at the back of this book).
- Use wee post-it notes and pop your thoughts relating to each one of these really quickly. One post-it per thought – don't add detail just yet. We've included some examples below.
- Don't think too much or worry if it's right or wrong, just get it on the paper. Start with the one that comes most naturally to you.



Building it up

Step 2

Once you have lots of thoughts down, you can start to organise and develop them. For each thought add another, larger post-it note with more depth.



Try to do this for all of your initial thoughts - then we can start to put them in order.

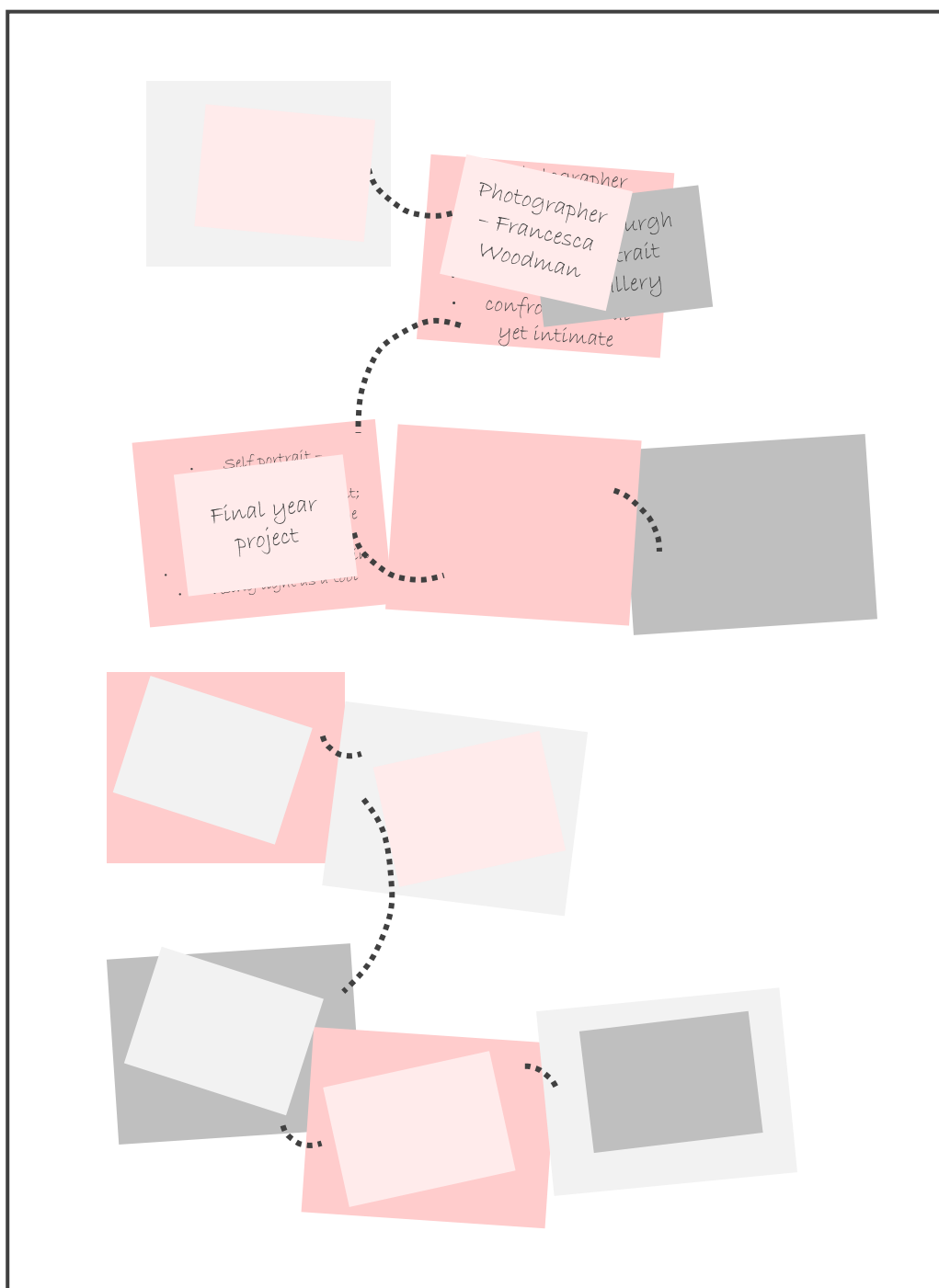
Creative a structure and making links

Step 3

There's no right or wrong order, and the joy of working on post-it notes is you can move them around until you have something that suits you and flows really well.

You can start with any one of them - but make it interesting! You don't have to start with why you want to do the course - that can come in later if it feels right.

You can also have sections in your statement for different topics.



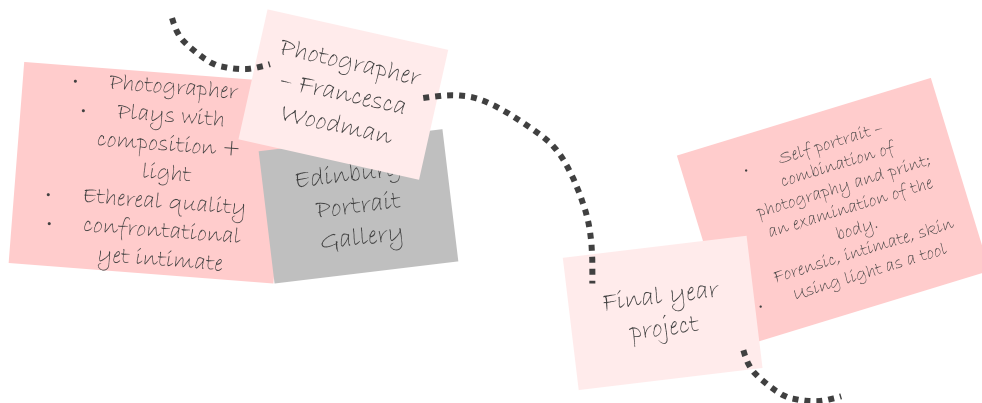
Writing it up – adding detail

Step 4

Once you have an order in place you can start to expand and write properly.

- Be sure to write in full sentences.
- You need talk about each thing in some depth. For example:
 - **Why** do you like this artist?
 - **How** have you made this work?
 - **What** caught your eye in that exhibition you went to see?
 - **What** did you learn from that ACES workshop you went to?

A wee example:



You could say...

“One artist that has inspired me is Francesca Woodman as her use of photography linked well to my final year project.”

...but this doesn't show **what you like** about the artist, your **understanding** of their work, **how it links** to your project, **why** photography is important to you etc.

Here it is again in more depth:

“Although my creative practice has always included a range of media and techniques, I'm really drawn towards the use of photography in fine art. One artist that has inspired me in this way is Francesca Woodman, who's playful way with composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is quite confrontational and direct towards the camera, yet retains a feeling of intimacy with the viewer. This is something I channelled in my final year project, exploring the use of light as a medium in photography and printmaking. My topic was self portraiture - and it focused on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

Chances are this is too long – 634 characters!

You only have 4000 characters for everything – so we need to edit!

Writing it up – editing it down

Step 5

ACES top tip: ignore the character limit. It's better to just write it as you think it – otherwise it's hard to add depth and detail when you are worrying about how much space you have left.

Once you have a completed draft, you then need to edit it down.

ACES can help you with this – please email a copy of your statement to aces@dundee.ac.uk.

Using our detailed paragraph as an example

Here I have scored through words to remove, and added shorter ways or saying things or letters to help things make sense:

~~“Although my creative practice has always included~~s a range of ~~media and~~ techniques, I'm really drawn towards the use of ~~particularly~~ photography in fine art. One artist that has inspired me in this way is I'm inspired by Francesca Woodman, who's ~~playful way with~~ use of composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is ~~quite~~ confrontational and direct ~~towards the camera~~, yet retains an ~~feeling of~~ intimacy with the viewer. ~~This is something I~~ channelled ~~this~~ in my final year project, exploring ~~the use of~~ light as a medium in photography and printmaking. My topic was self portraiture – ~~and it~~ focusing on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

634 characters!

And this is what it looks like once written properly:

“My creative practice includes a range of techniques, particularly photography. I'm inspired by Francesca Woodman, who's use of composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is confrontational and direct, yet retains an intimacy with the viewer. I channelled this in my final year project, exploring light as a medium in photography and printmaking. My topic was self portraiture – focusing on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

463 characters!

As you can see – the important information is still there, but we have cut out 171 characters. We can take it even further:

“I'm inspired by Francesca Woodman, who's use of composition and light brings an ethereality to her work. She is confrontational and direct, yet retains an intimacy with the viewer. I channelled this in my final year self-portrait project, exploring light as a medium in photography and printmaking, focusing on an almost forensic yet intimate examination of the body...”

365 characters!

Tips and things to avoid

- **ACES can help you edit your statement or simply have a look and offer some comments** – so please email aces@dundee.ac.uk.
- Pick a point that comes easily to you and take it from there – you don't have to begin with why you want to study this course if it more natural for you to begin with your influences or how you make work.
- Start small and build it up. Get quick ideas down on paper for each point and then begin to add in detail for each one.
- Be flexible – try moving things around and see if they read better.
- Ignore the character limit (4000 characters including spaces) at the start – you can edit it down later. Most first draft statements are at least 6000 characters!
- Write meaningful statements and explain your points in depth.
- Be careful how you word things. Avoid things like:
 - ‘Art is my therapy’ – the practice of art and design is a profession. Art might make you feel good, and you might want to be an art therapist in the future, but for your uni application you need to talk about it seriously.
 - “sketchy drawing style” – try words like ‘loose’ or ‘relaxed’.
 - “doodling” – you’re applying for a formal creative course. We don’t doodle.
 - Slang words – this is a formal piece of writing.
 - Cliché openings such as...
 - *“Ever since I was young I have wanted to study art”*
or
 - *“Ever since I sold my first painting aged 8 I knew art was the path for me”*
 - *“I have wanted to study art since I was young enough to hold a pencil”*

...if this is the best reason you can come up with for wanting to study a creative degree, then it sounds like you haven't thought about it since you were a child, and you aren't that serious
- “I highly appreciate this artist” – would you speak like this in real life?
- Be descriptive, but don't overdo it. Watch those adjectives!

Who/what
inspires
you?

Why Art &
Design?
Why this
course?

Work
experience
/extra
curricular
activities &
workshops

Step 1: Mind mapping

Use this mind map to help you get started

What work
have you
made?
Why?
How?

Which
exhibitions
/galleries
have you
seen? What
did you
think?

Future
ambitions

Notes

Notes

