Choosing your degree

Do your research and take your time so you can feel confident in your choice. Start by thinking about what subjects you enjoy at school. Where do you want your degree to take you – do you already have a career in mind that you’d need a particular course for? Also think about your wider interests and don’t limit yourself to only the subjects you’ve already had a chance to study at school – you might discover a course you never heard of before that’s exactly what you want.

Choosing your university

Are you up for the bustle of city life, or would you prefer the quiet of a rural setting? There are lots of things to consider – halls of residence, nightlife, cost and even how far away it is from home. Try not to be too influenced by where your friends are going or where your parents studied; only you know what will make you happy. Try to go to lots of open days to get a proper sense of where you would like to spend the next few years.

Writing your UCAS personal statement

This is your opportunity to convince the admissions team to offer you a place, so aim to address the question ‘Why should I be given a place to study?’ Everything you say in your personal statement should relate back to that question.

Remember these points as you work on your first draft:

- Show your enthusiasm – What inspired you to want to study this subject? What do you want to get out of it?
- Show that you have done your research – Why do you want to apply to this type of course? Perhaps it is a particular topic taught on the course, or the fact that there’s a large practical element? The style of courses will vary from one university to another even if they have the same title, so show that you’ve thought carefully about your choices and why you’ve chosen them.
- Tell the truth – It may seem obvious, but expanding your interests or inflating your achievements will not do you any favours in the long run. Being chosen for a course based on a false personal statement might mean you end up on a course that you’re not going to enjoy, so be honest with yourself and about yourself.
- Show, don’t just tell – Whenever you talk about your skills, make sure you give specific examples of when you have demonstrated them. Don’t just say, ‘I play football so I have good teamwork skills,’ when you could say, ‘I am an active member of my local football team and an excellent motivator when things aren’t going well. I like to organise the team according to the particular strengths of all the players to make sure we play as a unit.’

Once you have your first draft sketched out, go back with fresh eyes and consider:

- Does everything fit – Read through and check that the points you have included are relevant to that main central question (‘Why should I be given a place to study X?’).
- Does it sound like me – It can be tempting to reach for the thesaurus when trying to impress, but remember that an admissions tutor will be much more impressed by a clear personal statement that sticks to the point and sounds like you have actually written it.
- Have I proofread – No one is immune from the odd typo. Don’t just rely on computer spell check; read and re-read and then let friends, family and teachers read it too as they may spot things you missed. Be careful though that they don’t try to make you write it in the way they think is best – it’s important that you write it in your own style.

From brainstorming to polishing your final draft, this process will take time so be sure not to put it off until the last minute. If you find yourself writing it the night before the deadline, it might be worth asking yourself whether you want to send in a rushed application. Are there other things you want to do before you go to university? There’s nothing wrong with taking some time to think about what you want to do. When you know what you want to apply for and where, you’ll probably feel much better about writing the application and get it done in plenty of time.