The IAL Personal Statement Guide

Writing a non-JUPAS personal statement for Hong Kong's eight universities

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Before you start

This guide is for students applying to Hong Kong universities with International A Level (IAL) or GCE A Level results through the non-JUPAS (direct) route. It covers what each university asks for, what readers look for, how to plan and structure your statement, and how to edit it.

What this guide will not do is write your statement for you. Every example here was written for this guide and is fictional. Don't copy any of them. A statement built from someone else's sentences reads as generic, and at worst it can be treated as dishonest.

Rules change every year. Each university's requirement below links to its official page, so check it again before you submit.

1. What each university asks for

University	Personal statement	Length	One or several?
HKU	Required	Up to 1,000 words	One for all programme choices; HKU-UCL Law needs a separate one (HKU FAQ)
CUHK	Required	Up to two A4 pages or 6,000 characters, in English; Medicine needs a separate 250-word statement	One for all non-Medicine choices (CUHK FAQ)
HKUST	Expected	No fixed format, content or length	One (HKUST admissions FAQ)
CityU	Required, called an "Applicant Statement"	Not fixed	One for each programme (CityU FAQ)
HKBU	Optional, no standard format	Not fixed; some special schemes set word limits	One (HKBU FAQ)

University	Personal statement	Length	One or several?
Lingnan	Not compulsory, but listed first among the documents its best applicants usually provide	Not fixed	One (Lingnan FAQ)
PolyU	Not listed as a required document for the programmes on its supporting-documents page	—	Check your programme (PolyU supporting documents)
EdUHK	Not mentioned; you may upload "any other documents you consider appropriate"	—	Check your programme (EdUHK FAQ)

What this means in practice

- **Write one strong master statement of about 800–1,000 words.** It fits HKU's limit and CUHK's two pages, and you can trim or adapt it for everyone else.
- **HKU and CUHK read a single statement for all your choices.** If you apply for BBA, Economics and Global Business, the statement has to make sense for all three (see Section 7).
- **At CityU you write one for each programme**, so make each version clearly about that programme.
- **Where it's optional, still submit one if it adds something.** HKBU and Lingnan both say they look at the whole application. A short, specific statement can only help.
- **Don't send documents PolyU hasn't asked for.** If your programme doesn't list a statement, there's no need to submit one.

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2. What the reader is actually looking for

Your reader is usually a professor or programme leader working through a pile of applications. They already have your grades. The statement answers the questions grades can't:

1. **Why this subject?** What made you interested, and how do you know the interest is real?
2. **What have you done about it?** Reading, projects, work, competitions, or a topic you went beyond the syllabus on.
3. **What kind of person are you?** How you deal with problems, other people and setbacks.
4. **Why here?** Is there something about this programme that fits you, rather than any programme at any university?

5. **Can you write clearly in English?** Teaching is in English at most of these universities, and the statement is a writing sample.

A useful test: if a classmate could submit your paragraph with their name on it and nobody would notice, it isn't personal enough.

This is a free preview

The full guide continues with 12 more sections: collecting your raw material, a structure that works, writing each part, subject-by-subject notes, one statement for several programmes, situations IAL students often face, ten common mistakes, editing checklists, linking your statement to the interview, using AI tools, a fill-in template and a complete fictional example.

Get the full guide from IAL UnitWise.