

NAME _____

TUTOR GROUP _____

Holy Family Catholic School

UCAS TIPS



Please use this as a dip in – dip out guide – keep it safe for when you need it

I will be adding to it as we go along.

Any questions regarding UCAS please see me, or email me

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USEFUL WEBSITES

www.ucas.co.uk

<http://university.which.co.uk>

www.unistats.direct.gov.uk

[www/purepotential.org](http://www.purepotential.org)

Please let us know of any good sites you find

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So the one thing you know is that you want to go to university – the hard bit is deciding on what to study, and where. Here’s how to turn thousands of UCAS courses and more than 300 universities and colleges into five clear, confident choices.

Once you've read the advice below, you can start your course search here on Which? University.

Which subject?

This is an important one to get right – you don’t want to waste your time and money on a subject you don’t want to do (or end up dropping out of). To help you decide which subject area is right for you, break down your subject shortlist (or longlist) into three possible routes, questioning your reasons as you go.

Is it... a subject you have already studied?

For example, maybe you loved English literature at GCSE and A-level / Highers and you read novels for pleasure in your own time. Is an English degree right for you?

Questions to ask yourself:

- Will you still be interested in that subject for a further three or four years – enough to motivate yourself to work and research independently?
- Any thoughts on life after university – what do you want to do and could your subject choice affect this? You may get to the end of this degree and still not know how you are going to earn a living! On a positive note many careers will consider graduates with a wide range of subjects.

Is it... a subject that relates to a career idea?

For example, perhaps you did work experience in an estate agent office, and are now considering a degree in real estate management in order to become a professional surveyor. Or maybe you’ve always wanted to be a journalist.

Questions to ask yourself:

- How is the subject you’re considering viewed by the industry it is connected to? Do you need to take it to actually go into that career? You don’t have to do a journalism degree to become a journalist - many degrees are considered!
- Have you done any/enough work experience to see if this is the right career for you?

Is it... a subject that relates to something new?

For example, maybe you’ve always been interested in computers and the internet at home, and enjoyed maths at school, so are considering a degree in computer science, a course subject you probably won’t have studied before.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do you know what’s involved? Try speaking to a careers adviser, researching online and exploring in detail the type of modules you’ll be studying on different computer science courses.
- What’s your principal reason for taking the subject? Get this clear in your head. Is it because of a particular career path, because you’re fascinated by how computers work or you just want to broaden your horizons? Or is because your brother or sister did it or because there’s a uni close to home that offers this course? Question if your reasons are honestly the right reasons for you.

Still not sure...?

It's also worth thinking about:

- Joint honours – this could be a mixture of a subject you are already familiar with and something new, eg geography and something related to a career ie planning.
- Scottish university courses – many Scottish universities let you apply for a named degree ie politics, but you'll cover a wide range of subjects in your first year. In the second year you can carry on with politics or specialise in some of the other subjects you tried out.

Which university?

Once you've got your subject choice sorted, start looking around for where you want to be based for the next few years. Here are a few pointers to get you thinking...

Course content

Remember this might differ drastically from university to university, even if the courses have the same or similar names. On the other hand, it might be that the course you choose has to meet, or be accredited by, a professional body, such as civil engineering.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Have you actually read the outline of the course content provided by the university? In detail?
- Could you do any wider reading that relates to the course to prepare yourself? (in any case, it would be good for your personal statement).

Type of assessment

For example, you're doing a coursework-assessed BTEC Business, but the course you're considering is mainly assessed by exams. There might be a big step change moving from college to university studies – could this pose a problem to you?

Questions to ask yourself:

- Which methods of assessment best suit you? Exams, coursework, practicals, group projects and presentations could all be in the mix in differing quantities.
- Every university course will include a % breakdown of assessment as part of a new key information set it's required to display on its website - have you checked it out yet?

Grade requirements

You have to identify five courses that you have a realistic chance of getting the grades for as part of your UCAS application. Based on the universities that make you an offer, you'll then have to decide which is going to be your firm (first) choice and your insurance (second) choice.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Are your five course choices sensibly spread, including a safe bet alongside a more ambitious option, based on what you've been predicted to achieve?
- Does your insurance choice have lower entry requirements than your first choice? It should do!

Location

You might want to stay at home for financial reasons. You may prefer a city campus, an out-of-town greenfield campus – or a college that offers degrees.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Will living at home be a more affordable option for you? What will you pay in tuition fees in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?
- Have you visited a few different universities on open days to get a feel for which environment best suits you?

Explore our individual university and college profiles to get a feel for what it could be like to study at a particular place, including details of the local area and environment.

Reputation

League tables, friends, family, teachers, advisers - all can make suggestions of courses you should consider, but beware of over-simplified notions of what's viewed as a 'good' university.

When you're looking at a university, course content, assessment methods, grade requirements and location should always be your top priority.

Questions to ask yourself:

- If you're looking at the league tables, are you only considering universities higher up the table that you have heard of - why not explore some of the others?
- What do other students think? Take a look at student satisfaction scores – plus head to a uni's profile page where current students have shared what life's really like on the ground.

Next:

- Find the course that's right for you - try our personalised course search (30,000+ undergrad courses listed on Ucas).
- Explore universities and colleges - find out what students are saying about accommodation, facilities and cost of living.

Choosing a career: things to try now to help you decide



Asking yourself tough questions about the future such as ‘which career path do I take?’ can be a bit daunting. Need some inspiration? Here are seven career-related opportunities to help you get your foot on the ladder...

Whether you're certain of your career ambitions or haven't decided yet, it's important to get some real-life experience under your belt to help you decide what you want - and don't want! - to do. Here are some practical things you can take advantage of, at school, college and beyond.

For more careers tips, check out these [top ways to boost your job prospects](#) while you're at university and find out how to [make your work experience count](#). (<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/choosing-a-career-things-to-try-now-to-help-you-decide>)

Deciding if uni is right for you - and help to get there

These extra-curricular activities will offer you a flavour of what degree-level studies are like and whether uni is the right path for you, as well as giving you practical examples of how you've proactively researched your chosen subject to potentially use in [your personal statement](#).

Masterclasses

Usually organised by universities and focusing on a specific subject area, these are a great taster of what studying a particular degree discipline could be like. Expect to hear from, and maybe even meet, a head of faculty. You may also get to see the university's grounds and a lecture hall, which can be revealing in itself.

Where to find them: Widely advertised in school.

Summer school

Summer schools are extended stays at the host university. You'll get to experience university life living in halls, have a series of lectures, meet university students, learn new things and ask lots of questions...

Where to find them: the [Sutton Trust](#) organises a range of summer schools across the UK, including at the Universities of Bristol, Durham, Edinburgh, Nottingham and St Andrews. – widely advertised in school.

Public lectures

Universities almost always have public lectures running throughout the year. Most are open to all and encourage people of all ages to attend, giving you a chance to see a real lecture in progress – and testing whether you can last the full hour! Pick one that really interests you rather than one you think you should attend based on what you've been studying. Most universities also store lecture recordings online for those that can't make it.

Where to find them: check out what's on offer at your local university - also some interesting ones at the Universities of [Bath](#), [Birmingham](#), [Bristol](#), [Cambridge](#), [Leeds](#), [Manchester](#), [Nottingham](#) and [Oxford](#).

Mentor

In most mentoring schemes you'll be buddied up with someone a little older than you with common interests (subject, career, hobbies). They can advise you on your studies, talk about their experiences, help you make

the right decisions or just be there to listen.

Where to find them: your college or sixth form may already be connected to a scheme, or take a look at [Bright Links Ementoring](#) to be partnered up with an online mentor.

Get your career off to an early headstart - now

If you are thinking you'd like to kickstart your career now, there's plenty you can do to get your foot in the door.

Work experience

For students the main way of getting career-related experience is, obviously, work experience - it looks great on your [personal statement](#) and your CV, too. Getting experience in some areas can be competitive, so research companies and apply for placements early (don't just think that before the deadline will do; many employers start awarding places as soon as they receive high quality applications). Ask friends, teachers and family to check your applications.

Where to find it: the [National Careers Service](#) website offers some practical pointers - and check out specific work experience placement schemes on offer from the likes of [Random House](#) or the [House of Commons](#) on the AccessProfessions website.

Volunteering

Volunteering is another way of gaining experience, adding to your personal statement and CV but also helping people, animals or the environment at the same time.

Where to find it: the [Do-it](#) website lists local volunteering opportunities and projects near you.

Apprenticeships

Decided that university isn't for you, or thinking you'd like to be paid while you learn? As a school-leaver apprentice you get trained on the job, gain qualifications and are paid for doing so.

Where to find them: the [Apprenticeships.org.uk](#) website is a good place to start looking for vacancies, while other schemes such as [Pure Potential](#) work with big-name firms to offer training programmes to school leavers.

See our apprenticeship booklet.

10 things to put in your personal statement



No two personal statements should be the same (the clue is in the *personal!*), but there are certain additions that will get the attention of the admissions tutor reading it whatever subject you want to study. Remember: what you write could end up being the decider between you and another candidate.

1. Explain your reasons for wanting to study the course

What motivates you to take this course at a university-level? Mention how your interest developed, what you have done to pursue it or how you've drawn inspiration from your current studies. Or, just demonstrate your enthusiasm for it.

"Be specific from line one" (English admissions tutor)

2. Explain how you're right for the course

Provide evidence that you fit the bill – not only that you meet the selection criteria but also that you've researched the course or profession and understand what studying the subject at university level will imply, and that you are prepared for this.

"Keep on topic and show that you've really done your research and know why you want to do the course." (Sport admissions tutor)

3. Say what you've done outside the classroom...

If possible, outline how you've pursued your interest in your chosen subject beyond your current syllabus.

For example, talk about any further reading you've done around the subject and give your critical views or reflective opinions about it. This could be from books, quality newspapers, websites, periodicals or scientific journals or from films, documentaries, blogs, radio programmes, podcasts, attending public lectures and so on.

But try to avoid mentioning the wider reading that *everyone* else is doing.

"If I have to read about *Freakonomics* once more, I'll scream!" (Economics admissions tutor)

4. ...Why it's relevant to your course

Reflect on your experiences, explaining what you've learned from them or how they've helped develop your interest in the subject – it could be work experience, volunteering, a university taster session or outreach programme, summer schools, museum, gallery or theatre visits, archaeological digs, visits to the local courts, travel, competitions or a maths challenge.

"It doesn't have to be anything fancy!" (Archaeology admissions tutor)

5. ...And relevant to your chosen career

If you're applying for a vocational course that leads directly to a specific profession, it's really important to reflect on what you've gained from your experience and how it relates to your chosen career path.

For example, what skills did you observe or pick up during your work experience and what did you learn from this? How has it increased your understanding of the profession or your enthusiasm for going into it?

“Reflect on your experience, don’t just describe it. Talk about the skills the profession needs, how you’ve noticed this and how you’ve developed those skills yourself.” (Occupational Therapy admissions tutor)

6. Can you demonstrate transferable skills..?

Yes you can – and admissions tutors will want to hear about them. It could be your ability for working independently, teamwork, good time management, problem-solving, leadership, listening or organisational skills.

7. Expand on the most relevant ones

But don’t simply list off the skills you think you have – think about which ones relate most readily to the course you’re applying to, then demonstrate how you’ve developed, used and improved these. Again, admissions tutors want to hear about *specific* examples:

- projects and assignments (what role did you play, what went well, what did you learn?)
- positions of responsibility (what did it entail, what did you organise?)
- sport, music or drama (what did you learn from your role, how did you work as a team?)
- Young Enterprise, Duke of Edinburgh award (what were the biggest challenges and why, how did you overcome them?)
- Volunteering or your Saturday job (what do you do, what have you observed, what extra responsibilities have you taken on?)

8. Show that you’re a critical thinker

University is all about being able to think independently and analytically so being able to demonstrate that you’re working like this already is a big plus point. Briefly explaining how one of your A-level subjects, a BTEC assignment or placement, or additional studies such as the [Extended Project Qualification \(EPQ\)](#) has made you think more critically could be a way of doing this.

“If you’re taking the EPQ, do talk about it, as it’s the kind of studying you’ll be doing at uni” (Modern languages admissions tutor)

9. What’s the long term plan?

Mention what your longer term goals are if you can do it in an interesting way and you’ve got a specific path in mind but, if you do, then try and show a spark of individuality or imagination.

“Just saying you want to be a journalist isn’t exactly going to stand you out from the crowd.” (History admissions tutor)

If you’re not sure yet, just talk about what you’re looking forward to at uni and what you want to gain from it.

If you’re applying for deferred entry, do mention your gap year plans if you’ve made a firm decision to take a year out. Most universities are happy for you to take a gap year – but will want to know how you plan to spend it.

10. Keep it positive

It can be difficult to get going with your personal statement, but don’t panic. Start with your strengths, focus on your enthusiasm for the course and talk positively about yourself.

10 more things to include in your personal statement



To help you ensure your personal statement stands out, we asked university admissions tutors - the ones who will actually be reading your personal statement as part of your application - what they're really looking for. Here are 10 key points they shared.

1. Paragraphs

Use paragraphs, rather than one solid block of text, to help organise your material and make it more readable. A statement with three or four clearly-defined, well-structured paragraphs will look a lot easier on the eye to an admissions tutor who has hundreds to read.

Because you can't indent on Ucas Apply, leaving a line between each paragraph will look even better. But on the other hand, the lines you leave will count towards your 47, so you won't be able to say so much.

2. A balance of academic and extra-curricular

Universities tend to suggest that you focus about 75% on your academic interests and why you want to study the course and 25% on the extra-curricular dimension that shows you're a rounded person. It's not a hard and fast rule and different courses will need different approaches. But it's a useful guideline.

However, if you don't do much outside your studies, don't pretend. Just focus mainly on your academic interests and talk about what you think instead of what you do.

3. Evidence you've researched your choices

If your statement is all about your passion for media production, but their course is all about media theory and analysis, a tutor won't be impressed. Likewise, raving about Ancient Rome won't impress if their history course starts in 1500. So do research the courses thoroughly and ensure that the content of your statement shows you know what you're applying for.

A growing number of university websites include sections on what their [admissions tutors typically look for in personal statements](#) - some even do it for individual courses. You could be at a big disadvantage if you haven't checked these out.

4. Engagement

An admissions tutor wants you to stand out from the crowd, but in a good way.

Showing your genuine enthusiasm and engagement with your chosen subject - the book you found in the library that changed your views, the relevant experiences you've had, the project you did, the podcast you just heard or the summer school or public lecture you went to - will help you get the tutor's attention.

You won't achieve this by being bizarre, or with meaningless clichés like 'I was born to dance', 'biology is my life' or 'it has always been my dream to be a vet'.

5. Lateral thinking

Do talk about what inspires you about your chosen course, but try to avoid the more obvious and popular things that hundreds of other applicants will write about.

For example, a criminology statement that reflects on crime in 15th century Spain or the causes of the vandalism encountered in your part-time job in a leisure centre might have more impact than yet another one that talks about serial killers or *CSI*. Think outside the box!

6. Honesty

Be honest. It's your voice they want to hear - and if there's even a remote chance that you might be [invited for an interview](#), your statement will need to stand up to close scrutiny. You don't want any exaggerated claims coming back to haunt you during their questioning...

7. Enthusiasm

'Most of all we want people who are enthusiastic about the course'. Admissions tutors are likely to love their subject and they want to teach students who share their enthusiasm. If you can also demonstrate intellectual curiosity, that's even better.

8. Saying HOW

Show, don't tell. Give examples and evidence that demonstrate what you think or do. For example:

- How has playing basketball improved your teamwork skills?
- How has doing the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award made you a better leader?
- How did reading about the historical context of Yeats's poetry change your understanding?
- How did you get the old man with dementia in the nursing home where you volunteer to tell you about his life?
- How did you get a new insight into law in your Saturday job on the bakery counter?

9. Saying what you want from your course

Admissions tutors often mention this. As well as outlining what you can offer them, what do you want them to help you achieve?

10. Ending on a positive note

Make the conclusion short and sharp, choosing your key messages carefully and conveying them concisely. Don't simply regurgitate what you've already said. Finish on a positive note with something that adds to your statement.

10 things not to put in your personal statement



University admissions tutors read hundreds of personal statements from students each year – so what is it that they really *don't* want to see in there?

1. Quotes from other people

It's your voice they want to hear - not Shakespeare, Einstein, Paul Britton, Martin Luther King, David Attenborough, Descartes or Napoleon's. So don't put a quote in unless it's really necessary to make a critical point. It's a waste of your word count.

'So many people use the same quotes and the worst scenario is when it comes right at the start of the statement with no explanation.'

'I don't care what Locke thinks, I want to know what YOU think!'

Or as a sport admissions tutor said: 'I'm totally fed up of Muhammad Ali quotes!'

2. Random lists

Avoid giving a list of all the books you've read, countries you've visited, work experience placements you've done, positions you've held. For starters, it's boring to read. It's not what you've done, it's what you think about it or learned from it that matters.

A dentistry admissions tutor sums it up: 'I would much rather read about what you learned from observing one filling than a list of all the procedures you observed.'

3. Over-used clichés

Avoid 'from a young age', 'since I was a child', 'I've always been fascinated by', 'I have a thirst for knowledge', 'the world we live in today'... You get the idea. They constantly recur in hundreds of personal statements and don't really say an awful lot.

4. Bigging yourself up with sweeping statements or unproven claims

More phrases to avoid: 'I genuinely believe I'm a highly motivated person' or 'My achievements are vast'. Instead give specific examples that provide concrete evidence. Show, don't tell!

5. Limit your use of the word 'passion'

'The word 'passion' (or 'passionate') is incredibly over-used.'

'Show it, don't say it.'

6. Stilted vocabulary

Frequent use of words or phrases like 'fuelled my desire', 'I was enthralled by' or 'that world-renowned author Jane Austen' make you sound, well, a bit fake (or like you've been over-using the thesaurus).

If you wouldn't say something in a day-to-day discussion, don't say it in your statement. It's even worse if you get it slightly wrong, like 'I was encapsulated by the bibliography of Tony Blair' or 'it was in Year 10 that my love for chemistry came forth'.

7. Plagiarism, lies or exaggeration

UCAS uses stringent similarity and plagiarism software and your universities will be told if you copy anything from another source.

And as for exaggeration, don't say you've read a book when you've only read a chapter – you never know when it might catch you out at a [university interview](#).

'If you didn't do it, read it or see it, don't claim it.'

8. Trying to be funny

Humour, informality or quirkiness can be effective in the right setting but it's a big risk, so be careful.

'It can be spectacularly good – or spectacularly bad.'

'An admissions tutor is not guaranteed to have your sense of humour.'

'Weird is not a selling point.'

9. Negative comments or excuses

It can be difficult to 'sell yourself' in your personal statement, but don't talk about why you haven't done something, or why you dropped an AS level. Focus on the positives!

10. Irrelevant personal facts

Before you write about playing badminton or a school trip you went on in year nine, apply the 'so what?' rule. Does it make a useful contribution and help explain why you should be given a place on the course? If not, scrap it.

10 more things not to put in your personal statement



1. Incorrect spelling and bad grammar

Don't forget poor punctuation, either. These are obvious and easily-avoided issues, so check and double check before you submit. Grammar and spelling crimes can result in rejection, especially if you're applying to a very competitive course.

2. Long sentences

Keep it concise. If some of your sentences are several lines long and only separated with commas - or worse, not punctuated at all - try to break them up with more full stops.

3. Stating the obvious

Take this sentence: 'In my work experience I learned to communicate effectively with clients, which is an important skill in accountancy.'

It's the last part of this sentence that's unnecessary. An admissions tutor doesn't need you to tell them it's an important skill - that much is obvious. Instead, explain how you learned to communicate effectively, or give them an actual example.

4. Repeating irrelevant academic details

Your qualifications, subjects, grades and other personal details are listed elsewhere on your Ucas application, so you don't need to list them in your statement or start by saying "I am currently studying...". It's a waste of those precious 4,000 characters you've got to play with.

You don't have to write about all the subjects or courses you are taking, either, unless you really want to. Statements that say 'maths has given me this, English has given me this and Spanish has given me this...' tend to come across as a bit dull and unimaginative. Besides, admissions tutors also like to know what you have read beyond the syllabus.

5. Rhetorical questions and other waffle

'So why should I be considered for a place on your course?'. 'Why astrophysics?'. To put it bluntly, rhetorical questions like these just sound patronising: they serve no purpose and waste space.

6. Talking about 'when I was young...'

This is a common complaint from admissions tutors. It can be tempting to begin your personal statement with something that first inspired you when you were six - but unis actually prefer to hear about something more recent or, better still, what it is that inspires you now.

7. Flattery

Some statements have a tendency towards flattery, with sentences like 'it would be an honour to be offered a place at your world-renowned university'. Don't bother - it's not what an admissions tutor wants to hear. What they really want to find out is what *you* can offer *them*, or what you aspire to learn from them, not that you're only choosing that course or university because of its prestigious reputation.

8. Names of universities

Individual university names creep into personal statements all too regularly, according to admissions tutors (even worse if combined with number 7, above). Avoid showing preference for any specific university unless you are applying for only one. Universities may be looking for ways to thin down the number of applicants, so don't make it easy for them.

9. Being formulaic

'Too many statements are formulaic' is a frequent comment we hear from universities. Following a standard formula or template could mean that your statement just won't stand out. Yes, there are guidelines and criteria you need to meet, but do be imaginative as well.

That said, don't be too weird in your approach. But don't let anyone force you to be excessively conventional either and don't be afraid to demonstrate your individuality. Yes, it's right to get your personal statement proof-read but, if you let other people *edit* it for you, the danger is that it becomes your own voice gets lost.

10. ...And avoid getting stressed

Stay calm. It's difficult not to perceive your personal statement as a scary obstacle, but admissions tutors want you to view it as an opportunity to show your enthusiasm for the subject along with other experiences that really make you stand out as a prospective university student.

As one geography admissions tutor puts it, 'the reason students come here is because they're fascinated by the subject - so we just want you to demonstrate this in your statement, along with an extra-curricular dimension that shows, for example, that you work well in a team.'

How to make your personal statement stand out – as told by admissions tutors



“Admissions tutors are busy. You have to grab their attention”... “We receive more than 1,500 applications”... “Don’t give us a load of old flannel. Tell us what makes you stand out.”

These are a few choice words from admissions tutors – and here’s how to deliver a polished personal statement that will get you noticed.

The strong consensus is that you’ll stand out by being interesting, reflective, relevant and personal, not by using gimmicks. As a law admissions tutor explained succinctly: ‘Off-the-wall won’t work.’ Or as another tutor put it: ‘We want you to be different, but not TOO different.’ Avoid the top things tutors *don’t* want to see in your personal statement at all costs...

1. Follow these dos and don’ts

2. Start well

Write a strong opening sentence, making it clear why you have applied to study a particular course. Lee Hennessy | Deputy Head Of Recruitment - Admissions At University Of Bath

3. Make it easy to read

Don’t write it in one long paragraph! Write well-structured paragraphs, so that experience, additional qualification, aspirations etc are clearly-defined. Karen Pichlmann | Head Of Admissions - Bournemouth University

4. Don’t let someone else write or rewrite it

Write it yourself – and ensure that it reflects your own personality. By all means ask others to proof read it or critique it, but make sure that you are the one to make any changes. Over-editing just results in any individuality being lost. Angela Milln | Director Of Student Recruitment - University Of Bristol

5. Use examples

When you are talking about your strengths and qualities, make sure you use examples to highlight your claims whenever appropriate. Graham Hackney | Senior Student Recruitment Officer - Uclan

6. Let your personality in

Personal statements should be original, not just in terms of using your own words and avoiding plagiarising someone else’s work, but to make sure that what you write reflects who you are as an individual. Andrew Hood | Admissions Manager At University Of South Wales

7. Demonstrate a *real* interest in the subject

It is really important to focus a significant amount of the statement on your chosen subject and to detail what you have read or participated in to evidence a genuine interest in it. For example, by reading around the

subject area, talking to someone in the relevant profession or gaining some relevant work experience. Nathalie Mortimer (Head of UK Student Recruitment, University of Nottingham),

8. Don't lose sight of the task at hand

Always remember to answer the question 'why should we give you a place on the course?' rather than just writing about yourself – every bit of the personal statement should be answering this question. Fran Bonner And Becci Hubbard | Community Outreach Team - Nottingham Trent University

9. Value-added skills and learning

Emphasise what you have been doing to develop your awareness and understanding of your chosen subject above and beyond the requirements of your A-level, BTEC or International Baccalaureate course. Mike Nicholson | Director Of Undergraduate Admissions - University Of Oxford

10. Relevant work experience – and what you learned

If you are applying for a strictly vocational degree like veterinary medicine, the importance of reflecting on your work experience can't be stressed highly enough. Jim Cannon | Widening Participation Development Officer - Royal Veterinary College University Of London

11. Write naturally

Use your own voice. Students often lack the confidence to say things the way they naturally would and end up writing a bunch of bland clichés. Reveal your personality and your own opinions in the statement, not what you think we want to read. Chris Fuller | Schools And Colleges Liaison Officer - University Of Southampton

12. Remember – explain the Action, the Benefit, and relevance to the Course

Ensure that you follow the ABC rule and keep it course-related and relevant. Claire Little | Home/eu Student Recruitment Officer - University Of Surrey

University interviews: how to prepare



Been asked to attend a university interview and juggling feelings of satisfaction, panic and terror all at once? While it's natural to be nervous, having an idea of what to expect can help you to shine on the day. Here are some top tips to get you interview-ready.

Remember that receiving an interview invite means that admissions tutors are impressed with your application so far and you're in the running for receiving an offer.

To help you prepare we've also asked students to share their stories on what a uni interview is really like, as well as some of the more unusual interview questions you may be asked.

What will the interview be like?

Interviews can range from an 'exam out loud' (it's safe to expect this from an Oxbridge interview) to an informal chat designed to encourage you to choose that course. They can last anything from ten minutes to an hour and are usually, though not always, conducted by one interviewer.

They can also vary depending on the subject you're applying to study – for example, English students may have to discuss a poem with their interviewer, while maths applicants might be asked to solve an equation.

Whatever the format of your interview, there should be a two-way interaction. Make sure you not only respond to what your interviewer asks you, but contribute to the discussion. There is no such thing as the perfect interview, or the perfect answer to a question an interviewer might throw at you. As much as possible, just try to relax and see it as an opportunity to discuss a subject you and your interviewer share an interest in.

What are interviewers looking for?

Above all, tutors want to see that you're genuinely enthusiastic about your subject. Your application has done enough to persuade them so far, so try to just be yourself.

Tutors may ask you to expand on any claims you made in your personal statement which demonstrate your particular interest in the subject – any extra research or work experience you've done, for example – so make sure your statement stands up to scrutiny.

Here are some tips from universities on what else interviewers want to see:

University of Bristol: 'Among other things, they will ask you about your reasons for wanting to study that particular subject and make sure you are aware of what the course involves and what the career options are. They will also assess your ability to communicate and to cope with stress.'

University of Kent: 'Interviewers will expect you to show some knowledge of the course and university, and have the ability to present your ideas and arguments well.'

University of Oxford: 'They are looking for evidence that you are thinking independently, that you are willing to engage with new ideas beyond the scope of your school or college syllabus, and that you are committed to your subject.'

Interview tips: what you might get asked about

- Revisit the university prospectus and course details, thinking about how you'd answer questions such as 'why this course?' and 'why this university?'.
- Re-familiarise yourself with your personal statement and be prepared to elaborate on anything you've said.
- Get someone (who hopefully knows a bit about your subject) to give you a mock interview. Having some interview practice beforehand will help to boost your confidence and expose areas you need to work on.
- Make sure you're aware of the latest issues in current affairs relevant to your subject – tutors may bring these into the discussion.
- Prepare some questions to ask tutors – just make sure that they haven't already been answered in information you've been sent by the university.

Interview tips: the practical prep

- Look carefully through any material that is sent to you before the interview, so you know what to expect when you arrive.
- Make sure you have something suitable to wear. The university may offer dress code recommendations, but if not, dress in something you feel comfortable in that won't distract the interviewer from the points you want to make.
- Plan your journey. If an overnight stay is involved, plan for this as well. To avoid extra stress, give yourself plenty of time on the day.

Take a look at what other tips students shared with us about how best to prepare for a university interview.

Pointers for on the day

- It's not just what you say that's important – body language is key to the impression you'll make. Sit up straight, make eye contact and look (and sound!) interested. It's important to engage with the interviewer right from the start.
- Let your interviewer take the lead when it comes to handshakes, sitting down, starting to talk, and so on.
- Listen carefully to the question and don't be afraid to take some time to think about your answer or ask them to repeat it – you won't be penalised!
- Remember, an interview is a two-way process. Make the most of it by finding out as much as you can about the course (including teaching methods) and getting a feel for whether the course and the university are right for you.

MAKE SURE YOU ASK THE SCHOOL FOR A MOCK INTERVIEW

Quick guide to fees and finance if you're studying in England



Student finance can feel like a bit of a minefield, so it's important you get all the facts to help you make your decisions. If you're looking to study full-time in England, this will give you a good outline of what you need to know to get started.

1. Tuition fees trivia

Most universities and colleges offering higher education courses in England plan to charge £9,250 in tuition fees for their courses as standard,

You don't need to find the money to pay your fees upfront – a loan covers the fees, and you'll only repay it when you're earning.

2. Student loan info

Tuition fee loan: this part of the loan is designed to cover your fee costs, funnily enough. You can borrow up to £9,250 a year (or however much your fees are). If you're applying to a private institution, you can apply for a tuition fee loan of up to £6,000 a year, but this might not cover your fees in full.

Maintenance loan: this part is designed to cover the cost of accommodation and living costs. You can borrow up to £5,555 a year if you're living away from home (more if you're in London, less if you're at home). The exact amount depends on your household income.

If you choose to apply for non-income assessed support, you can receive up to 65% of the maximum loan amount - £3,610 for students living away from home outside London.

You'll apply for both student loans in one go, via the Student Finance England (SFE), which is part of the Student Loans Company (SLC). They have videos on their website.

3. Free money is out there to help

Maintenance grant: if your household income is below £42,620 a year, a maintenance grant worth up to £3,387 could also be yours

Bursaries and scholarships: extra money you never need to pay back is also on offer directly from universities and colleges. These are awarded for lots of different reasons – from personal circumstances to academic achievement.

4. Repaying the debt

You'll only ever have to pay any of it back once you're earning more than £21,000 a year:

- earning below £21,000? You won't have to pay back anything
- earning £25,000? You'll pay back £360 a year, £30 a month or £6.92 a week
- earning £30,000? You'll repay £804 a year, £67 a month or £15.46 a week.

After 30 years, any outstanding debt you still owe will be written off, even if you didn't pay anything during some of that time (because you weren't working or earning below £21,000).

5. You can work out your budget with these nifty tools

For a personalised look at how much you'll need to borrow, and how to calculate your day-to-day costs, we really like:

Brightside's budgeting calculator

MoneySavingExpert's student finance calculator

- - find out what students are saying about accommodation, facilities and cost of living