

Year 13

Your UCAS Application & Personal Statement

Wednesday 3rd October 2018

1. * Student Ambassador02: Hi, my name is Laura and I am currently in my third year studying Medical Sciences. The theme for today's forum is UCAS applications and writing your personal statement. For those of you who are new to the forums, you are welcome to ask me questions either directly related to the theme or about any other aspect of university life.

2. PoppyCheeseman: In UCAS applications in the choices section does the order in which you list your choices matter?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Poppy! In your initial 5 choices, it does not matter which order you place your applications. However, when you get all of your offers back, you have to choose an insurance choice and your firm offer. Do you have any more questions about the process?

3. OllieGould13 2: Hi. I just wanted to ask what kind of information I should include in my personal statement for Exeter University for business and management, but whilst still aiming it towards Falmouth Uni for an interior design course, so how would I make it a general statement?

* Student Ambassador02: Hi Ollie, Ideally it would be good if the courses you are applying to are more similar than those that you have picked - but I understand that that can be difficult! In this case, I would suggest focussing your personal statement around transferable skills that may be applicable to both of those courses, for example, talking about experiences that have led you to become more organised or more able to work independently - Laura

4. PoppyCheeseman: Are you allowed to apply for 2 different courses at the same uni?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Poppy! It can be done, yes. I applied for two courses at a University myself!

5. Rowena Marshall: Hi, I was wondering how you would suggest structuring a personal statement? Thanks :)

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Rowena! Universities do not look for a specific structure, they look at the statement as a whole. Remember to be yourself. It's great to put your interests, hobbies, academic skills and achievements in your statement but there is no set combination! Just imagine that you are trying to introduce yourself. Don't be scared to be funny, or discuss your favourite books or TV programs so long as you make it relevant to the course(s) that you wish to study!

6. Vanessa Vieira: Hello, what aspects of a student's personal life such as hobbies and interests do universities look for in personal statements? Also, can you advise on how long a personal statement should be roughly? Thank you. -Vanessa

* Student Ambassador02: Hi Vanessa, a personal statement can be up to 4000 characters (including spaces) or 47 lines, a lot of people find that they get to this amount quite quickly but if you find you are under this limit there is no point in trying to get to the word limit with content that you don't think is relevant to your application. There are lots of ways to structure your personal statements, there is definitely no single correct way! Some people choose to begin with a personal story, others begin with talking about subjects they have enjoyed at school and sixth form and sometimes people begin by discussing a relevant topic they have read about outside of school. I would definitely have a look at some discussions on the student room and advice from your teachers - that really helped me! - Laura :)

7. OllieGould13 2: Yes, that sounds like a good way to tackle my problem, so if I was to say about good time management and working well as part of a team would be good cross over attributes?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Ollie! They would be great attributes to mention, as they will be valuable to you during your time at University. Mention any experience or interests that you may have in the field, too. Most of all, introduce yourself as a person and show your personality!

8. Pearl Johns: Hi, I'm struggling a bit to know exactly what universities want to know from me in my personal statement; and what I can write about in terms of my external activities as due to certain circumstances I never really got the opportunity to do much structured extra-curricular activity?

* Student Ambassador01: Hello Pearl! Don't worry, Universities are incredibly understanding of extenuating circumstances. If you have been unable to do extra-curricular activities, discuss your favourite interests or what you would enjoy doing when you are at University. Don't be afraid to say that you have had difficult circumstances, you can try to reflect how the situation may have strengthened your passion for your subject, or made you more determined to go to University. Above all, be yourself and be authentic because they are interested in getting to know you!

9. OllieGould13 2: Okay great. Also I am very interested in applying for an apprenticeship for a job revolving around one of these courses, should the statement be different or the same?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Ollie! Yes, for sure. If you mention your positive attributes and passions and interests, it should work well for you. Always try to keep it relevant to what you are applying for and ensure that it reflects your interests and passions! Don't be afraid to show determination, either. Being passionate about your course or apprenticeship is always a good thing!

10. Rowena Marshall: Is it essential to include wider reading? Some teachers have mentioned it, but I'm not really sure... thanks!

* Student Ambassador02: Hi Rowena, personally I would say it depends on the course you are applying to. For example, it would be more important if you were for an English Literature degree than a maths degree! However, your personal statement should show the admissions team that you are enthusiastic about your subject, and sometimes talking a bit about wider reading can help get this across. Although, there are other ways to do this such as talking about extra-curricular activities to do with the subject you may have done or

even talking about a news article or a documentary on your subject you enjoyed, there is no point including wider reading if that is not the way you show enthusiasm for the subject! Don't panic read books or studies just so you can talk about them in your statement! - Laura :)

11. Pearl Johns: Thank you! I was also wondering if there's actually a good way to start your personal statement without sounding super cringey or cliché; it's something I'm struggling to overcome?

* Student Ambassador01: Hello Pearl! This is something that I struggled with too when I was writing mine. My A level tutor told me to avoid using cliché words such as passionate, because so many personal statements start with "I'm passionate about my course because...." In all honesty, it does not matter if you use words such as passionate because in all honesty, being passionate about your subject is such a good thing! I started mine with "as a naturally inquisitive child, I always wondered about..." (themes in my course) and it seemed to go down well!

12. OllieGould13 2: Thanks for the advice, I better go and continue writing the statement

* Student Ambassador01: Good luck with the statement! :)

13. Téa Clark: When picking your insurance and firm, is it better to choose one aspirational and one safe, or two that you really want to go to?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Téa! It's all down to personal preference. I would say to put the University that you would love to go to as your firm, and then put your second favourite as your insurance. Always be realistic about your grades but don't let that make you place a University that you don't like as your firm or your insurance! This is something that I struggled with too, because I got so worried about not getting the grades. Remember, there is always UCAS Extra if you change your mind and as an extra reassurance, you can call the Universities that you put as your firm and insurance to ask if they can release you (so you can re-order the two) but this is at the Universities' discretion. There is also Clearing, and we at Exeter have clearing too. In short, choose your favourite Universities! :)

14. OllieGould13: Thanks for the advice

* Student Ambassador01: No problem at all! We're here til 8:30 if you need anything else!

15. Téa Clark: Also, if we've attended multiple summer schools, but we can't find a way to relate to them in our personal statement, what's a good way of making the university aware?

* Student Ambassador02: Hi Tea, if you cannot find a way to talk about all the summer schools you have attended then simply pick the ones you feel are most relevant to your application - your application to University is all about showing your enthusiasm and passion for the subject you wish to study whilst also displaying transferable skills you may have developed over time. Maybe refer to the fact you have attended and enjoyed multiple summer schools but specifically reference what you learnt from the most relevant ones

e.g. summer schools relevant to your subject or summer schools where you developed transferrable skills -
Laura :)

16. Vicky T: Hi! I'm kind of struggling with writing a personal statement as the courses at different universities are different subjects i.e. I am thinking of applying to Natural Sciences or Renewable Energy at Exeter however I will most likely want to apply for chemistry/chemical engineering at other universities. Do you have any advice about choosing courses/how to go about it to make my personal statement seem 'seamless' as possible (not obvious that I am applying to different subjects)?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Vicky! Great choices - my friend Megan is currently studying Renewable Energy on our Cornwall Campus and she loves it! I would say to make the personal statement science based primarily and discuss your interest in engineering. Don't be afraid to mention that you have a strong interest in renewable energy and chemical engineering as the Universities may just think that you're discussing your interests. (Seamless!) However, Universities expect you to be applying to more than one course/university so don't feel pressured to just mention one of them. You could also discuss the themes within each of the courses!

17. Vanessa Vieira: Thank you Laura that is very helpful. This isn't related to UCAS or personal statements, however may I ask how you both found the course that you thought would be best suited for you at university? I am currently and have always been interested in the study of psychology, but sometimes feel like there are so many other courses that are equally as interesting it becomes very over whelming and quite scary to only pick one, especially when you know so little about each of them. Thank you!

* Student Ambassador02: No problem Vanessa! I actually wanted to study Psychology myself at the beginning of Year 13 but have now ended up studying BSc Medical Sciences (Neuroscience)! I can understand that choosing between lots of courses is scary and slightly overwhelming but even within courses there is so much room for flexibility. If you did choose Psychology there is often room to then specialise in child psychology, clinical psychology, forensic psychology and many more! What I'm trying to say is don't see this decision as if it is dictating the rest of your life - simply think about what you enjoy and work from there. I found that looking at course descriptions and seeing what modules were in the courses really helped me, I finally decided that I really enjoyed Biology and Psychology so Neuroscience suited me well! - Laura :)

18. Téa Clark: Thank you :)

* Student Ambassador01: No problem, Téa!

19. * Student Ambassador02: Everyone, do you have any more questions about personal statements? I know how difficult they can be to write!

20. * Student Ambassador02: Or does anyone have any questions about being at University in general?

21. Vanessa Vieira: Thank you very much for your help and advice. I look forward to acting upon the advice given. I also plan on taking part in future online forums. Good luck to everyone.

* Student Ambassador02: No problem! Good luck Vanessa!

22. Vicky T: Thank you! Do you have any advice on how choose universities to apply to if you have not visited them? My school has given us unifrog to use, which helps us to choose a shortlist based on predicted grades and I have not visited some of the universities that are within my range of predicted grades (due to timing, difficulty and price of transport), what research can be done outside of open days?

* Student Ambassador01: Hello Vicky! If you cannot attend an open day, have a look online to see whether they have a virtual tour of the campus, or any photos or videos of open days. When I was looking at the University of Exeter's Penryn campus, I had a look online and found that there is a tour of the campus on the Falmouth website, the University that shares the Cornwall campus with us! This could give you some ideas. Additionally, you may be able to access funding when attending offer holder days after the initial offers have been made. You can often get a bursary to travel down to the campus for the day. This is only offered by some Universities, so I would check ahead by emailing their admissions department. You could also find out from others about their experiences; talk to friends or friends of friends who attended the University, watch vlogs about the University on YouTube (I know I did that loads!!) and research into the course, cost of living, lecturers, societies, etc.! Exeter actually have a YouTube channel :)

* Student Ambassador01: Hi everyone, just to let you know that we have five more minutes! Does anyone have any final questions about University?

23. Téa Clark: My teachers have told me to make sure my personal statement is personal, but I'm not sure how to strike a balance between my personal interest and my subject

* Student Ambassador02: Hi Tea, as I've said in this discussion, your personal statement should mainly show your passion and enthusiasm for your chosen subject. Ultimately this enthusiasm, how it has developed and the way you choose to show it, will be personal to you. You can then obviously include extra-curricular activities you have taken part in and your hobbies, but they must also show how they have helped you to develop certain skills that would be valuable at University. For example, instead of just saying you enjoy horse riding, you might say that you enjoy horse riding and that it has helped you to become more organised as you had to be at the stables early to clean out the stables (a random example!) - Laura :)

24. Téa Clark: Thank you :)

* Student Ambassador02: No problem! :)

25. Vicky T: Thank you!

* Student Ambassador01: No problem! :)

26. Téa Clark: How difficult have you guys found budgeting?

* Student Ambassador02: Tea - Personally, I haven't found it too difficult, I have lived off my student loan and then also work as a Student Ambassador and also worked on the Student Information Desk at University for extra money! Both of these jobs are run by the University and were flexible so I could do less shifts when I was busy with University work which was helpful. A lot of people I know do not need have jobs whilst at University and simply keep count of how much of their money they are spending each term! - Laura :)

27. * Student Ambassador02: Everyone - it's the last five minutes, any final questions to ask? :)

28. Vicky T: About Penryn, how is the transport there? Falmouth isn't a city (compared to Exeter anyway, I've heard)

* Student Ambassador01: The transport is great! They have a U1, U2 and U3 bus that go directly into Penryn and Falmouth and it is only £1 each way with a student card! This is subject to change yearly, but it's a great deal! You can easily walk to Penryn from the Campus, and Falmouth is only around 15-20 minutes on the bus from the campus, dependent on whether you take the express bus or not! Falmouth is a harbour-side town, so you are right near the docks! There are two beaches within walking distance from the centre, and you have all the amenities that you need. To get to the Uni, there are rail links and you can also get a Megabus or National Express!

* Student Ambassador01: If anyone has any Streatham or Penryn specific questions, feel free to ask!

29. Vicky T: Okay, good to hear! Thanks, have a good evening!

* Student Ambassador01: Thank you, Vicky! Have a great evening too, and best of luck with your choices!

30. * Student Ambassador02: Thanks very much for taking part in today's online forum; I hope you've found it useful! Details of the next session can be found at www.exeter.ac.uk/exeterscholars/currentparticipants/liveonlineqaforums/. If you have questions in the meantime, please contact the Exeter Scholars team, who will be happy to help: www.exeter.ac.uk/exeterscholars/contact/currentparticipants/.