



Robert Smyth Academy Sixth Form

APPLYING THROUGH



A Student Guide 2024-25

Keep this booklet safe as it contains a lot of important information

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Robert Smyth Academy

July 2024

Dear Student,

Year 13 is arguably the most important of your school career but it will pass very quickly. If you are considering continuing your education at university you will need to make a UCAS application in the first term of Year 13. Each year the majority of RSA students complete a higher education application form of some kind.

This booklet has been prepared in order to guide you through the application process. I hope you find it helpful.

Your tutor is a really important person in this process; you will show them your personal statement and give them a paper copy of your completed application form when you think it is ready. The other people who will be really important are Mr Luhrs as Head of Sixth Form, Mrs Colman and Mrs Fenton as Heads of Year 13.

Some of you will face the prospect of an interview, and in order to help you prepare for it, the Market Harborough branch of Rotary will be conducting practice interviews at the beginning of November. You are strongly advised to take advantage of this opportunity if there is any possibility of you being interviewed by a university.

Some of you will need to compete admissions tests. Details of these has already been sent out twice via Satchel One.

Given the competition for places, it is important that you make a prompt application. The final school deadline is **Friday 15th November**. Application forms completed and approved by **Friday 27th September** are guaranteed to be sent to UCAS before half term. Some students, such as those applying for Oxbridge, medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry courses, need to adhere to the same early deadline.

I wish you success with your university application and will be happy to give you advice at any stage in the process.

Yours faithfully

Gavin Luhrs
Head of Sixth Form



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UCAS Key Dates

2024

Friday 27th September

- Year 13 staff references due

Friday 27th September

- Applications to Oxbridge, medicine, veterinary medicine & dentistry due
- Completed UCAS forms guaranteed to be sent by half term

Friday 15th November

- Academy deadline for all UCAS forms

2025

Wednesday 29th January OFFICIAL UCAS DEADLINE

- Applications received after this date are marked 'late' and admissions tutors do not have to read them.

Late February

- UCAS EXTRA opens. If you've used all five choices, and you're not holding any offers, you might be able to add another choice.

Early July

- UCAS CLEARING opens. If you are still unplaced, courses vacancies are available from the UCAS website.

Thursday 14th August

- EXAM RESULTS Clearing begins for those without a place

UCAS TARIFF POINTS

Tariff Points	A Level	AS Level	EPQ
56	A*		
48	A		
40	B		
32	C		
28			A*
24	D		A
20		A	B
16	E	B	C
12		C	D
10		D	
8			E
6		E	

Year 13 Timeline: What Happens When?

Year 12 is nearly over: Year 13, and with it your UCAS application looms. If you are wondering what happens when, this is the guide for you.

One minute you're in Year 12 and the next it's almost Year 13. Where did that time go? Why so much talk about deadlines? There's a lot to think about and do, so keep this article or, even better, transfer the main points to your diary and enjoy a smooth ride through Year 13, safe in the knowledge that you won't forget that vital thing you need to do next.

July/August

You should spend July and August attending university open days (dates at www.opendays.com), narrowing down the courses that you are interested in and drafting, tweaking and generally perfecting your UCAS Personal Statement. You can also register for UCAS Apply and start completing the easy bits of the application (assuming you know your name, address and so on!).

September/October

You can submit your UCAS application online (www.ucas.com) from early September. **15th October** is the UCAS deadline for applications to Oxford and Cambridge universities, plus medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. The RSA deadline is **Friday 27th September**. There is a point to this: it gives your teachers time to give you feedback and it also gives you time to make any necessary changes resulting from this. It also allows plenty of time for the staff to add their, hopefully, glowing reference! Additionally, an early application sends an important message to admissions tutors: you are the sort of serious, committed and well-organised student they would very much like to teach.

Some university open days will still be taking place; these are a good opportunity to ensure you've visited all those on your shortlist.

November/December

If you haven't yet submitted your UCAS form get a move on!

January/February

Wednesday 29th January is the UCAS deadline for applications to all other courses (except some art and design degree courses). Applications received after this date do not have to be considered by universities, so make sure you meet this one.

During January and February (or even before Christmas if you applied early), you will start to receive responses from the universities to which you have applied. Some might call you for an interview, or invite you to visit – watch out for the letters or emails and respond quickly, if required. If you are invited to interview it's a good idea to get some practice before you go – speak to Mr Luhrs or Mrs Wilson who will be able to arrange this for you. If no universities make you an offer or, due to a dramatic change of

direction you decide to reject all your offers, you can make further applications through UCAS Extra.

April/May

By the end of April you should have received responses from all your universities. UCAS will give you a date by which you need to make your final two choices: your firm and insurance acceptances. Think carefully about this as it's a major decision. Above all, meet the UCAS deadline or you will lose all your offers which will be a rather big setback.

If you haven't already done so, you should make your application for student finance (loans, grants and so on) at www.gov.uk/student-finance.

Your mind will by now be occupied by thoughts of revision and exams, but there are still a few pressing non-UCAS things to think about, such as when you go on study leave, the Leavers' Dinner and what happens on results day. Do pay attention and make a note of relevant dates.

Your universities should also have provided you with information on accommodation. Apply asap as you don't want to end up with nowhere to live!

June/July

Revision, exams, stress, exams, revision stress ... holiday!

August

A level results day will be mid-August. You will be able to check the status of your application on UCAS Track from 8.15am.

September/October

Start university – Yay - Freshers' week! Find out when you are supposed to turn up as universities start on different dates. Get hold of your first year reading list so that you can source second-hand books from the university or from various websites. Even better, get some preliminary reading done (and accrue advance brownie points with your tutors). Think about the boring but sensible items you might need to buy: pots, pans, bedding etc.

UCAS - Frequently Asked Questions

How many courses can I apply for and do I have to list them in order of preference?

Up to five courses - you put them in alphabetical order. Applicants to medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine/science, no more than four with a fifth in a different subject.

Can I add more choices at a later date?

Yes, if you applied to fewer than five originally and providing you have not replied to your offers.

Will admission tutors see my other choices?

No.

What happens when I click on "Pay and Submit"?

After paying on the UCAS website, your form will be locked to you. It will be available to Mr Luhrs who completes the final reference.

Can I unlock the form?

Yes, Mr Luhrs will be able to do this for you. Email to request this. Make your alterations and then click on "Pay and Submit" again.

How long does it take for the form to be sent to UCAS?

It is impossible to be precise. It depends upon how many other forms are being processed at the same time. Early forms may take up to a fortnight; in November it is likely to be longer. We quality assure each form before it is sent to UCAS; **it is a lengthy process and patience is required.**

What happens after UCAS receive my form?

UCAS will send you a welcome email and applicant guide. They will send a copy of your form to your chosen universities and colleges at the same time.

Do institutions respond at the same time?

No, it varies greatly. Sometimes you have to sit an admissions test, and/or attend an interview. Art and Design students usually have to present a portfolio of their work. Some admission tutors wait until the January deadline before making decisions.

What is a conditional offer? (C)

This an offer with certain conditions attached, e.g. specific grades, possibly in named subjects, or a certain number of UCAS points.

What is an unconditional offer? (U)

This is an offer with no qualification conditions attached. Some universities will require you to choose them as your 'firm' choice (a *conditional unconditional offer*).

How long do I have to reply to offers?

Once made, an offer cannot be withdrawn. You should wait until you have had a response from each of your courses before making your final choices regarding firm

and insurance courses. You will receive an email from UCAS giving the date by which you should respond.

How many offers can I hold?

Two. A firm and an insurance offer. The 'firm' is your first choice and the second offer an 'insurance' choice in case you do not make the conditions of your 'firm' offer.

Do I have to accept two offers?

No, you can reject them all, accept one only or a maximum of two.

Am I bound by these decisions?

Yes. It is important that you think very carefully before making your decisions. You must not accept an offer if you are not prepared to go to that university.

What can I do if I am holding no offers either because none were made or I have rejected all those that were?

Do not despair; you do not have to wait until UCAS Clearing. You can use UCAS Extra to apply to further universities and colleges that still have vacancies from February to the end of June. You will be notified by UCAS if and when you become eligible to use Extra.

What is UCAS Clearing?

This process runs from July until September. It is a system for matching applicants without a place with course vacancies. After results day, if you do not get the exam grades you hoped for, and if your places are not confirmed, there is still a chance that you could find a place on a suitable course. You may well have to be flexible about where and what you want to study. Tens of thousands of places are secured through Clearing each year.

Where do I find out about course vacancies?

You will be advised by UCAS through Track if you are eligible for Clearing. Lists of vacancies, including entry requirements, will be published until late September on the UCAS website and in some national newspapers. The UCAS Clearing Plus service will also attempt to suggest suitable courses via your dashboard.

What do I do if I find a suitable course vacancy?

You should contact the university/college to express your interest. You may well be interviewed over the phone and offered a place. If so, you will need to enter the course details into Track and the university/college will then confirm your place. If you are unsuccessful you may repeat the process, applying to one at a time.

What if I am away on holiday in the middle of August?

Don't be! You may well have to make important decisions quickly. You need to contact institutions personally, not your parents or teachers.

Applications to Medicine and Dentistry

This is a general guide to applying for medical and dental courses. Applicants should always check individual universities' own entry requirements and admissions service.

Students applying to medicine and dentistry courses are limited to four choices on the UCAS form; the other choice can either be left blank or can be for another subject. Remember that admission tutors will not see your other choices unless they are at the same institution, so will not be able to infer anything from other subjects applied for. However, it is important that you write your Personal Statement for either medicine or dentistry and do not try to write a 'catch all' statement. It is also important to remember that dentistry, pharmacy and paramedical courses such as physiotherapy are at least as competitive as medicine and should not be used as a back-up choice.

Medical and dental applicants need to clear several hurdles before they can actually enrol on a degree course. Firstly, students need to satisfy universities' specific academic entry requirements – if you don't meet these it is almost inevitable that you will not get to the interview stage. You need to convince admissions tutors in your Personal Statement that you are a good candidate (for example, by detailing relevant experience, plus some indication of outside interests). Your reference will need to be excellent and you will probably need to perform very well at interview and in an aptitude test as well. You will usually have to get the actual grades that have been predicted to fulfil the offer.

Academic requirements

All medical and dental schools have their own entry requirements, which applicants must check before applying, but realistically students need to have a minimum of 5 GCSEs at grades 9 – 7; many universities will ask for more than this. Admissions tutors need to be confident that applicants will be able to cope with the academic demands of what is a challenging course. Any qualifications already achieved are concrete evidence of a students' potential. Specific GCSE subjects needed at these grades usually include maths, English language and science (either double award or individual science subjects).

A level or IB grades/points required vary, but predicted grades will need to be high: As and Bs or a minimum of around 36 IB points. Some universities ask for a fourth subject as well or an EPQ. It is vital to check the subject requirements: students often assume they know what it is required but are often wrong. For example, virtually all medical and dental schools require chemistry at A level plus at least one other science subject – usually, but not always, biology. It is also often assumed that three science subjects are needed at A level, but in fact many medical and dental schools are happy for the third A level to be a humanities or arts subject. However, some medical schools will have a 'soft' subjects list. It is also important for students to check which science A level subjects are accepted; many universities do not include psychology. So the message is clear, students must not leave their subject choice to chance or rely on hearsay. Rather, if you are serious about a medical or dental career you need to do thorough advance

research to ensure that you will meet your chosen universities' academic requirements.

The personal statement: commitment and motivation

Most teachers and careers advisers will have heard of cases where academically exemplary medical and dental applicants are inexplicably rejected by all their choices (often without interview). Once these cases are investigated (most medical and dental schools will give feedback in response to written requests from schools) the reasons become more obvious. These are the most common: a lack of relevant experience; inadequate description of relevant experience; little or no elaboration on what was gained from relevant experience; no evidence of outside interests. However academically able the applicant is, for most medical and dental schools this is not enough, and the Personal Statement is your opportunity to convey your suitability for the course.

Medical and dental schools are looking for students who are realistic about their choice of profession. They do not want to select students who drop out the minute the going gets tough (which it will!). This is where relevant experience is essential, preferably more than one spell. What counts? For medicine any work experience (paid or voluntary) in a medical setting will be beneficial: hospitals, GP surgeries, care homes or hospices. Some will have age restrictions, but it is usually possible to arrange something – it really does not have to be shadowing a world famous surgeon! Many medical schools will accept work experience in healthcare related settings for medicine candidates. For example, working at a care home or getting involved in school/college social services schemes. For dentistry you would need to shadow at least one dentist (and ideally see a range of procedures, both NHS and private). Any suspicion sown that work experience has been one afternoon at your own dentist, possibly whilst being treated yourself, is likely to be rewarded with rejection. Recent experience is the most valuable; a week in Year 10 with nothing else since will not look too impressive.

Having undertaken the relevant experience (students should ideally sort this out for themselves and mention this fact in the Personal Statement), the next hurdle is writing about it. This is crucial, as one sentence along the lines of "I did two weeks' work experience in a care home" is nowhere near enough. Students should make sure they state clearly how long they have spent at each venue. If you are continuing to visit on a regular basis, for example every Saturday morning, this really is worth emphasising. You need to give details of what you did and observed, then say what you learnt from it and how it has confirmed your choice of career. What did you learn about the challenges that you will face? What personal qualities do you think are most essential – have you got them? Attendance at conferences such as Medlink can also be mentioned, as can completion of a first aid course, but remember that these do not count as work experience.

As well as evidence of motivation and a realistic attitude, admissions tutors usually look for an interest in science. Applicants should mention what they have found interesting in their studies, plus any other evidence of a scientific interest (reading New Scientist, attendance at university summer schools or taster courses and so on). Mentioning

news items of medical or dental interest can be impressive, but make sure your understanding of the significance of these is correct.

Extra-curricular activities and leisure pursuits are important, as medical and dental students will need some means of unwinding; these activities also often indicate a propensity for team-working (essential to a doctor or dentist). However, students should not take up (or invent) unusual hobbies just to include in their UCAS forms. Hobbies and interests that demonstrate a commitment will impress admissions tutors, such as long-term involvement in a club or team. Dental applicants will need to demonstrate manual dexterity, so any hobbies or school subjects likely to have developed this should be highlighted, for example if a student plays a musical instrument or enjoys art.

The reference

The academy's support will be important and a glowing reference is essential. Your reference will need to indicate that medicine or dentistry is a realistic choice for you and that you are academically suited to the course, as well as possessing the personal qualities (empathy and a liking for people, team-working ability, excellent communication skills and so on), required. If your teachers wholeheartedly support your application and think you will make an excellent doctor or dentist they should say so.

Testing

The UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) is currently the most common aptitude test. Students can take this test from June-October before they apply and can use their results to decide whether to apply for medicine or dentistry or not – taking the test does not commit you to applying but can help inform your decision. The test is designed to test aptitude and ability and does not require any special revision. There is a charge to take the test – full details can be found at www.ucat.ac.uk.

Details are available on the UCAS website (www.ucas.com)

Interviews

Most medical and dental schools interview, but only if the UCAS form is satisfactory. Test results are likely to be used as an additional filter. Some medical schools show videos with scenarios, or send out material on ethical or other issues in advance of the interview; both of these methods may be used to trigger relevant discussion in the interview. Preparation is the key to being successful at the interview stage and it might be worth organising practice interviews. Interviews are held over several months from November to around March. Students should expect to be interviewed by a panel of at least two and must be prepared to discuss anything they have included in their Personal Statement, especially relevant experience. They should also keep up with current affairs, particularly anything to do with medical advances, health care, the NHS, ethical aspects of medicine and so on. It is worth getting into the habit of checking the health sections of broadsheet newspapers and the BBC website for topical information about the NHS, healthcare etc. Students should expect to be questioned in some detail and to

be asked follow-up questions; you should not be afraid to give your own opinions but you may have to explain them.

Interviews can be challenging but any applicant who gets to this stage should keep in mind one important message: he or she must, on paper, be a good applicant. This should go some way to giving you confidence to relax and engage with your interviewers. The interviewer is not trying to catch the candidate out, it is to gauge whether you are right for the course that the medical or dental school offers; and this works both ways.

Other requirements

Candidates who are offered a place at medical or dental school will need to meet other entry requirements other than their grades. Typically this will be a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check and occupational health clearance.

Complete Guide to Admission Tests

If your chosen degree requires you to take a test find out as much as possible beforehand, such as where you have to go to take the test, and then practise.

Which courses require a test?

Medicine, dentistry and law are the most common subjects where a test might be part of the application process. Oxbridge and several other universities also require applicants to certain other subjects to sit tests. University websites and prospectuses will detail test requirements.

Medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine

Most medical schools require applicants to take a test, the most common being the UCAT (UK Clinical Aptitude Test). Full details can be found at www.ucat.ac.uk. This is taken between July and October in the year that you apply, at a convenient Test Centre. It is a test that you cannot revise for as it assesses innate abilities such as verbal, abstract and quantitative reasoning. You can, however, prepare for it by practising the questions online, preferably under timed conditions. Familiarity with the format will allow you to move through the questions at the fast pace that is required to complete the test within the allotted time.

Law

The LNAT is used by universities to help them select students for their undergraduate law courses. It is designed to test the verbal reasoning skills that students will need to succeed on a law degree. These include comprehension, analysis and deduction. The test comprises a multiple choice section and an essay. You can select a convenient date and test centre when you register online at - www.lnat.ac.uk

Oxbridge (and others)

Some universities set admission tests for certain subjects. The Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) is used by Oxford and Cambridge as well as the Sixth Term Exam Paper. Some tests are administered by the university or college and others by outside agencies. Some are taken at the university, possibly when you attend your interview, and others are taken in school, usually on a specific date. Some tests examine subject knowledge; some assess your skills and abilities and some are a mixture of the two. Sample papers and online test questions are available at the university website or that of the testing organisation. You can find links at - www.ucas.com

Admissions Tests – Key Points

- Find out where the test is going to be held.
- Investigate what you will be assessed on and revise accordingly.
- Look for sample questions and practise thoroughly

Work Experience

Will I need work experience?

For a number of vocational degrees it is essential that you have the relevant work experience and are able to write about it intelligently in your personal statement. For many courses, work experience will make the difference between getting an interview and rejection.

Universities ask applicants to get relevant experience for two main reasons:

1. To demonstrate commitment to their career choice.
2. So they can be certain that you know what the reality of the job entails.

Which degrees require relevant experience?

In general, the subjects where admissions tutors expect to see evidence of meaningful experience are those where you are going to be working with people, particularly in a medical or care setting, or for very competitive courses, especially in media fields. It is, therefore, essential for medicine, dentistry, nursing and midwifery, physiotherapy and paramedical courses. Veterinary medicine and teaching also require relevant experience. If you are interested in media, journalism and law you are also well-advised to arrange some work experience.

What kind of experience is needed?

Admissions tutors will be looking for the right kind of work experience, as outlined below.

Medicine

Many hospitals have age restrictions on voluntary work and shadowing. Other places where you could gain experience are a care home or a hospice. It is more beneficial to help out on a regular basis over a long period of time rather than to spend a couple of days in the setting. GP surgeries will not allow you to observe their consultations but experience could be gained by talking to the GP and other members of staff about their jobs, the Practice and the NHS. Gaining a range of experiences is the key.

Dentistry

As with medicine, you should aim to get as much experience as possible in this highly competitive area. Applicants should approach their own dentist to start with and arrange shadowing for a week or so. Ideally, you should shadow more than one dentist and try to see a range of procedures.

Nursing and midwifery

You will require some experience in a health care setting; care homes and hospices are excellent settings where you can find out if you are suited to this type of work. For midwifery, contact your local hospital's midwifery service manager to arrange experience in the maternity unit.

Physiotherapy, occupational therapy and paramedical courses

Physiotherapy is very competitive, so getting work experience is essential. It should be your priority to get this in a hospital setting as most jobs will be with the NHS. This applies even if you are aiming to work in sport. Applicants for other healthcare and paramedical courses should aim to get experience in both hospital and community settings.

Veterinary medicine

This is a highly competitive course. If you are an aspiring vet, you should aim to get as much relevant experience as possible, in both small and large animal Practices.

Teaching

Whether it is for primary or secondary teaching, your application form should include some work experience. For primary courses, it is a good idea to experience Key Stage 1 and 2, so that you can explain your reasons for choosing a particular year group. Helping out at summer play schemes can also be very useful. For secondary teaching, aim to get a wide range of experience, for example, become a mentor or help students with their maths and reading.

Media/Journalism

These courses are highly competitive and you should get as much experience as possible. This could include doing work experience on your local paper, editing the school magazine, working for local or hospital radio and sending articles to magazines.

Law

It is not essential to have experience to get onto a law degree, but it could be beneficial to helping to correct any misconceptions about the profession. Applicants should contact local law firms as they will be able to demonstrate that they know what the job involves and have an awareness of the many different fields of law.

Presenting work experience effectively

The key to success is in the way that you present your work experience; both in the UCAS application and at your interview.

To get the most out of your work experience you should keep a daily diary or record of what you actually did. You must show that you have extended your knowledge of that career through work experience. You should mention if you organised your work experience yourself as it will show that you are a highly motivated applicant.

If selected for interview, you should be prepared to talk in depth about your experience. Review your work experience as part of your interview preparation and it can help to have a practice interview beforehand.

Your Personal Statement Preparation

A well thought-out, interesting personal statement is vital. Below are some questions that you should be addressing; the answers should form the basis of your personal statement.

Why have you chosen this subject?

It is important to tell the University or College why you want to study the subject and what you hope to get out of it, whether it is part of your career plan or simply reflects your enthusiasm for the subject. In Year 12, do plenty of research on different courses; talk to a careers adviser or take an interest questionnaire such as the Unifrog ones.

Do you know what the course involves?

It is important that you fully understand the course content so that you won't be disappointed and can show that you know what the course entails. In Year 12, find out as much as possible about the subject; go to taster courses and lectures, ask questions at university open days and HE fairs.

What did you learn from work experience?

For courses like medicine, teaching and veterinary medicine, it is essential to have some relevant experience. You will need to be able to write about what you did, what you enjoyed and what you found out about the realities of the career. This will show that you are committed to the course. In Year 12, find out if you need to have relevant work experience, organise this yourself and keep a log-book or diary.

What skills do you have?

Think about your transferable skills and link them to your chosen degree. You might have developed skills such as teamwork, self-reliance and communication through other areas of your life; through hobbies, sport, part-time work, The Duke of Edinburgh Award etc. In Year 12, learn the skills that you need and how to evaluate them. You will need to show that you have developed them.

Are you a responsible adult?

It is important to be able to demonstrate that you are sensible enough to make the successful transition to university. Include details that show you can take on responsibility such as, whether you are Head Prefect, are on any school committees, run a club, are in a sports team, do voluntary work etc. In Year 12, volunteer for activities that will demonstrate your maturity.

What are your interests and achievements?

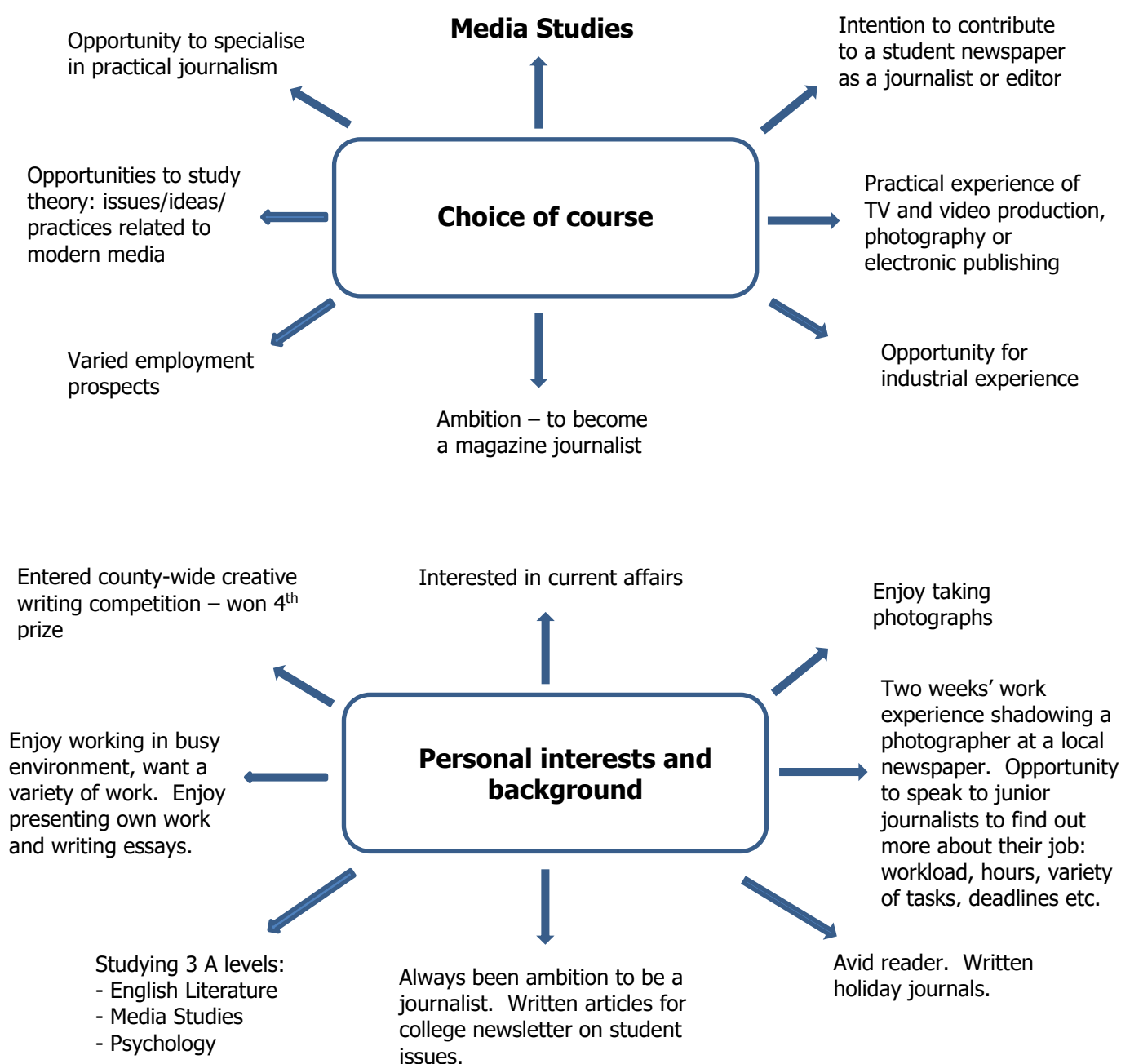
Extra-curricular activities show that you can manage your time effectively and that you have the ability to persevere. Include details in your personal statement without making these activities the whole focus.

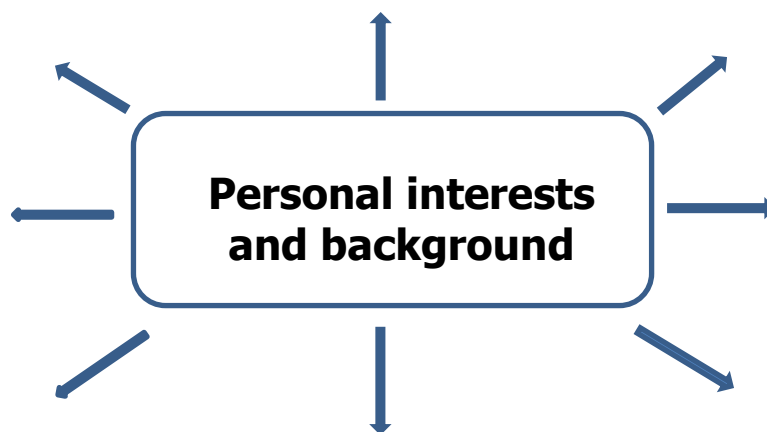
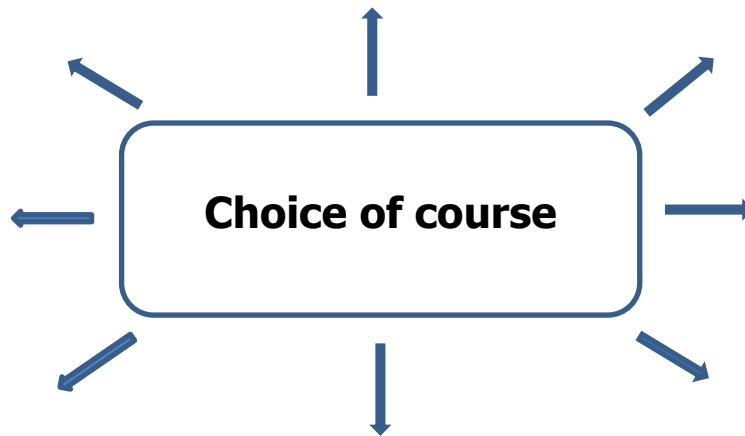
Brainstorming Your Personal Statement

It is a good idea to plan out your Personal Statement before you start to write it. Brainstorm your ideas on the diagram on page 20 and then try to build sentences from your key points (the example below may give you some ideas).

Admissions tutors particularly want to know:

- **Who** you are (interests/skills/what you have already studied etc.)
- **Why** you are interested in the courses you have chosen (relevant experience/ambitions/career etc.)
- **What** you consider to be your strengths (academic/achievements/work experience/ social etc.)





Writing Your Personal Statement

Your Personal Statement is important because it is the only part of the application form where you have a chance to select and emphasise points about yourself. It provides you with an opportunity to influence the admissions tutors, explain your motivation and reflect your personality.

Dos when writing your Personal Statement

- Do use your best English and don't let spelling and grammatical errors spoil your statement.
- Do show that you know your strengths and can outline your ideas clearly.
- Do be enthusiastic – if you show your interest in the course, it may help you get a place.
- Do expect to produce several drafts of your Personal Statement before being totally happy with it.
- Do ask people you trust for their feedback.

Don'ts when writing your Personal Statement

- Don't exaggerate – if you do you may get caught out at interview when asked to elaborate on an interesting achievement.
- Don't rely on a spellchecker as it will not pick up everything – proofread as many times as possible.
- Don't leave it to the last minute – your statement will seem rushed and important information could be left out.

Some principles

- Think about the impression you want to give.
- Organise the material.
- Only put in things you are prepared to talk about at interview.
- Look closely at the advice given in the UCAS instructions.

Organisation

There is no right or wrong format - here are some suggestions:

- Choice of course(s) – you need to justify this:
 - Show that you have researched your chosen course. Why are you interested? What sparked your interest? What specific topics do you enjoy? If you're applying for more than one course try to identify common factors.
 - If you are applying for a combined course, make sure you talk about why you're interested in both subjects.
- Career aspirations:
 - If you have an idea of the career path you would like to follow, explain how the course fits.
- Relevant work experience:
 - Both related and unrelated to your course choice. Be specific about what you learned. Refer to transferable skills gained, for example: communication, planning, time management and problem-solving.

Personal Achievements

Include any personal achievements and what they demonstrate, for example, participation in fund-raising events that may have involved teamwork, research, organisational skills, commitment and perseverance. Describe any positions of responsibility that you've held such as student mentor or team leader.

Extra-Curricular Activities

You should include activities that support your course choice. Describe any visits that you have made; for example, visits to art galleries for art courses or hospitals for nursing. Even if you interests aren't directly relevant it's important to give an impression of your personality, so mention any hobbies or gap year plans.

Admissions Tutors are looking for the following

- Intellectual ability
- Motivation
- Commitment
- A willingness to contribute to University life.

You do not need to use all the space but leaving much of it blank may not create the best of impressions.

Top Tips

- Aim to get your applications in as close to the start of the UCAS application cycle (beginning of September) as possible.
- Start thinking about your personal statement weeks in advance – you'll need to write several drafts.
- As a rough guide, use half the space to write about your chosen course. Use the other half to write about your chosen career path, work experience, achievements and extra-curricular activities.
- Write in a positive style that you feel comfortable with, using simple words and clear sentence structures. Don't try to be funny as others may not share your sense of humour. Be analytical about yourself and the subject, rather than descriptive. Never start your Personal Statement with 'I have always been interested in ...'
- Be honest! You may be asked questions about your Personal Statement at university interviews.
- Don't rely on a spell checker – proofread as many times as possible. It can be helpful to leave a few days between drafts as it's often easier to pick up spelling and grammar mistakes after distancing yourself. Ask your parent, friends or tutor to make final checks.
- Make sure all the details are correct – your address, email, qualifications and course code. Errors can delay your application.

University Interviews

It's important to prepare for your interview. Admissions staff can tell the difference between those who have and those who haven't prepared.

How to Prepare

- **Know where you are going** – plan your route. Arriving late doesn't make a good first impression and you may miss your interview.
- **What to wear** – if in doubt check whether to wear casual or smart dress code.
- **Research the university and course** – check out prospectuses, course information and websites. Departmental web pages should give you an idea of the course structure, topics, modules you can choose and work placements (if relevant). Some websites also have student profiles, so you can find out what current students think of the course.
- **Current affairs** - keep up to date, especially with developments in your chosen area of study. Read newspapers, relevant magazines, look out for radio, TV programmes and documentaries and use the internet. Good news sites include: www.bbc.co.uk and www.theguardian.com
- **Personal Statement** – refresh your memory on what you have written by re-reading your Personal Statement.
- **Practice** – think of suitable answers and questions to ask in advance (it's not the best time to ask about nightlife and social clubs!). Don't memorise your answers word for word as it will sound false. Practice with a friend, relative or teacher as this will increase your confidence and reduce your nerves on the day.
- **Interview format** – make sure you know what to expect. Interviews may be with one or two admissions tutors, they could be a group interview or involve written or performance tests.

Some typical questions

These are intended as a guide to help you practice. Your interviewer will ask you more detailed questions.

1. Why did you apply for this course?
2. Which of your current subjects do you enjoy the most and why?
3. What are your least favourite subjects and why?
4. What are the latest developments in your proposed area of study?
5. What are your best qualities?
6. Why would you make a good teacher/surgeon/psychologist?
7. Have you done any related work experience and, if so, what did you learn?
8. Where do you see yourself five years from now?
9. What interests do you have and/or do you play any sports?

Tips for the day

- **relax**, it's also your opportunity to find out more about university
- **how you come across** is as important as what you say
- **essential attributes** are interest, enthusiasm and confidence
- **don't look bored!**
- **take a copy** of your personal statement for reference
- **listen carefully** to questions and answer what's asked
- **if you don't understand** or don't know the answer, say so
- **if you feel you've answered badly**, forget about it and carry on
- **ask your own questions**, find out more about the university and course (as long as it hasn't been covered)
- **enjoy your day**, explore the university, city/town and area.

Financial Support for Full-Time Students Going to University

Apply for Student Finance Early

If you're a new full-time student you need to log on to the Student Finance England website via **www.gov.uk/studentfinancesteps** before the end of May 2019 to get your student finance in place before the start of your course. If your application's late, your money might be too.

It takes at least 6 weeks to process your application. You don't need a confirmed place at university or college to apply, just use your preferred choice and update it if it changes. Sign in to your account to check the status of your application. You can also see letters and emails sent to you by Student Finance England.

Extra help

You may also be able to apply for:

- Disabled Students' Allowances
- Childcare Grant and Parents' Learning Allowance - if you have children
- Adult Dependents' Grant - if you have adults that depend on you financially

Your university or college might offer you a bursary or scholarship to help with your studies.

Find out more

You can:

- ask questions in the Student Room's student finance zone
- read the quick start student finance guides
- use the student finance calculator to estimate what loans, grants or other finance you could get.

What To Do If Things Go Wrong

Once you have submitted your UCAS application, everything usually goes smoothly. If not then the advice below could be useful.

What if I don't want to accept any of my offers?

Think carefully before making any snap decisions which you might regret. If you are certain and you have rejected all your offers, you can still apply to any course that has vacancies through UCAS Extra.

Use UCAS course search to look for more suitable degrees, making sure that you meet the entry requirements and that the university will take UCAS Extra applications. You can only apply to one course at a time. If you are made an offer you must decide whether to accept or decline it before you can apply elsewhere.

I have received five rejections

You can also search for alternative courses through UCAS Extra and if this does not produce results, you will automatically be entered into Clearing.

I think I should have taken a gap year

If, after careful thought and discussion with parents and teachers, you still want to take a gap year, contact the universities whose offers you are holding to see if they will defer your place. If they agree the universities will let UCAS know.

I like the university but not the course

In this situation contact the university not UCAS and they will decide if a course change is possible. If it is, they will inform UCAS. Keep an eye on Track to ensure the change is confirmed.

I have missed the accommodation deadline

Get in touch with the university and ask if you will still be considered for university accommodation. If not, you will have to find something in the private sector. Most universities will be able to help out with this.

I feel sure I won't get the results I need

Hopefully you are worrying unnecessarily, but you could prepare by researching universities that you could, realistically, get into. On results day check Clearing vacancies and be ready to call.

I feel sure I'm going to do better than my predicted grades

If you do achieve a great deal better than predicted, you might be able to apply to a university which requires higher grades through UCAS Adjustment. This is available from results day until 31st August – apply via the UCAS website.

Taking a Gap Year

Many students decide to take a gap year before they begin university. This can be a productive way to spend a year and is viewed as a positive experience by many universities and employers. However, you must use your year constructively in order to show it was worthwhile.

If you are thinking of taking a year out here are some things to consider:

What you could do

There is a whole range of things you could do during your gap year, like:

- Travel
- Teach abroad
- Volunteer to work on a project at home or abroad
- Work in a paid position to save some money for university
- Gain some unpaid work experience
- Undertake further study or training.

The pros and cons of a gap year

Pros:

- You may feel more energized and refreshed after a gap year, which could lead to you feeling more motivated towards your studies.
- You may have the chance to work or study in an area related to your course, which will help prepare you for your further studies.
- You may have the opportunity to travel, see new places and have new experiences.
- If you decide on paid work, you can earn some money to help finance your degree.
- You could gain a sense of real personal achievement through your gap year activities.
- A year of more independent living can mean that you are more mature when you begin university.
- If you decide to work or volunteer, you can gain new skills and develop existing ones.

Cons:

- You may not be able to discipline yourself for independent study and might find it hard to settle back into studying.
- It could be expensive, for example if you decide to travel or do unpaid work experience.
- Your friends may go off to university while you will be a year behind them.
- If you don't spend it productively, this could give employers a bad impression.

Prepare yourself

If taking a gap year, you'll need to decide what you want to do and then plan it carefully.

- When deciding what to do, make sure you understand your reasons for a gap year, as this will point you in the right direction.
- A useful starting point is the UCAS gap year guide.
- Research the options so you make the right decision – there are lots of organisations that can give you gap year ideas and more information about what's involved.
- Gap year organisations can be helpful but you don't have to use one. Make sure you shop around to find the best deal and the gap year that's right for you.
- Set yourself goals, so you know what you want to accomplish in your year out.
- Plan your finances so you don't get into debt. Think about how much you need to earn and/or how much you will spend.

Completing the UCAS Form

If you want to take a gap year, you can still apply to universities one year in advance. You will need to indicate the year that you wish to start on your UCAS form.

Websites to Explore

Essential Viewing

www.ucas.com

- Find universities and colleges using '**Where to study**'
- Research courses using '**Find a course**'
- Complete an application using '**Apply and Track**'
- Check financial options using '**Finance & support**'

www.unifrog.com

- You have used this extensively in PSHE / tutor time.

General Advice on Higher Education

www.gov.uk Click on Education and Learning.

www.brightknowledge.org A resource library on a wide range of topics – updated daily.

www.nus.org.uk The official website for the National Union of Students.

www.unifrog.org Interactive careers and education guidance for young people.

Courses and Applying to University

www.ucas.com UCAS directory of all higher education courses available at UK universities and colleges, how to apply and other frequently asked questions on undergraduate study.

www.unifrog.org Interactive list-making for courses.

<http://sacu-student.com/> SACU is a great independent and impartial source of course information and careers guidance for students, parents and teachers.

www.hotcourses.com A directory of all courses available.

www.whatuni.com University search site with reviews and interactive profiles.

www.thestudentroom.co.uk A student interactive site – good for communicating with other prospective students, as well as current students.

www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide

Good university guides.

Open Days

www.opendays.com For information on dates of university and college open days.

Graduate Careers

www.prospects.ac.uk Prospects for graduate jobs, postgraduate study, advice about work experience, internship opportunities and graduate careers.

www.beetroot.com Student and graduate jobs - provides information on career choices.

Student Finance

www.gov.uk/studentfinancesteps The most up-to-date information on student finances. Advice on tuition fees, student loans and financial help, including a calculator which can help students find out what financial support they are likely to get.

www.slc.co.uk Advice on student loans.

www.scholarship-search.org.uk A guide to everything you need when planning and organising your student finances.

Gap Years

www.gapyear.com Gap year ideas and travel deals.

www.bunac.org An organisation offering working holidays, flexible work and travel programmes and volunteering and teaching placements.

These are just examples of what is available.