

Applying to University

your guide

Admissions tutors won't just look at your predicted grades to decide between candidates. They want students who take time over their applications and show they are interested in the subject areas.

This guide contains information and tips to help you really sell yourself in your application form and personal statement.

Make it your own

Avoid using templates (admissions tutors will recognise these) and don't copy from someone else's statement. Admissions tutors use specialist software that can detect copied forms.

Include specific things about you rather than general statements. Keep it relevant and truthful because your statement will form the basis of your interview.

Keep it professional, too – the admissions tutor may not share your sense of humour so think twice about being funny.

General studies

Remember to mention your general studies. Although a lot of courses don't accept it as one of your required grades, it can still help a tutor choose between you and another candidate.

Presentation

Space is limited so make it clear and concise. Don't use subheadings as they waste space, but use paragraphs to separate your ideas and focus on the detail.

- Use the full word count to sell yourself.
- Mistakes with spelling and grammar could mean you lose out on an offer, so it's vital that you spell check and proofread your personal statement rigorously.
- Proofread your application and get other people to check it for you as well.
- Make sure you understand the meaning of all the words you use as they may come up in interview.

Do your research

Your personal statement should show that you understand the course you are applying for and have done your research.

- What parts of the course are you interested in?
- Do you have experience of some areas that will be covered?
- How will it fit in with your chosen career?

Try not to apply to several very different courses, as it can appear indecisive and that you have no commitment to a particular area.



How to handle content

- Differentiate yourself from other applicants and make the most of what you've achieved.
- Keep a copy of the form as you'll be asked about it at interview.
- Research the course you are applying for and be clear about why you are applying.

Don't just make statements; give examples to back up what you are saying.

- Why have you applied for the course and this specific subject area?
- What inspires you?
- When a course involves practical elements, show your interest in the academic side of study as well.

If you are applying to more than one course, try to cover each area in your statement. So, for example, if you want to do joint honours, write a paragraph on each subject and then a paragraph on joint honours and why this appeals to you.

If you want to do a particular course at a particular university, look into the detail of the course and reflect this in your statement. Don't mention the course itself, though, as this could alienate admissions tutors from other institutions.

- Admissions tutors may look for evidence of your self awareness and your ability to evaluate yourself and your development. How have you learnt, benefited and grown? Tutors are interested in your all-round skills and strengths, and also in how you would like to develop further.
- If you have career plans then mention this, especially if it is related to the course. This shows commitment to the subject and that you've thought things through.

Activities

It's not what you've done, but what you've made of it that counts.

Most activities are relevant in some way, but it's up to you to show how. Don't just list all the things you've done; say what you've gained from them and focus on the most significant experiences and the skills they've given you.

- How has your job in the local supermarket given you the skills for your course?
- If you are taking a gap year, what will you gain from it and how will this benefit your course?
- Do you have relevant skills that you've developed in your own time? For example, fashion candidates may enjoy making and customising their own clothes.
- What are your strengths and characteristics, and what can you bring to the course?
- Have you visited the University to take part in an open day or seminar? This shows that you've been interested enough to come in, look around and make an informed decision. Make sure you tell us what you gained from this, too.

References

Some courses are so oversubscribed that admissions tutors have to base their decision on something other than predicted grades and personal statements. Make sure the teachers who are writing your references are aware of your qualities, skills, interests and activities. Get involved in school activities and make yourself known to teachers. This way your reference will be unique to you.

Contacting admissions tutors

It's usually best to email admissions tutors with questions as they are busy and might not be around to take a phone call. Bear in mind the impression that your email address will put across to the admissions tutor.

Qualifications

Don't mix up the qualifications you already have with those you are working towards. This is confusing and gives a bad impression.

Ensure that the courses you are applying for are in line with your predicted grades, as the tutor will be looking for grades that meet the admissions criteria. The exception is if you are applying through a compact scheme, which gives consideration to applicants from educationally, financially or socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Disability

If you have a disability and will need support on your course, tick the disability box so the university can prepare everything you need for when you arrive.

Deadlines

Applications must be received between 1 September and 15 January, but universities have targets to meet and will start making decisions as soon as they get the forms. With this in mind, it's a good idea to have started work on your form by the beginning of September to maximise your chances of being offered a place.

Keep your school or college deadlines in mind. Remember, you need to give your tutors enough time to write your references to avoid delays in submitting your form.