

## COMPLETING YOUR UCAS FORM - Personal Statement

- ⇒ First of all, some general points about applying to Higher Education courses through UCAS:
- ⇒ It's almost NEVER too early! UCAS will accept applications from September 1st. The sooner you apply, the better chance you have of gaining a place on your preferred course.
- ⇒ It's almost NEVER too late! - but bear in mind that your tutors must have enough time to complete their reference and send the form to UCAS before the final January 15th deadline. Because of this the school/college and your tutors will give you a deadline well before the official UCAS one.
- ⇒ Many Universities have a "first come first served" policy when deciding who will be invited for interview etc - if you miss the January deadline UCAS will still process your application BUT it will only be considered at the discretion of the admissions tutors, subject to any vacancies they think they might have the following September.
- ⇒ Any applications after June 30th will automatically be dealt with through Clearing.
  
- ⇒ Note: If you want to include Oxford or Cambridge on your form the closing date is October 15<sup>th</sup>, as it is for medicine, dentistry and veterinary science courses.
- ⇒ Applications for popular courses (medicine, optometry, physiotherapy, law etc.,) should be made as early as possible.

## FILLING OUT THE FORM

- ⇒ Research courses thoroughly - you will have wasted a choice if you apply for a course for which you will not have the entry requirements. Check grades AND subject requirements, including GCSEs.
- ⇒ Read the instructions on the form AND FOLLOW THEM - for example, you are told to use black ink (if you are sending a paper application) so it will make a bad impression if you don't do so. Most applications now, however, will be made online.
- ⇒ Leaving things out or making mistakes will cause delay in processing your application form. Hundreds of people every year leave out campus codes and get their date of birth wrong!!
- ⇒ Make sure you have the correct information - in particular that you are using the correct course codes and are using prospectuses and the UCAS handbook/directory for entry to University in 2015.
- ⇒ Have a dummy run first - photocopy or save your form to practice a few times and refine your personal statement until it fits easily into the space available.
- ⇒ Be honest! Don't try to hide information which may come to light later (such as five attempts at GCSE maths!) and don't exaggerate your level of skill or interest in something - the chances are you'll be sitting opposite a REAL expert if you're interviewed!

## THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

This is your chance to add anything you want to say in support of your application. You are reasonably free to write whatever you want to and it is an opportunity to show the thought and consideration (hopefully!) that you have put into choosing your course, together with an idea of what YOU are like - personality, strengths, hobbies and interests. Apart from the academic side, what else will you bring to the department and the institution?

To make sure you cover all you want it's a good idea to plan what you're going to say in sections, which you will probably need to condense and refine several times until it all says the right thing, in the right way - and fits into the available space! A hint - don't write about things which have been adequately covered elsewhere on the application form.

The sections should cover some or all of the following.....

- ⇒ Choice of course - you need to give your reasons for choosing a particular type of course. It could be your interest in the subject, the options for study or perhaps the availability of an industrial placement. Remember though, that your form will be seen by each of the institutions you have applied to, so don't be too specific about one course or you will alienate the others. For example, a student who places a huge amount of emphasis on the fact that one year will be spent somewhere else in Europe had better first make sure that this applies to ALL the courses applied for - or not be surprised that some of them don't come up with an offer of a place!!
- ⇒ Choice of institution - are there any reasons for choosing particular institutions? For example, if they are all in large cities, or are all campus universities, or all in a particular area of the country? Again, you obviously can only mention this if they all have something in common!
- ⇒ Longer term career aims - if you have definite career intentions there is no harm in saying so, especially if you have chosen clearly professional courses such as education, medicine etc. However, don't worry if, at the moment, you only have general plans - it is better to say that long term you are undecided than to make something up.
- ⇒ Anything which relates to your course should be mentioned - prospective PE students had better mention sports! - while education students should have done some teaching (maybe a Sunday school) or have worked with groups of children(of the age they are planning to teach) by helping out with a youth club or scout group etc.
- ⇒ This type of 'linking' activities to choice of degree is especially important if you have chosen a subject that you have never studied before such as social administration or hotel management. If you want to do law you had better say you've observed a Magistrates Court occasionally, or done some work shadowing with a firm of

solicitors - and if you haven't, you had better do so before you are invited for an interview!

- ⇒ The person behind the form - now the admissions tutors (we hope) know why you want to study, what your academic interests are and, from the rest of your form, what you have studied before - but they still don't know about YOU: your achievements, your hobbies, your personality. This is probably the most difficult part, because you need to impress without being arrogant and need to be interesting, without sounding as if you spend so much time on "extra curricular" activities that you never do any work! Obviously there is no standard format to do this because everyone is different, but here are a few pointers:
- ⇒ Try working on this section with a group of friends - often someone else will think of something significant to add where you wouldn't yourself.
- ⇒ Give lots of leads for a future interview. Obviously though, you need to be honest about your interests as you will probably need to talk about them. For example, if you say you are a keen football fan you had better know who the current England (or Welsh in my case!) manager is!
- ⇒ Go into detail, even if this means being a bit more selective about the things you include. For example, "reading" as an interest could mean comics. On the other hand "reading modern fiction, especially Stephen King" invites the interviewer to ask why - and of course you will have prepared a suitable answer in advance!
- ⇒ How do your hobbies relate to your chosen course? It may not be obvious, but a keen footballer hoping to study law may be asked what he thinks of the legislation for all-seated stadia. A potential economics student could be asked about club finances and transfer fees, a psychology student about hooliganism and crowd behaviour and a media student about Sky TV coverage and Pay Per View! You should think of this sort of thing when completing your form.
- ⇒ Presentation and use of language in this section gives tutors an indication of communication skills and is important. Basic spelling

and grammar are also vital. Remember that this is your chance to impress, and silly or obvious mistakes will do the opposite.

- ⇒ Make a copy of your form after you've completed it. You will need to remind yourself of the things you have said in the months to come, and especially when preparing for any interviews.
- ⇒ Look at the relevant subject information in "Degree Course Offers" for hints on what to put in your personal statement; what work experience you should have had and examples of questions likely to be asked at interview.
- ⇒ Last, but definitely not least, get the form to your referee EARLY. References take time to write - and good ones take even longer!

KW 2015