

What Is a Personal Statement, and What Is It For?

60 minutes

Strand 1.1: Understanding Myself

Participating

Outcome LCW.M1.S1.PS.1

Outcome LCW.M1.S1.PS.2

WHAT THIS LESSON DOES

Read personal statements the way a stranger-reader does. Name what a personal statement is for, tell it apart from a CV, cover letter and statement of purpose, and annotate a sample draft for what works and what could be stronger.

CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Outcome	What the specification asks for
LCW.M1.S1.PS.1	outline the purpose of a personal statement.
LCW.M1.S1.PS.2	recognise different formats and uses of personal statements.

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

- Outline the purpose of a personal statement for progression opportunities
- Distinguish personal statement, CV, cover letter and statement of purpose
- Annotate a sample personal statement for what works and what could be stronger

KEY TERMS

Term	What it means here	For example
Personal statement	A thorough, reflective, yet concise overview of you as a person, written so someone who has never met you can judge your suitability for a progression opportunity.	Typically a 300-500 word piece for a QQI Level 5 Healthcare Support PLC, an apprenticeship, or some HE and additional screening routes
CV	A structured list of facts about your education, experience, skills and referees. It shows what you have done; it does not explain who you are.	Typically a one- or two-page Irish CV with contact details, education, work experience, skills and two referees
Cover letter	A short letter (typically one page) that accompanies a CV and argues why you fit one specific role or opportunity right now.	Around a 200-word letter to a named manager applying for a summer retail job, matching three of the advert's requirements
Statement of purpose	A focused piece that explains why you want a particular course or programme and how it fits your plans, often used for specialised or postgraduate applications.	A short why-this-programme paragraph for a specialised art college, competitive PLC pathway, or postgraduate-style application (less common at school-leaver stage in Ireland)

BEFORE THE BELL

- Students need device access to the in-platform document annotator (explore mode) and their Strand 1.1 Digital Portfolio folder.
- The audit document is created in class today; printed sample copies are not the default path.
- If some Strand 1.1 banks are thin, plan pair support or a one-achievement-from-memory fallback and flag portfolio catch-up before ALT 1 drafting.
- On screen this lesson: document annotator.

What Is a Personal Statement, and What Is It For?

HOW THE LESSON RUNS		
5 min	introduction	Getting Started
5 min	content	Key Terms
35 min	activity	Annotate a Sample Personal Statement
10 min	content	Think About It
5 min	summary	What you covered

STEP BY STEP

5 min Getting Started

Open with a quick show of hands: who has already been asked for a personal statement, a CV, or both? Gloss ALT 1 once as the upcoming personal-statement draft task later in this unit, so the code is not a barrier.

If a student's Strand 1.1 bank is thin or messy, pair them with a peer who has clearer evidence, or let them use one achievement from memory today and flag a short portfolio catch-up before ALT 1 drafting starts. Do not stall the class on folder tidy-up.

Keep the hook short. The distinction between the four document types lands in Key Terms; the real work is the annotation.

5 min Key Terms

Spend no more than five minutes here. Ask: *If you only had room for one document in an application pack, which would still need the other three sitting behind it?* The personal statement is the one that cannot be replaced by a list.

If students press on statement of purpose, use the art-college / specialised PLC / postgraduate-style example and stress that it is less common for most school-leaver routes in Ireland, but still worth recognising when an application pack names it.

Flag that formats differ by audience (Lesson 23). Today is purpose and quality of writing, not format variety.

35 min Annotate a Sample Personal Statement On screen: document annotator

SUGGESTED TIMING

- 0–3 mins: read once, no labels
- 3–18 mins: students place labels in explore mode; circulate and push anyone who only marks "what's working"
- 18–25 mins: reveal the model on the board; hear two places the class disagreed
- 25–35 mins: write Personal Statement Audit in the portfolio document (three headings plus My own evidence)

If write-up is unfinished at the bell, homework is make-up only after the in-class model reveal and pair share have happened. Do not skip the model discussion to send the whole task home, because the reveal is where students find out which of their labels a reader would agree with.

LOOK-FORS

- A complete audit has at least three "what works" and three "could be stronger" entries, each with a named phrase plus one why line, plus the prove answer under the third heading
- Students can say why a specific scene beats "I am a hard worker"
- They notice buried evidence (Garda Vetting, named place) versus empty claims
- The audit names phrases, not vague praise like "good introduction"
- My own evidence names a real Strand 1.1 artefact (or a memory stand-in flagged for catch-up), not a generic claim

TEACHING TIPS

If someone marks everything as working, ask: *Would a stranger who has never met Sam still know what teamwork looked like on the pitch?* The camogie line is the trap most miss.

Mention briefly that ALT 1 drafting starts soon, and that this is the eye they will bring to their own pages.

10 min Think About It

Read the two prompts from the screen and let the class talk; there is nothing to write down on this step itself. Two or three pairs then share aloud.

Before pairs answer the second prompt, give a tight stem: *Name one portfolio artefact first (values entry, achievement, or skills evidence), then say whether it would earn "working" or "could be stronger" on today's test.* Push away from generic answers. If a folder is thin, allow one achievement from memory and note catch-up.

Treat **My own evidence** as the close of the Personal Statement Audit already open from step 3, not a vague later option. Check that the three lines are written in the portfolio document before you move to the summary.

Optional stretch for fast finishers: rewrite Sam's two weakest sentences in their audit document using the Mary-scene standard (specific moment, checkable detail).

5 min What you covered

30-second done-check before dismissal: every student has a Personal Statement Audit document in their Strand 1.1 folder with the three main headings (What works; What could be stronger; What a concise reflective overview must prove), at least three phrase-plus-why lines under each of the first two headings, the prove answer under the third, and ideally the My own evidence close. Confirm saved, then dismiss.

Preview Lesson 23: same content reshaped for different audiences.

ANSWERS AND LOOK-FORS

- "one afternoon a week at St Brigid's Day Centre" - What's working - Names a real place and a real pattern of time. A reader can picture this. Compare it with any line that could sit in anybody's application.
- "We talked about her garden for twenty minutes" - What's working - A concrete scene beats 'I care about older people'. You can see Sam in the room. This is show, not tell.
- "patient handling, infection control, and how to keep someone's dignity" - What's working - Uses the language of the course and the job. Shows Sam has looked up what Healthcare Support actually involves, not just 'helping people'.
- "completed Garda Vetting through the day centre and I have already..." - What's working - Checkable facts. A coordinator can verify these. Passion claims are easy; Garda Vetting and two shadowed mornings are evidence.
- "which has taught me teamwork" - Could be stronger - Camogie could be strong evidence, but the sentence stops at the label. A reader needs one moment: a match, a role, a result. Right now it is a slogan.
- "My goal is to work in a community care setting after I finish" - Could be stronger - True but thin. It does not yet connect back to Sam's values, aptitudes or the Mary story. A stronger close would echo something already evidenced.

TEACHING MOVES

- Gloss ALT 1 once as the upcoming personal-statement draft later in this unit.
- Model or reveal the first annotation with the class so the camogie trap is visible: empty "teamwork" claims need a moment underneath.
- Circulate during explore mode; push anyone who only marks "what's working".
- Facilitate brief pair discussion on Think About It; stem the self-evidence prompt with "name one portfolio artefact first".
- Exit check: document exists in Strand 1.1 with three headings, ≥ 3 working and ≥ 3 stronger (phrase + why each), the prove answer, and ideally My own evidence.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Students can say why a specific scene beats "I am a hard worker".
- They notice buried evidence (Garda Vetting, named place) versus empty claims.
- The audit names phrases, not vague praise like "good introduction".
- Confusing personal statements with CVs: emphasise that it must explain who you are, not just list facts.
- Focusing only on positives: encourage identifying what could be stronger.
- Skipping labels: remind students to use each label at least once.
- Generic self-evidence answers: insist on a named Strand 1.1 artefact or a flagged memory stand-in.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Support: allow paired work for the annotation activity; offer sentence starters for audit lines.
- Extension: ask students to propose rewrites for weak sections using the Mary-scene standard.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE LEFT WITH

- Personal Statement Audit: annotated sample naming what works and what could be stronger