Personal Statement

How your background led you to want to make a difference at home, what you have already done, and the barriers you crossed.

500	5	2	Free
WORD LIMIT	BEATS	WORKED EXAMPLES	TO READ & DOWNLOAD

ABOUT THE EXAMPLES.

All names, places, institutions and statistics below are anonymised and reinvented versions of successful Commonwealth applications, changed to show technique. The personal details are invented. Your story must be yours, and must be true.

01 SECTION 1

Part one: what this answer is for

A NOTE ON DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES.

You decide what to share. Nothing in this guide asks you to disclose more than you are comfortable with. A barrier can be stated in two or three plain sentences and still be powerful. What matters to the panel is what you did next.

Structure. Five beats: scene, contributions, barrier, turning point, forward.

Word plan at 500 words.

BEAT	WORDS
Scene: one concrete image that started the question	80
Contributions: what you have already done	150

BEAT	WORDS
Barrier: what stood in the way and what you did	140
Turning point: the realisation that shaped your plan	80
Forward: why this course, why home, why the Commonwealth	50

It answers one question: **why are you the person who will do this, and how do we know?** It is not a second CV, a biography, a catalogue of hardships, or a repeat of your ambitions. Your qualifications, employment and prizes are already on the form. Your Development Impact statement already contains your plan. The personal statement is the only place the panel hears **why this matters to you** and sees **what you did when it was difficult**.

What the panel is reading for

- **Origin.** A real, specific reason this problem is yours.
- **Action.** Something you have already done about it, however small.
- **Resilience with agency.** A barrier you faced, and what you did, not only what happened to you.
- **Coherence.** A line from your background to your plan to the course.

The three failure modes

Hardship without agency. A paragraph of difficulty with no action leaves the panel sympathetic but unconvinced. State the barrier briefly and spend the words on what you did.

Ambition without evidence. "I have always wanted to help my community" is an assertion. A tutoring group that grew from nine children to 120 is evidence.

A CV in prose. A list of roles and awards duplicates the form. Use only what advances the story.

02 SECTION 2

Part two: choosing your thread

You have 500 words, so choose **one origin**, **one barrier** and **two or three contributions**. Everything else belongs elsewhere on the form.

CHOOSE	FILTER
The origin	Is it small, concrete and connected to the problem in your plan?
The contributions	Did you decide things, or take part? Can you give one number?
The barrier	Does it explain something the panel needs to understand, such as a dip in grades or a gap in access?
The turning point	Is it the moment your problem became a plan?

Under-represented applicants

The CSC specifically invites applications from people who have faced disadvantage or who are under-represented in their field. This can mean first-generation university students, applicants from remote or under-served regions, women in fields where they are few, and people with disabilities or those who have overcome other barriers. Say it plainly, and connect it to your work: your standing is part of your evidence.

Disabled applicants who do not hold a 2:1 may be considered for a contextualised nomination through the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum nominator, and the CSC publishes a disability support statement. Check the CSC's pages for details.

Explaining a dip in your record

The CSC's panel guidance says that if there are reasons why an applicant has not scored well in part of their academic career, they should be explained here. Do it in three steps: the circumstance in a sentence, what you did, and the result with a number. "My grades fell from 8.7 to 6.4 in my second year. I arranged to submit coursework in stages, and I finished with 8.9." Do not make excuses and do not over-explain.

03 SECTION 3

Part three: writing it, beat by beat

Scene, around 80 words

Open on one small, concrete moment, not on your biography, a quotation or a statement about your passion. The strongest scenes are specific enough to be seen, short enough to read in fifteen seconds, and connected to the problem in your plan.

Variant one, the witnessed moment.

> *"When I was fifteen, the mechanic who repaired our family's three-wheeler lit a fire behind his workshop to melt the lead out of old batteries. The smoke drifted across the lane where I did my homework."*

Variant two, the inheritance.

> *"My mother counted bricks for a contractor all day. One night she watched me copy out a sum and said, 'The people who can read the ledger decide what the ledger says.'"*

Variant three, the first encounter with the gap.

> *"In my first week as a clinical trainee, I met a patient who had walked nine hours to reach us and could not be given the test he needed, because the one machine in the district was broken."*

Convert the scene within a few sentences. A scene with no point is decoration. After it, say what you understood, even if you only understood it later. "He said it paid for his children's school books, and that nobody had ever told him where else the batteries could go."

Avoid openings like "Since childhood I have wanted to serve my country", "Poverty has always been my greatest teacher" or a dictionary definition.

Contributions, around 150 words

What you have already done, chosen for relevance to your plan. Give two or three, each with a verb you own and a number.

The test for each contribution: did something change because of you, and can you say how much? "I organised a collection drive that gathered 3.1 tonnes of discarded electronics from 14 hostels" is a contribution. "I participated in several sustainability initiatives" is not.

Connect your contributions to each other. They should form a trajectory: from a drive on campus, to a survey in settlements, to a role at a youth forum. Show that you widened the scope of what you attempted over time.

Include one external signal if you have it: an invitation, a committee seat, a grant, a selection. Someone else bet on you.

Barrier, around 140 words

Name the barrier plainly, say what you did, and give the result.

The shape of a good barrier paragraph.

1. **The circumstance (one or two sentences).** What happened, factually.
2. **What it cost you (one sentence).** A number if possible.
3. **What you did (two or three sentences).** The decisions, the help you sought, the changes you made.
4. **The result (one sentence).** Where you ended up.
5. **The lesson, tied to your work (one sentence).** What it taught you about the problem you will work on.

Credit those who helped. A named professor, mentor or foundation who stepped in is not a sign of weakness. It is evidence of how systems can work, and it often links to your plan.

Keep the tone steady. Avoid words like "tragedy", "despair" and "turmoil". The facts will carry the weight. State them and move on.

Turning point, around 80 words

The moment the problem became a plan. It might be a conversation, a project, a data set or a meeting. It answers why this problem and why you.

> *"Each described the same gap from a different side: the engineers could recover the metals, the regulators could write the rules, and neither had a route for the informal workers who handle most of the batteries. I recognised the mechanic behind his workshop."*

Good turning points return to the opening scene, which gives the statement a shape.

Forward, around 50 words

Connect to the course, to home and to the Commonwealth. Keep it short and concrete: what you will learn, where you will use it and why you will return. Do not repeat the Development Impact statement.

04 SECTION 4

Part four: what to leave out

- Your prizes and publications, which are on the form
- A list of every role or club
- Generic statements of passion or duty
- Your academic achievements, unless you are explaining a dip
- Detail of traumatic events beyond what the panel needs
- Plans you describe in detail elsewhere
- Names of famous people you have met, unless the relationship produced something

05 SECTION 5

Part five: two full sample answers

Bracketed labels show structure. Do not include them. All details are invented.

Sample one, battery circularity

Sample one, Personal statement

> *When I was fifteen, the mechanic who repaired our family's three-wheeler lit a fire behind his workshop to melt the lead out of old batteries. The smoke drifted across the lane where I did my homework, and for a week my younger sister coughed through the night. I asked him why he did it. He said it paid for his children's school books, and that nobody had ever told him where else the batteries could go. I had no answer then. I have spent the years since trying to find one.*
> *That question followed me into engineering. I ran a hostel collection drive that gathered 3.1 tonnes of discarded electronics from 14 hostels, and spent weekends teaching waste segregation to children at a government school in Ashbury. After graduating I worked as an analyst at Meridian Insights, where a client weighing a switch to electric drivetrains showed me how much of a vehicle's sustainability is decided by what happens to its battery at the end of its life. At the Tidewater Youth Forum I led a team that surveyed 300 households in informal

settlements about waste and income. It taught me that the people who handle our waste are rarely asked what would make their work safer.

My own path was not smooth. In my second year my father, the only earner in our home, fell seriously ill with kidney failure. I took on evening tutoring to cover fees and travelled two hours each way to the dialysis centre, and my grades fell from 8.7 to 6.4 out of 10. I nearly deferred. A professor, Dr Leena Rao, sat down with my results and asked what I needed rather than what I had failed to do, and arranged for me to submit coursework in stages. I recovered and finished with 8.9, and my final project, a low-cost water-quality monitor for urban canals, was chosen for my department's showcase. My father recovered enough to see me graduate. That year taught me that a system can look like failure when it simply lacks one missing support.

At a regional mobility forum I met two battery start-ups and a researcher from an energy policy institute. Each described the same gap from a different side: the engineers could recover the metals, the regulators could write the rules, and neither had a route for the informal workers who handle most of the batteries. I recognised the mechanic behind his workshop. The problem was never that workers did not care. It was that no one had built a system they could join.

That is why I want to study circular systems engineering, which joins engineering, policy and the economics of recovery. I want to bring those tools back to Port Marrow and, as a Commonwealth Scholar, to learn from countries that have faced the same questions, so that the next mechanic has somewhere to send his batteries.

Sample two, child labour

Sample two, Personal statement

In the cold season when I was ten, I did my homework by the glow of a brick kiln, because our hamlet in Dunmore District lost its electricity at six. My mother spent her days counting bricks for a contractor. One night she watched me copy out a sum and said, "The people who can read the ledger decide what the ledger says." My two elder brothers had left school at twelve to work in the kiln, to pay off a debt my father owed its owner. I was the one who stayed. I have never forgotten that the difference was a decision my mother made.

I walked seven kilometres each way to the nearest high school and became the first in my family to finish secondary school, supported by a foundation scholarship that covered my fees. At university I began tutoring the children of kiln workers on Sundays. The group grew from nine children to 120, and with a $2,400 youth grant I organised a campaign with the Dunmore Women's Savings Federation that brought 214 children back to class. I was invited to sit on the Provincial Child Protection Commission's district reform committee, and later

> *represented my province at a national youth consultation on education. Each step taught me that the barrier was rarely the child's willingness. It was money, distance, and officials who did not visit.*
> *My background shaped what was possible. Dunmore has the lowest school completion rate in the province, and few from my village had reached university. My family's debt meant my fees were never certain, and in my first year I lived in a hostel with no reliable money for books. I worked as a library assistant and taught evening classes, and I told no one how close I came to leaving. When a lecturer, Dr Samira Qadir, noticed I had stopped attending seminars, she asked me directly, and arranged a book allowance and a place on a research assistantship. I finished with first-class honours. Because someone asked, I stayed, and I now try to ask the same question of every child I tutor.*
> *While working on a research project about rural livelihoods, I noticed that the savings groups of women in Dunmore already held more trust, and more money, than any government scheme. They knew which families were in debt and which children had stopped coming to school. No policy used that knowledge. I began to see child labour not as a failure of families but as a gap in design, and the gap as something a policy could close.*
> *I want to study public policy to learn how to turn that idea into a funded, tested and measured model. I will return to Dunmore, because the children in the kilns are not an abstraction to me, and because the evidence I need is in the district I come from.*

What both samples do. They open on a small, concrete scene and convert it into a question within a few sentences. They give contributions with numbers and a trajectory. They state the barrier plainly, name the person who helped, and give the result with a figure. They return to the opening image in the turning point. They end on the course, home and the Commonwealth, without repeating the plan.

06 SECTION 6

Part six: dos and don'ts

Do

- Open on one small, concrete scene
- Convert the scene into an insight within a few sentences
- Choose two or three contributions with a number each
- State the barrier plainly, with what you did and what resulted

- Credit the people who helped
- Explain any dip in your academic record, with the result
- Return to your opening image in the turning point
- Connect the end to the course, home and the Commonwealth

Don't

- Open with a quotation, a definition or a claim of passion
- List prizes, roles and clubs already on the form
- Describe hardship without describing what you did
- Use melodramatic language
- Disclose more than you want to
- Repeat the Development Impact plan
- Name famous people with nothing attached
- Overclaim a team achievement

07 SECTION 7

Part seven: common mistakes, and the fix

MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS MARKS	THE FIX
"I have always wanted to help."	Assertion with no evidence	Open on a scene and show an action
A catalogue of awards	Duplicates the form	Keep only what advances the story
Hardship with no action	Sympathy without conviction	Spend the words on what you did and what followed
Melodramatic wording	Obscures the facts	State the facts in plain sentences
No link to the plan	The statement floats free	End each paragraph so that it leads to the turning point
Unexplained dip in grades	Hurts candidate merit	Explain it briefly, with the result

MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS MARKS	THE FIX
Contributions with no numbers	Unverifiable	Add one exact figure each
An ending that repeats the plan	Wastes fifty words	Connect to the course, home and the Commonwealth
Name-dropping	Looks like a contact list	Name only people with whom something was produced
Too many threads	None lands	Choose one origin and one barrier

08 SECTION 8

Part eight: checklists

While drafting

- One small, concrete opening scene
- The scene converted into an insight
- Two or three contributions, each with a verb you own and a number
- A trajectory across contributions
- One barrier: circumstance, cost, action, result, lesson
- Any dip in grades explained with the result
- A turning point that connects to the opening scene
- An ending on the course, home and the Commonwealth

Before submitting

- No list of prizes or roles repeated from the form
- No melodramatic wording
- I have shared only what I am comfortable sharing
- Every number and name is real and spelled correctly
- Nothing contradicts my employment entries or Development Impact statement

- A person who knows me would recognise the voice
- Within the 500-word limit in the live form