


HOW TO GET INTO UNIVERSITY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED
TO KNOW IN ONE PLACE

What do you want from life?

Before we begin, think through what you want to achieve, what you think success really is, and how you'll know it when you've got it.

Remember, you've got to do the studying, not your parents, so make sure you're doing what you are passionate about.



Start here!

Decide what you want from life - this will make the next step easier :)

Getting Started

What is UCAS?

Top 5 tips for success

When do I apply?

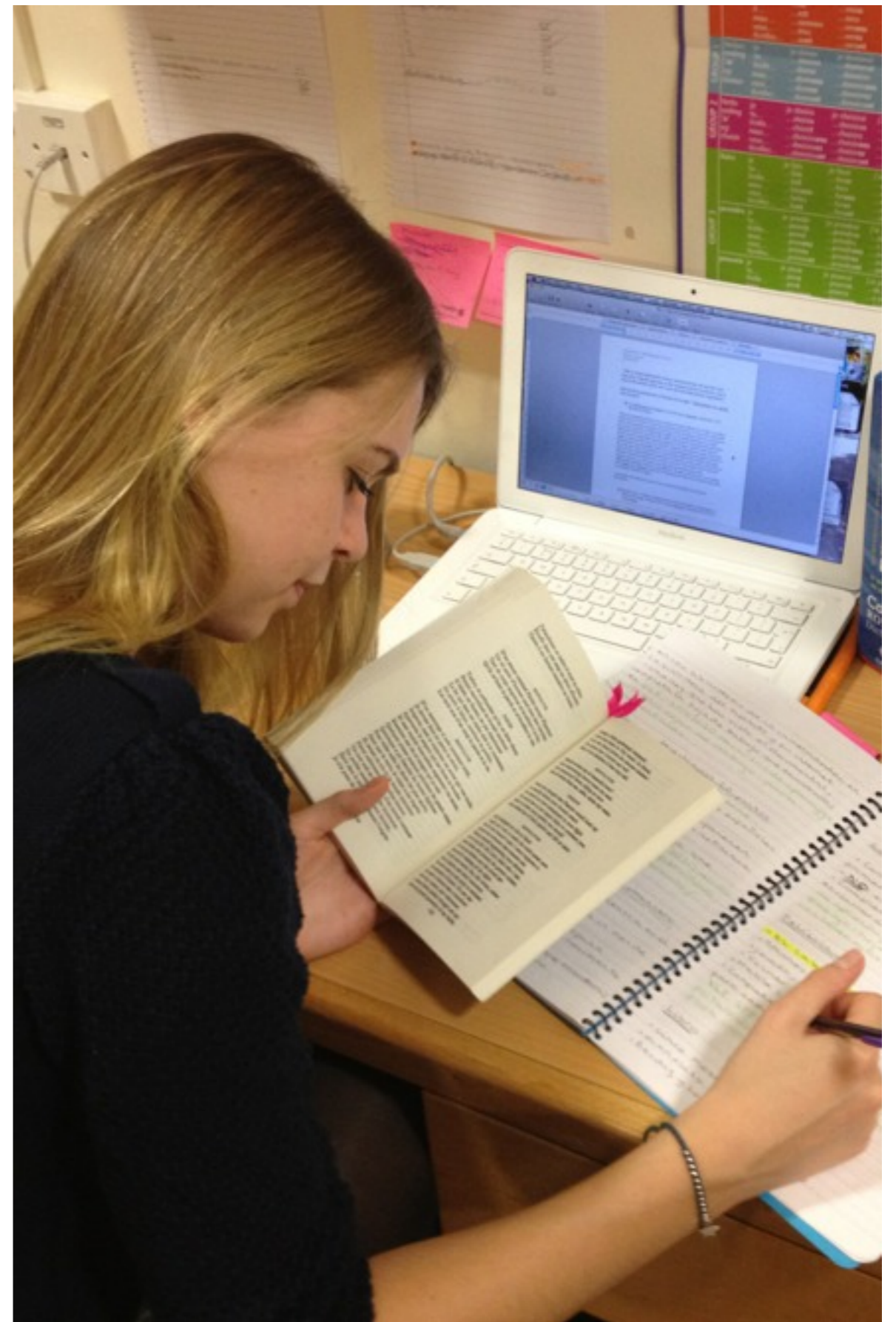
How do I register?

What about Medicine?

When is the Oxbridge deadline?

I'm a musician - do I use UCAS at all?

How do I apply direct to Art College?



An Introduction to UCAS

HOW TO APPLY

1. Register at [UCAS](#) University and Colleges Admissions Service. If you can you should link your application to your school: ask your teachers for a *buzzword* to do this
2. You usually have 5 choices
3. Medics, Dentists and Oxbridge candidates have an early deadline: 15 October
4. Medics can only apply for 4 Medicine courses. Use the 5th as a backup
5. Art and Design applicants: many courses require direct application outside UCAS
6. Music and Performing Arts - register at [CUKAS](#) - Conservatoires UK - a UCAS sister site.
7. The final deadline for applications is 15 January, but don't leave it this late!

The Process in a nutshell (assuming you are yet to take your A levels or equivalent):

1. **Choose your course and universities**
2. **Complete your application before the deadline**
3. **Receive offers from up to five universities: NB this can take time! **DON'T PANIC**. Scottish universities in particular can drag it out until April or occasionally even later.**
4. **Reply to the offers: pick a Firm Choice (where you really want to go) and and Insurance Choice (if you miss the grades for your Firm, hopefully you'll be OK for the Insurance)**
5. **Finish your exams**
 - a. **Got the grades for the Firm Choice :) Off to uni!**
 - b. **Missed the grades for Firm, OK for Insurance. :/ OK, still go to uni!**
 - c. **Missed the Insurance grades too :(Try to find a place in Clearing.**

In the remaining chapters of this book we will try to help you ensure that you first of all get good offers from the universities of your dreams, but please realise that you then have to do the work and get the grades to go there! If possible you want to try to stay out of Clearing.

UCAS

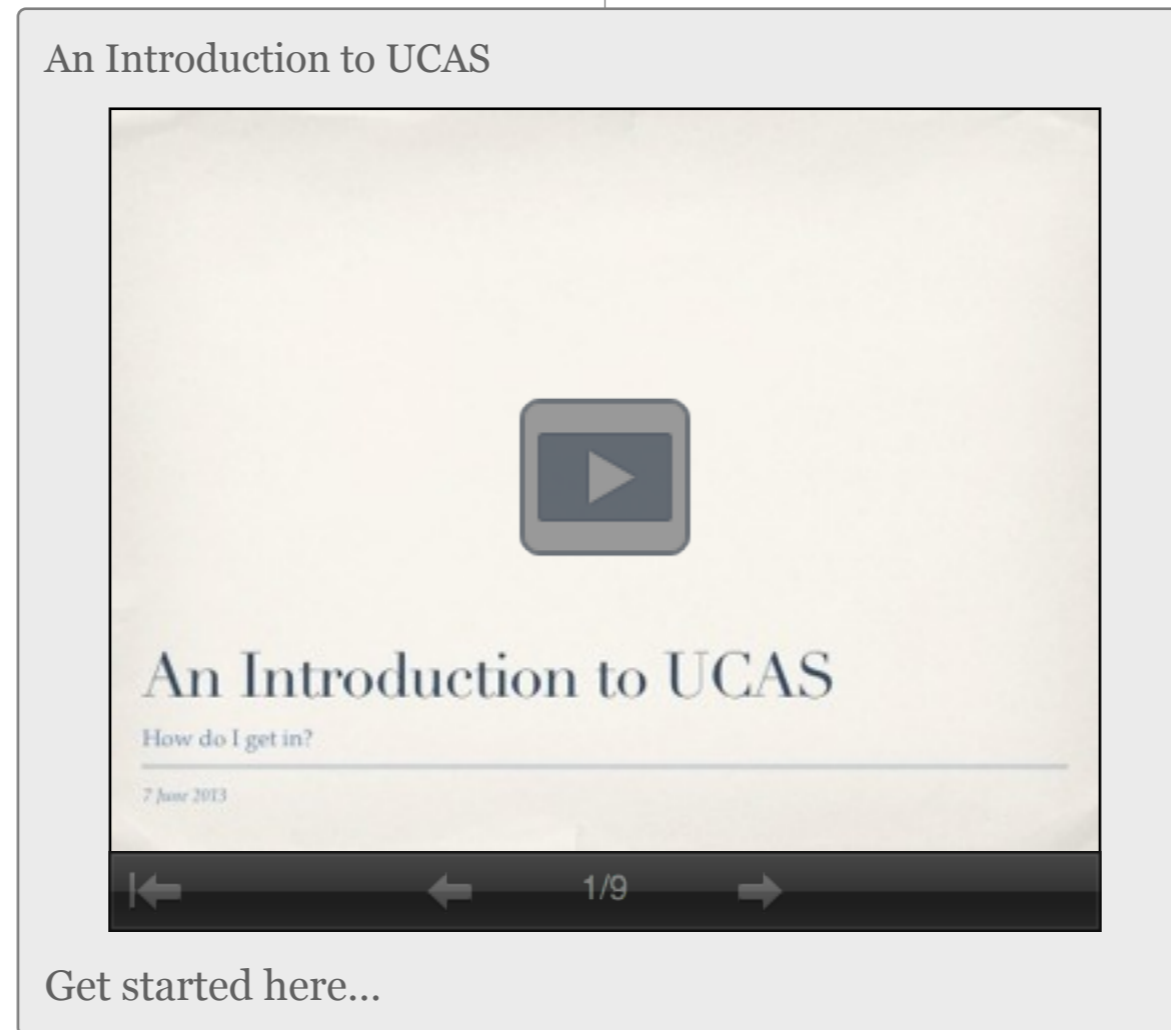
UCAS stands for University and College Applications Service. It only deals with applications to UK Universities (although not all possible "Further Education" Courses are listed on UCAS).

UCAS University Course choices

For UCAS (UK Universities), you are allowed to apply to five university courses. These courses can be at the same university if you wish but most people choose five courses at 5 different universities (eg History at five different universities, Sociology at five different universities, Modern Languages at five different universities etc - you get the drift!). It is usual to select five identical or very similar courses (for example, a mixture of Ancient and Modern His-

tory Courses, or a mixture of International Politics and International Relations Courses).

Medics are only allowed to apply to four Medicine courses. However, many medics apply to a Biomedical Science course as a fifth choice backup.



Art and Design applicants can only apply to five courses through UCAS. However, many Art and Design courses are not listed on UCAS, so in practice Art and Design students will apply to more than 5 Courses. In the case of most school leavers interested in Art, a year's foundation course is recommended.

UCAS Extra

If you receive no offers from any universities, you can enter "Extra" which allows you at least one more crack at a course. This stage usually takes place towards the end of the Spring

Term. Unfortunately, many Courses at many Universities will be closed at this stage because they are full.

UCAS Clearing

Clearing is the final backup, allowing you one last chance (for that year) of being accepted at university. Clearing takes place in August/September after the A2 exam results are published. Sadly, Clearing is a hectic and stressful time. We are on call to help from the moment that results are released to us. However, the best advice is to have a good, lower "backup" Insurance Offer with UCAS so you can avoid Clearing. It should be noted that universities will need to speak with pupils directly at Clearing: parents and school advisors play a background role when dealing with UCAS on this matter.

You are eligible for Clearing in the following circumstances:

- If, by the time of your results, you have received no offers through UCAS
- If you miss the grades required for both your Firm and Insurance offers
- If you applied very late or missed the UCAS deadlines

UCAS Adjustment

- A positive version of Clearing - if your results turn out to be better than expected, you can hold your existing offers on Results Day and see if anything more desirable turns up.

Top Tips

TOP 5 TIPS FOR APPLICATION SUCCESS

1. Be realistic
2. Have a sensible backup
3. Start early
4. Plan your statement and what will go in it from the beginning of Year 12 if not before
5. Make your Personal Statement relevant to the course

1. Be realistic

What grades can you really achieve? Honestly? Not what you think you'd like, but what your teachers think, who are professionals with your best interests at heart (really!). Don't be shy - ask them: you need to know what they think you'll get!

2. Have a sensible backup

Let's say you are predicted AAA at A level. Great - find two or three universities that are asking for those grades for the course you're interested in. **BUT** now imagine it's results day: bad news - you've got ABB. You need an **INSURANCE** choice. Look for a couple of universities that ask for at least two grades lower than you are predicted. The precise insurance offer that might be best for you will depend on your individual circumstances, so again, ask your teachers - how close are you to grade boundaries in their subjects? Get **proper advice** on this.

3. Start early

Don't leave it all to September in your last year at school. Ideally your planning should start in Year 11 (5th Form), before your GCSEs or National 4s and 5s.

- a. **Year 11:** What are your strongest subjects? Can you squeeze the top grades out of them at GCSE? Which are you going to take on to A level or Higher? Do they complement each other (see Chapter 4)

b. **Year 12:** you've chosen wisely, based on your academic strengths, subjects that support each other. You know more or less what subject you'd like to read at university, and you know that your A levels/Highers are an acceptable combination for that course (see Chapter 4). You start to read beyond the syllabus in your most relevant subject, and plan 'super-curricular' and extra-curricular activities that will support your application. At the end of the summer term you are registered on UCAS, have drafted your Personal Statement, and are ready for a relaxing holiday, maybe some work experience, and some extra reading.

4. Plan your personal statement early

More on the contents of the Personal Statement later in this book but for now just remember to be thinking about what goes in it way before you have to write it.

5. Make your Personal Statement relevant to the course

One of the big mistakes we see over and over is Personal Statements written for the wrong course. Why does this happen? Daddy wants you to be an accountant but you live and breathe music? It's going to make for an unconvincing application if your heart is not in it.

Another common problem is a complete misunderstanding of the purpose of the statement: think of it as a **job application** - you are applying for the job of being a student. I don't mean the kind that gets up after midday and can't find the library.

You are trying to persuade sometimes world-class experts in their field to spend time talking to you for three or four years. They want to know that you share their passion for Economics, bio-engineering, quantum mechanics, whatever it is.

The personal statement is NOT a general character sketch, a kind of Facebook 'About Me' blurb: 'I'm single, like girls, rock music and pizza'. Admissions tutors don't really care about that - make yourself stand out from every other teenager on the planet.

Make everything **relevant** to the course you are applying for: President of the Pancake Flipping Society and you want to be a doctor?? No problem - hand to eye co-ordination is essential in surgery! Passionate about the piano and want to read French at uni? Great! Debussy is your new favourite composer, and you love his music for Mallarmé's poem 'L'après midi d'un faune,' etc etc, you get the idea.

Deadlines and advice...

By the start of Year 13 your Personal Statement is ready for a final check by the start of September. Show it to an experienced teacher you trust, and your Higher Education/Careers Adviser at school, or **ask us**. Don't ask all your friends to read it as you know they may copy your best bits and you or they might be caught out by UCAS for copying. Submit your form early (by 5th October for Oxbridge, Medics and Vets - the actual deadline is 15th October, but your school or referee needs time to check it and do their bit). Soon after for everyone else. Then sit back and wait for the offers to come rolling in!

Entrance Tests

OXBRIDGE, MEDICS, VETS, LAWYERS - READ CAREFULLY!

1. Oxford: HAT, PAT, MAT, TSA, ARGGGGHHH!!! - Relax, they're just Oxford's own entrance tests, a filter for interview, sat in November in your school.
2. Cambridge: may ask for STEP papers (Maths and Physics)
3. Medics, Vets: UKCAT or BMAT
4. Lawyers: LNAT

The picture keeps changing and you **MUST** check for up to date information. In short, if you are in any of the categories on the previous page, follow the links below and start practising early.

Oxford requires a wide range of tests, sat at your school, with lots of silly names.

MAT = Maths Aptitude Test

TSA = Thinking Skills Assessment

PAT = Physics Aptitude Test

... and so on.

Check what the requirements of your particular course are here, **download some past papers** and get to it. Your teachers should be able to help - if they can't, **we can**.

Cambridge require some tests but not nearly as many as Oxford. It tends to be STEP papers for the very mathematical. Don't know what they are? Click **here**.

Medics: You should definitely take **UKCAT**, sat in test centres throughout the country. Who asks for it? Most medical schools, but for an up-to-date list **check here**.

Practise for this - if you're good at science it shouldn't be hard as such, but it should make you think, and the timing can be tricky. How's it used? It changes, but for safety's sake assume you'll be ranked according to the average for your cohort (eve-

ryone taking the exam in your year). If you fall below the average score (which isn't published until the test has closed), you'll quite likely have trouble getting interviewed at many medical schools.

There are many expensive courses offering training for the UK-CAT. You should be able to prepare in school and at home perfectly adequately. The key thing is to get your timing right. Save your money, but invest your time.

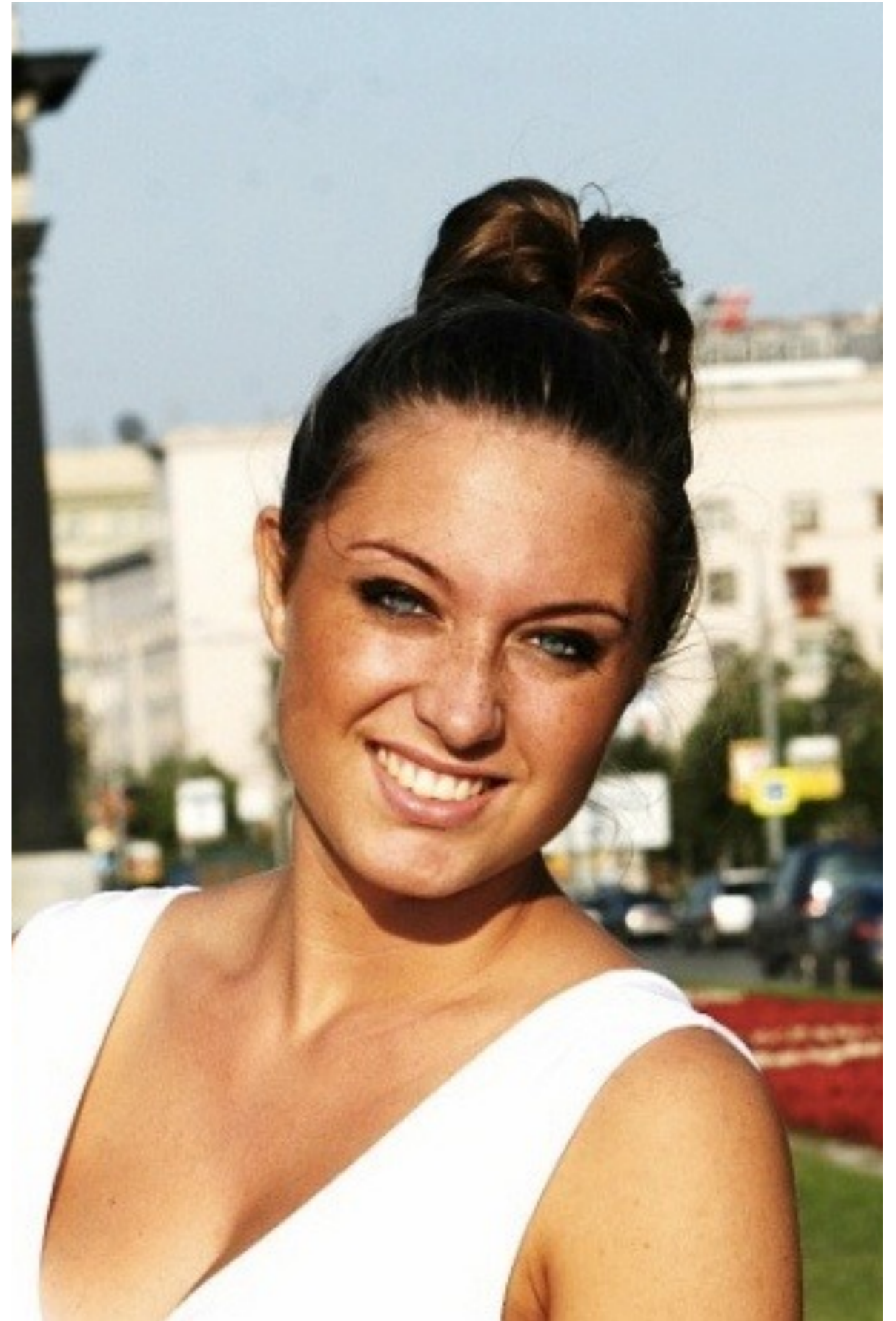
Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial and now Brighton ask for **BMAT** instead. This is sat in your school like the Oxford tests. The focus is a bit different, but the preparation should be the same.

Vets: the requirements keep changing, so **check** before you apply, but assume you'll need BMAT as per the instructions for Medics above (Cambridge and Royal Veterinary College want it, Bristol are interested).

Lawyers: in almost all cases you should plan to sit **LNAT** - again sat at test centres throughout the country, and preparation once again is key: see notes above for UKCAT.

What shall I study?

Which course should you apply for?
What are your strengths?
What are your predicted grades?
What is your passion?



What to study?

HOW TO DECIDE WHICH COURSE IS RIGHT FOR YOU

1. What are you good at?
2. What do you enjoy doing the most?
3. What kind of career would you like to have?
4. What are your predicted grades?
5. How can you prepare yourself?

1. What are you good at? What do you enjoy?

Don't let your parents push you in a direction you don't feel passionate about. If you want to be a musician, but your parents think you should be a lawyer because that's where the money is, it's time to attempt a frank discussion with them about whose life it is.

This kind of argument can often come down to money. Your parents think they are paying the fees, supporting you through university, and expect you to 'make something of yourself'.

The fee issue is quite simply not their business, it's yours. You repay the fees through the tax system, not them. Make them read [Chapter 7](#) of this book if they won't believe you.

You may indeed be hoping for their support with your living expenses while at university, but you are also entitled to a Maintenance Loan, so while it isn't that much, you are not going to be penniless if your parents cut you off entirely. Which I hope they won't.

You can also persuade them to support your decision by pointing out that you are more likely to get a good degree if you are studying something that interests you. This in turn will be of more use to you than a lower class degree in a subject you hated. So get a First in Music, then convert to Law if you're interested later on. Don't drag through three years of Law hating every moment and come out with a Third. The musician would actually have better job prospects as a lawyer!

Careers

Stick to the subject you do best and that you enjoy the most, and try not to worry too much about career prospects. These tend to open up for people who are genuinely enthusiastic and committed to their subject.

When you look at universities (we'll do that in the next chapter), you can consider employability statistics for each institution. This is a potentially useful measure of how employers rate a degree from a particular institution.

Predicted Grades

Before you go any further, you need to have an idea what your predicted grades actually are.

If you are in Year 12, the Lower Sixth, you will be getting close to AS exams if you are in England. These are a useful half-way measure of progress, and some universities (particularly Durham and Cambridge) are keen to see a breakdown of your unit scores in your AS papers. Your teachers will be able to make more accurate predictions when you actually get your AS results, but before you go away for the summer holidays, you need a clear idea of what they think your potential is.

ASK FOR YOUR PREDICTED GRADES!

Some schools can be a bit precious about releasing this information. **This is crazy!**

First they are obliged to share information they hold on record with you by Data Protection laws, and second,

YOU NEED TO KNOW SO YOU CAN PICK THE RIGHT UNIVERSITY!

Prepare yourself

So let's assume you know what your predicted grades are, you have worked out which subject really lights you up, and now you need to start preparing yourself for getting into university!

DO THESE THINGS STARTING NOW:

1. Read everything you can related to your subject.
2. Pester your teacher and head of department for tips on applying for their subject. What's new in the field? What are they reading? What are the best journals or magazines for the subject?
3. Look online for free introductory courses in your field. Oxford university does some great lectures on a wide range of subjects available on [iTunesU](#). Their podcasts are also a great place to start: [Oxford Podcasts](#).
4. Start a discussion group, join the school club for your subject, suggest a lecture topic, contact an outside speaker and invite them to the school to give a lecture.

I know some of this sounds pushy and geeky, but so what? If other pupils are taking the mickey, remember that they will be the losers in a few months time when you've got 5 offers from leading universities, and they have nothing.

Admissions Tutors love to see someone with a bit of initiative and drive: it's OK to say you've read this or that book, but if you can say you've set up a lecture at your school with Professor Smith and organised a question and answer session for him, this puts you in a different league. It also lends itself to an excellent reference from your teachers.

REMEMBER: SHOW INITIATIVE!

Now read on to discover the details of the UCAS Course Search, and how to make sure you've got the right combinations of subjects for success.

Which university?

What kind of university experience do you want?

Do you want a big city to party in?

A campus university?

How about accommodation?



How to choose

WHICH UNIVERSITY IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

1. Don't get swayed by snobbery or parental pressure
2. Visit the universities you think you are interested in to get a feel for the place
3. Be ambitious but realistic - what do your predicted grades allow you to apply for?
4. Think about whether you'd like to study at a campus university
5. Look at the accommodation on offer
6. Check out the student satisfaction surveys here: [The Complete University Guide](#)
7. Another useful site: [Unistats](#)

A short cut to how to find universities that are right for you:

- Start with a course search on UCAS: this is how it's done:

<http://ucas.com/students/choosingcourses/>

You now have a short list of possible universities. Next ask yourself a few questions:

- Big city or small town?
- Traditional or modern?
- Campus or collegiate?

Lifestyle is important, but so too is what you are studying. For example, you may absolutely love French at school, have had a great time on French exchanges, enjoy watching French movies and think Audrey Tatou is cute. You've been through Oxford with your dad and think you may as well give it a try.

LOOK AT THE COURSE DESCRIPTION FIRST!

In this case, you will find the course heavily literary, starting with texts from the 18th century in the first year, then going further back later on. Is this what you really had in mind?

There may be something far more suitable to your interests at another good university. So once you've got a range of places that you think fit, check the university websites and faculty pages and read their course descriptions. There are usually links on the UCAS course search results page, as shown.

Also **Speak to your teachers of your chosen subject:** get advice from people you trust.

‘Facilitating Subjects’

WHAT ARE ‘FACILITATING SUBJECTS’?

1. This is what the Russell Group of universities calls the subjects which lend themselves to greater flexibility in your choices later on - the more traditionally academic subjects that keep your options open - watch the short video at the link opposite from them that explains it
2. If you’re worried, avoid more than one so-called ‘soft’ subject in your three A level choices **IF** you are going for the more competitive courses or universities. **It depends what you want to study though!**
3. Check out this pdf from the Russell Group for a guideline as to what combinations might be in your interests: [Russell Group Informed Choices](#)

Really, the campaign for some university places and courses starts a lot earlier than September in the Upper Sixth / Year 13.

Before you finish your GCSEs, you need to be planning which subjects to take on to AS and A2, and ensuring that you have the right mix to set you up for success when trying to win that elusive place at the most ‘desirable’ universities. Remember - ‘desirable’ is a debatable concept - find the course that’s right for you rather than the *Brideshead Revisited* fantasy that probably has nothing to do with the reality of many courses now. Many Russell Group universities are highly rated based on their research, which means that top professors are not going to have time to spend on the likes of you smelly undergraduates. Make sure you find out about student satisfaction too from [Unistats](#), and find out from current students, maybe recent leavers from your school, what life is really like at the university you fancy and how well you’re looked after.

Having said all that, click on the link below for a video on what the Russell Group universities advise:

<http://russellgroup.ac.uk/informed-choices/>

What are we talking about?

Certain subjects support each other and make for useful combinations, while others, rightly or not, are considered ‘soft’ options by some universities or for some degrees. Mostly, universities don’t explicitly say so as not to upset people or seem snobby.

As an obvious example, if you want to read Medicine, you should certainly study Chemistry at A level, and almost certainly Biology too. After that, your third subject is a bit more open, but err on the side of caution, and probably stick to the traditional sciences (Physics, Maths) or if you really don't fancy that, perhaps add a language or an essay-based subject (History or English) to show you can deal with what are considered heavy-weight subjects without breaking too much of a sweat. Check [here](#) for more subject-specific advice.

THERE IS NO SIMPLE ANSWER!

Is this fair on Business Studies, Theatre Studies etc? No, probably not, but it's the way the world is. On the other hand, Physics is not particularly 'facilitating' if you want to go into the theatre later on in life. In that case, Theatre Studies, Art, and English would be great. So this does not mean you cannot study any of these subjects, just think through your choices before you commit yourself to your A levels, and make sure that your end goal in terms of a degree is supported by what you are studying.

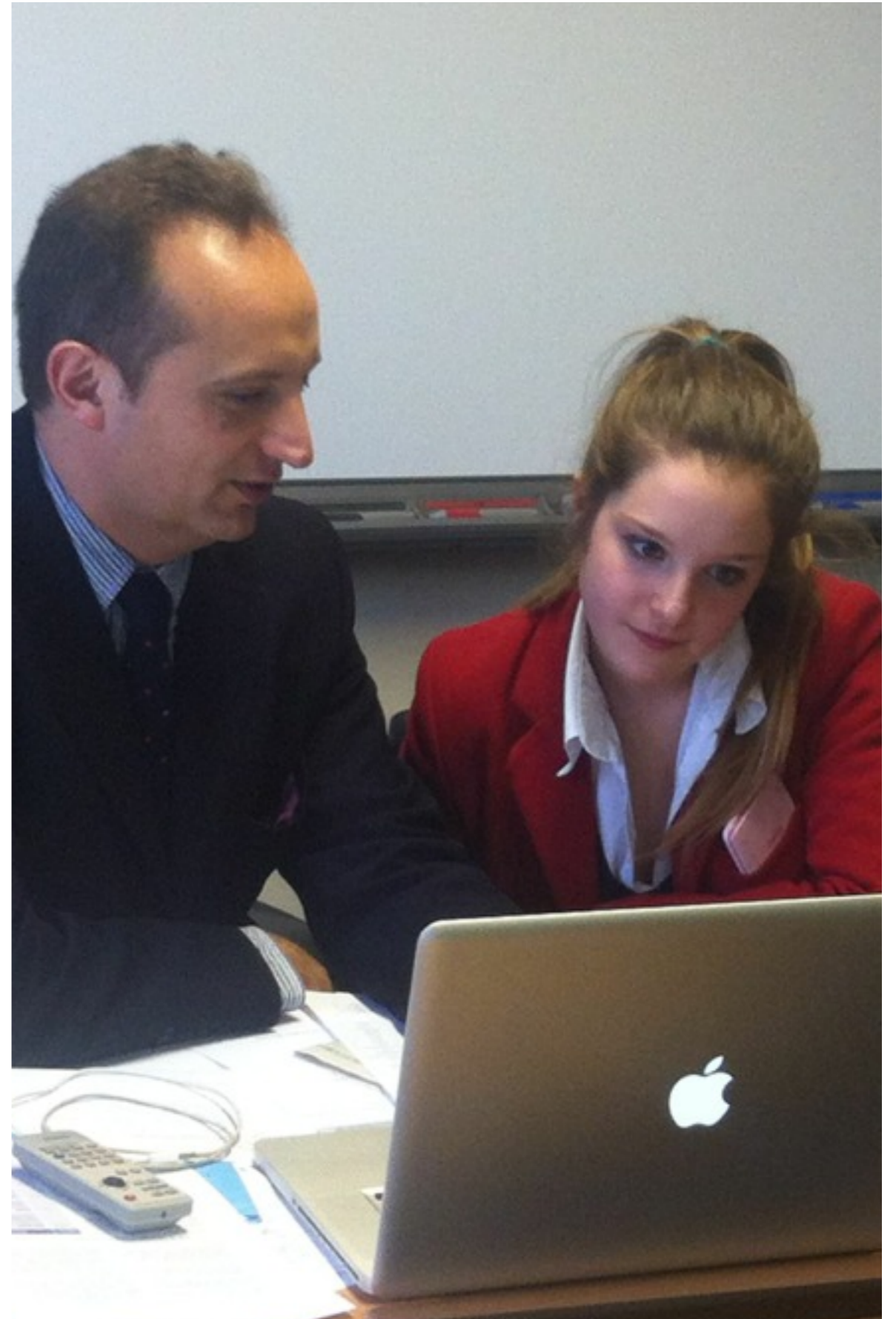
Follow the link to the [Russell Group's interactive pdf](#) on subject choices. This will give you a good idea of which combinations are favoured by many leading universities, and what is most likely to keep your options open.

The Boring Bits

How to fill in all the boring bits on the UCAS form...

Get these wrong and you get off to a bad start - some competitive courses are just looking for any reason to reject you if they have 10 or more well-qualified candidates for each place.

Don't let it be you!



The Boring Bits

BORING BUT IMPORTANT...

1. Personal Details
2. Educational history
3. Immigration details (if relevant)
4. Student finance
5. Putting in the choices

1. PERSONAL DETAILS

You'd think not too much could go wrong here wouldn't you?
You'd be wrong...

It all starts with the name: *please* use capitals for the first character:

Daffy Duck - good

daffy duck - bad

DAFFY DUCK - WHY ARE YOU SHOUTING??

A small thing, but you're not sending a text to a friend: if you want to apply for university you should expect to be able to cope with basic literacy and formal communication. This is where it starts.

Previous surname at 16th Birthday: unless you've been married and changed your name, or have other interesting family circumstances, you don't need to put anything here.

Postal Address: give them an address where you can actually reliably receive the mail. It's important! Open everything from universities and read it carefully - it might be asking for further information or an interview.

Telephone numbers: again, make yourself as available as possible.

E-mail: VERY important - universities and UCAS will communicate with you using this address, so make sure you have

regular access to it and CHECK IT EVERY DAY, particularly in the holidays when your teachers aren't there to nag you.

Another point: it's time to get a grown-up e-mail address. Maybe when you were 12, 'jellytot1999@hotmail.com' seemed really cute, but now you want to be an engineer, it's time to get something a bit more dignified.

Similarly, carjacker666@hotmail.co.uk is not an ideal e-mail address for a prospective lawyer. Think about not just this but how your entire online profile looks to anyone who googles you. Lock down your Facebook settings, remove tags of any photos that don't do you credit. Employers look at your online profile, and universities may be starting to as well. Protect yourself! Consider getting yourself on **LinkedIn** or setting up an **About.me** page to promote a positive online image of yourself.

Residential Category: this is crucial - it will determine how the universities judge your application, and also how much you have to pay.

It's also a complex area, and one that depends a lot on your circumstances. **Get in touch** for detailed advice.

2. EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

The best thing is to give them as much information as possible. You must tell them about all exams you have 'certificated' - that is where you have got a final result and a certificate (you might not actual hold the certificate but the result is published

in your school stats). Many schools are certificating AS results too so you need to put these on your form. You can, however, with the co-operation of your school's exam officers and teachers, play various games to help put your best foot forward. For example, if you are very good at Maths, you may be capable of taking your A level a year early. **DON'T DO IT!** Hold off for one paper, so it looks like you are more academically 'robust' - you are still taking 3 or even 4 exams (possibly Further Maths) in Year 13, rather than having an easy ride for your last year. Except you're not because you did the heavy lifting in Year 12. If your school is having trouble with this concept, make sure they realise they are putting your offers at risk if they insist you sit the whole exam and certificate in Year 12. We are always happy to explain.

Always include:

- **GCSEs or Standard Grades**

- **AS levels:** give a full breakdown of all units and grades, as well as the overall certificated grade

- **A2 exams** you are yet to sit: include any AS papers you are planning to re-sit and choose 'pending' for the grade

- Make sure you get the **dates** right. For example, it's September 2014, you are in your Upper Sixth (Year 13) now, and you sat your AS grades in the summer. So your AS results are actual grades, achieved August 2014; your A2 grades are pending, August 2015.

- If there are **gaps** in your educational history, these will need explaining - make sure whoever is writing your **reference** is on it!

- **Maths and English:** check the course requirements carefully - usually you must get a C at least in these two subjects, sometimes the requirement is higher. If you need to re-sit in the 6th Form it's a pain but you can do it.

- **Overseas applicants** who don't have UK exams, you should include whatever school certificates you can - if you don't the universities will quite likely get back to you and ask, so save yourself some time later and get it done now.

3. IMMIGRATION DETAILS

If you are not a UK citizen it is important to give as much information as possible: make sure you put in your **passport number** correctly, and always make sure you are taking **IELTS or an equivalent English language exam:** you will be asked for it as a requirement to get a visa even if the university doesn't formally require it, which they should. Aim for **6.5 in all units** (Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing). You might get away with less, but don't risk it. The UKBA (UK Borders Authority) have tightened up a lot on student residency, so be ready for a long visa application - give yourself plenty of time so that you don't miss the start of term.

Some **engineering and scientific courses** require an additional visa, known as the **ATAS Clearance** as of early 2012. This is a separate application.

Useful address:

UKBA Visa Section

4. STUDENT FINANCE

This is complicated and unfortunately affects your chances of a place. You can not normally choose to answer differently here (though there may be exceptions) - you just have to tell the truth and work out how it affects you.

In a nutshell:

If you have lived in the UK for three years, and at the address you quote on your UCAS form at the start of August in the year you want to go to university then you are resident in that country for application purposes.

Example 1: Johnny grew up and went to school in London. In Year 12 his parents get a job in Edinburgh and so Johnny finishes his schooling there. On 1st August in the year he is going to university he is living in Edinburgh, therefore he is Scottish resident for application purposes.

Why does this matter?

To Scottish universities, under the current funding arrangements (2012-13) this means that he is competing for places in a relatively small pot, against other Scottish students as well as everyone else in the European Union *except* England.

If he wants to go to the more sought-after universities in Scotland, his chances are now radically different to those of students from south of the border.

If he succeeds in winning a place at a Scottish university, though, he does at least get his **tuition paid for** by the Scottish government. No need for a tuition fee loan for Johnny.

Example 2: Sophie was born in Scotland of Scottish parents, but lives in London due to her parents' work. The family owns no property in Scotland. If she wants to go to a Scottish university, **she will have to pay tuition fees**, probably £9000, like all other English residents (more on how the loan is paid back later).

She does, however, have a much **better chance** of getting a place at a Scottish university. Why? Because her application is not one of the capped ones, from the small, restricted number that the Scottish government has to pay for. The universities can, in theory, take unlimited numbers of **'Rest of UK' or 'RUK' applicants**.

Example 3: Clint is from New York. He is applying to universities in both Scotland and the Rest of the UK. They can charge him pretty much whatever they like, and this is going to be payable upfront. His application is judged in another bucket again, and there is considerably less competition for places for him, but he does have to pay more.

Theoretically the entrance criteria should be the same for all applicants on the same course, regardless of residency status.

In practice, grade offers can vary widely, and your chances are considerably better if you are a full international student. For example, at one leading Scottish university, we were told that on their more competitive courses the offer ratio was 1:14 for Scottish and EU applicants, but more like 1:4 or 5 for internationals.

At another institution, completely different offers are made to international students: places that would be difficult to obtain with a faultless exam record and a straight A prediction at A level or Higher are offered to international applicants at BBB.

Games you can play...

If your parents have property both north and south of the Scottish border, you can effectively opt to be Scottish or English depending on your priorities.

- Are you keen on a particularly competitive Scottish university and worried about not getting the place? **Be an English resident.**
- Are you concerned about tuition fee loans, and are not so bothered about the 'prestige' institutions anyway? **Be a Scottish resident.**
- If you have **lived abroad** a lot for whatever reason, be careful and answer any supplementary questions from the university carefully: they want to know whether they can treat you as an international. This is going to cost you or your parents a lot of cash up front.

Answer questions truthfully!

Do not try to trick the university into giving you an offer, then change your residency status! The offer will be withdrawn.

5. PUTTING IN THE CHOICES

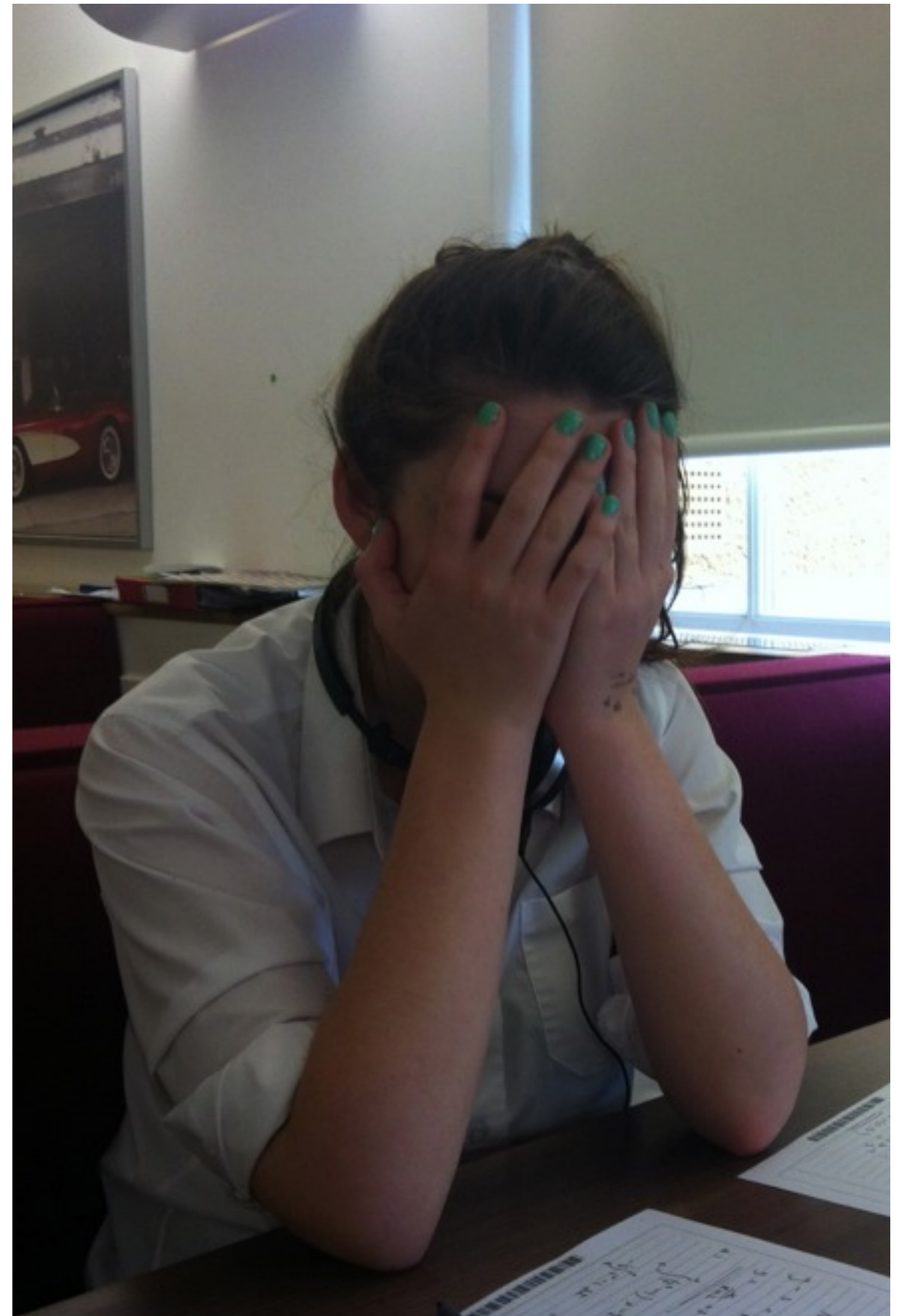
This is fairly simple: just make sure you've found the right course code and university! Every year we get a few people who put in something completely different because they were in a rush. We spot it, but your school may not, and then you've wasted a choice.

Watch UCAS's video on filling in the form [here](#).

The Personal Statement

Don't panic - it's not as bad as all that.

Follow the advice here, and you'll be writing a killer personal statement before you know it.



The Personal Statement

WHAT TO DO

1. Plan
2. DO NOT get someone else to write it for you!
3. Follow the structure given in this book
4. For most applications, stick to a 75-80% academic bias
5. Don't just list achievements; pick key ones and show what you've learnt from them
6. Don't undersell yourself
7. Get subject-specific advice from someone you trust
8. Tell the truth
9. Turn negatives into positives
10. Redraft, redraft, redraft, redraft

What is it?

The personal statement is a 47 line, 4000 character (including spaces) text in which you sell yourself to the university admissions tutor.

WARNING: you will not see full sample Personal Statements in this book. We know how easy it is to 'borrow' good material once you've seen it. **DON'T DO IT!** You will get caught by the UCAS Similarity Detection Software and your application may be cancelled.

DO NOT PAY SOMEONE TO DO IT FOR YOU - they are almost certainly producing an 'off the shelf' product and changing the key details to suit you.

Do not show your Personal Statement to your friends. If they 'borrow' something they like, and submit their form before you, it will be you who gets caught for plagiarism, not them.

Get personalised help from us instead.

So how should you write it?

MAKE EVERY WORD COUNT

It is not a chatty personality sketch:

'Hi ;) i'm, like, really, like, into stuff like music and i love the playing the guitar and i'm like in this band with my BFF and

i'm so into hockey and play every wednesday and i, like, have so many friends on facebook so i'm like really popular and outgoing as a person. Oh and i'm like really into being a student and reading and stuff. i love reading i was reading a magazine yesterday and there was this article about how difficult relationships are so that is why i want you to give me a place for psychology. Thanks :) xx'

This candidate has misunderstood the task and misjudged the appropriate tone. There are a few annoying grammatical and punctuation errors as well.

Top tips for Presentation and Style

- Make it easy on your hard-working admissions tutor: leave a line between each paragraph - it's just easier on the eye - like this book.

- Avoid contractions: 'do not' instead of 'don't'; 'I am' instead of 'I'm'.

- Don't try to be funny. It doesn't work.
- Write in the 1st person: 'I want to study...' not 'John wants to study...'.

The Structure

- 1. Introduction: Why do you want to study this subject?**
- 2. What have you enjoyed most about your A levels/ Highers and why?**
 - a. Give specific examples**
 - b. Show how you've gone beyond the syllabus**
 - c. Reflect on what you have learnt**
- 3. What work experience or other experiences have you had? How are they relevant to your chosen course? What transferable skills have you acquired?**
- 4. What music or sporting activities are you involved in? What transferable skills have you acquired?**
- 5. Conclusion: Summarise why you are suitable for this course and what qualities you can offer the university.**

The Introduction

1. Introduction

This is where you attempt to capture the Admission Tutor's attention from the outset - first impressions are important, so it's OK to leave this until you've worked through the rest of the task, and worked out yourself what it is about the subject that fascinates you, then do this bit when you've completed the other sections.

- **Avoid opening with a quotation** - the Admissions Tutor wants to hear about you, not the first thing you found on Wikipedia.
- **Avoid tear-jerking stories of childhood trauma** - there was a spate of these copied from the internet for Medicine a year or two ago, along the lines of 'The last thing I remembered was the lorry hitting our car. I woke on the hospital bed to find a doctor looking into my eyes, and I knew at that moment I too wanted to help people through Medicine'.

Please!! If you have *genuine* experiences that have shaped interests, by all means share them, but keep the soap opera style to yourself.

- **Avoid the highly predictable**
 - *I am passionate about Physics*
 - *I am fascinated by Economics*

Not that bad in themselves, but Admissions Tutors tell us they read this so often, it is good to give them something slightly more interesting and personal. Explain why: you loved taking toys apart when you were little, this developed into a fascination with Technics Lego, and now you are determined to be a mechanical engineer.

Examples

Here are some real examples of weak openings that our students have worked on to make them stronger and punchier:

LAW

Before: *I am really interested in law as I think that it gives everyone a chance of a fair trial. My father is a lawyer and has always wanted me to follow in his footsteps as he has worked to make law help people and I want to do the same. I have seen what the lifestyle is like, and I am prepared for the challenges a career as a lawyer will offer.*

After: *Law is at the centre of a well-ordered society: it promises justice and fairness, and for as long as I can remember I have wanted to be part of the process of making justice attainable for all. Before he left China to seek a new life in the West, my father experienced law being used as an instrument of repression. This has helped to shape my view of the world and the need for a fair legal system.*

Note how interest in the subject is expressed with more detachment: the parental influence is still there, but there is more maturity and reflection, as well as a clearly formulated moral dimension to the candidate's interest in the subject.

PHYSICS

Before: *I have all my life been interested in Sciences; they inspire me and have already explained many of the mysteries of life. I am particularly interested in studying physics to a further level than I have studied so far, it is a subject which I find has a lot of influence in our everyday life, it is complex but logical. I also enjoy biology very much for most of the same reasons; I like to understand the way we are made and the reasons behind it. Our bodies as well as most living organisms are very complex, and I am a person which likes to understand the mechanism behind things. Another subject which is fascinating from my point of view is chemistry which can explain most of the metabolic reactions which take place in our bodies, and using chemistry is a great way to find an explanation to changes which have occurred during*

the creation of the earth as most are due to chemical reaction. During my first years of school, I was in a boarding school in France so I am fluent in the language.

After: *All my life I have been passionate about the Sciences; they inspire me to uncover the mysteries of life. I am particularly interested in studying Physics at a higher level. It is a subject whose complexity and logic I greatly enjoy, and I am fascinated by its capacity to explain so much of the world around us, and many of the most exciting scientific discoveries are being made in the realm of Physics. I am deeply motivated to become involved in these leading-edge discoveries.*

The original version lacks focus: all the sciences are touched on, whereas in the second version, Physics is properly prioritised.

Make it personal, but don't make it up!

Have a conversation with a friend or teacher - get them to ask you why you want to study the subject, and write down what you say. Many students spend hours coming up with tortured, pretentious long words they wouldn't use: keep it simple, authentic and honest, but also take your interest to the next level - why Physics and not French? What is it about the particular subject area you have chosen that gets you so excited?

Academic Content

2. The Academic Content

This is where you demonstrate your worth as a student.

Answer these questions, and you will have completed this section:

1. What have you enjoyed most about subject A?
2. Give an example of work that has particularly inspired you.
3. What have you read or done as a result of this work?
4. How has it inspired you to pursue the subject beyond the classroom?

Now repeat for all your other subjects.

It really is as simple as that: just show that you are genuinely interested in your subjects and that you have some independent study skills. **Don't SAY** you are good at working independently, **PROVE IT!**

What do I mean? Compare the following:

I have enjoyed studying our set text for French this term and have done some other reading in French too to extend my understanding of French literature in general as I think it is important to develop independent study skills and take my work beyond the classroom.

I have enjoyed our study of 'Cyrano de Bergerac' this term, and was so interested in French Romantic ideas about the Sublime and Grotesque that I have started to take my reading further. I was particularly interested in the work of Baudelaire and in how he found poetic inspiration in material that previously was considered beneath a poet's notice. I especially enjoyed 'L'Albatros' and 'Le Chat' for their use of animals in this context, though in very different ways.

See how the first candidate tries to make us believe he is doing some reading without actually offering any proof? The second one has actually thought about the set text, maybe with a teacher's help, but that's fine, and taken his reading further. He doesn't say 'I am an independent learner', he implies it through and offers concrete examples to back up what he is saying.

This would also be a good starting point for an **interview**.

Here are some examples of subject-specific paragraphs that have contributed to a successful application. Note how the candidates in each case make intelligent connections between their studies and other experiences, and relate everything back to the main subject applied for.

GEOGRAPHY

Recently I have particularly enjoyed field work in an urban environment, analyzing land use distribution along our local High Street and undergoing new forms of primary data collection and dispersion theories such as nearest neighbour analysis. As a complete contrast I also relished participating in a sand dune survey on the coast. I enjoyed testing soil and sand samples from my analyzed site in the biology department to see how their content changed at an increasing distance from the sea.

ENGINEERING

Growing up near to the Forth Road Bridge and travelling across it on numerous occasions has often led me to marvel over its structure and ability to stay up. From the suspension Road Bridge, you look across to the cantilevered Rail Bridge. In my A level studies I have begun to learn a little of how the mechanics of such structures work – and the differences between them. On the way I have discovered a great passion for investigating problems in order to understand them fully. The skills I have learnt from my school subjects have helped me to sort problems sequentially and to learn to manipulate

numbers. But at this level, knowing a little leads you to understand how much more there is to learn.

PHYSICS

Physics is a subject I study not just to pass exams: I study it because I enjoy it. In my eyes, the subject is self-motivating. Looking at the night sky, I find myself inspired to explore the theory of star creation. The applied side of Physics is also of great appeal to me. In the summer holidays I attended a five day "Headstart" course on Aeronautical Engineering. This was to feed my curiosity and to spark my future career in Physics. However, I returned home knowing that I did not want to take up engineering at University but instead focus solely on pure Physics.

SOFTWARE ENGINEERING

I study Maths, clearly a key discipline when developing software, especially when working with algorithms. I decided to take an extra Maths module, Decision Maths 1, in order to gain a better understanding of algorithms and applying Maths in the real world, not just during exams. I found Physics the most closely related to Software Engineering. Although I prefer to focus on the software side of computers, I wanted to gain some knowledge of how the inner workings of a computer operate. My study of English Literature and Language has helped me too as most

programming languages are based on English, and I also enjoy reading old English Literature, more specifically, poetry, where precise use of language is critical. In Government and Politics I have been interested in understanding how Computers and the software they run have an impact on the political world around them, for example in the recent London riots where social networking played an alarming role. I aim to familiarise myself with, and learn how to prevent such impacts.

ACTION POINT:

WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU MOST ENJOY IN EACH SUBJECT YOU STUDY NOW.

Work Experience

- **Do you have a Saturday job?**
- **Have you done any volunteering?**
- **Have you helped a family friend in their work or business?**
- **Do you do any babysitting? Dog walking? Anything?**

This is an area that can cause some anxiety: there was coverage in the press recently comparing work experience of pupils from independent and state schools, stating that the private school pupils had an unfair advantage.

Here's a link to the article on the Sutton Trust website that caused a minor media stir: [Sutton Trust](#).

Here's a table of comparison from the report:

Work-related activity 'experiences' (Independent school applicants)	Work-related activity 'jobs' (State school applicants)
"I work-shadowed a stockbroker at the London office of Union Bank of Switzerland."	"I have a part time job as a drinks waitress working at the KC stadium. Even though it's my job I look forward to my shifts."
"Next summer I have been offered a work experience placement to shadow the Indian Ambassador to the United Nations, in New York."	"Last year I worked in Aldi and in a local bakery, which gave me experience of dealing with a variety of customers' demands."
"My extensive involvement and success in assisting my father in his international company shows my ability to handle situations in the real world."	"I have a part time job in a local pub where I work as a waitress and a barmaid."
"My fervour for economics has led to work placements in a leading bank in India and accountancy firm in New York."	"I have two part time jobs in the hotel and catering industry."

So are you terribly disadvantaged if Daddy didn't manage to send you to Eton?

Don't panic - Admissions Tutors can see through the applicants who have everything handed to them on a plate. No matter what experience you have, you can make it count. In fact, universities are put under increasing pressure to treat students from under-privileged backgrounds favourably, and if anything independent school candidates have to go to extra lengths to prove that they have really made the most of their experiences, reflected on them properly, and sought them out for themselves.

Medicine and Veterinary Science

Some disciplines demand particular kinds of work experience, so let's deal with those first.

It is essential from as early as you can to start volunteering for **regular work experience**. This is where having an uncle who is a consultant brain surgeon is actually not that useful. You can swan around with Uncle Tom in a white coat for a few days in the holidays, but the student who has volunteered every week for two years to go to the local old peoples' home and empty bed pans has shown considerably more **dedication** to medicine and has a more **realistic idea** of what the profession is like.

It's the same for potential vets: go to the local vet surgery and ask for some experience; volunteer to muck out stables; work on a farm. Do this every week for a year, then see if you are still interested.

This kind of work experience is essential to test yourself: have you really got what it takes to stick out the very long and rigorous training? It's better to find out now.

Extra-Curricular

Do you play any instruments?

Do you enjoy the theatre?

What about the cinema?

Is sport important to you?

Do you play in any important school teams?

What else do you do outside school and the classroom?

This section towards the end of your Personal Statement should usually take up no more than 25% of the total space. Many students have trouble with this advice, but remember you are applying for an academic ‘job’, not trying to persuade

someone your own age that you are up for game of football at the weekend.

Reading

A word of caution: *‘I like reading’* sounds really lame. If you are hoping to study anything at university, a fair amount of reading is a certainty. It is particularly worrying to see students of English assure the Admissions Tutor that they ‘like reading’ while failing to mention any specific books. This is the main area where you must **imply** by discussing enthusiastically something you have read, rather than simply **stating**.

The place for this is in the ‘Academic’ section.

Music

Again, try to be more interesting than simply saying you like to play the guitar with friends. You and about 300,000 other teenagers do that. Be specific: what kind of music do you like? Why? What does it express for you? What discipline, skills, team-working abilities are required to play in a group, band, orchestra, ensemble? How often do you practise? How does your dedication to music demonstrate your ability to manage your time effectively? Do you perform in front of an audience? What has that taught you?

Theatre and Cinema

‘I like going to the cinema with my friends’. Once more, you’ll be hard-pressed to find a teenager who doesn’t. This is not a reason to give you a place.

Sport

It can be tempting if you have some serious sporting achievements to simply list all the teams you've played in:

'I am a proud member of the school's 1st XV, and have represented the school throughout an unbeaten season. Last year I achieved a similar feat as captain of the 2nd XV. I am also a keen hockey player and have played in all my school's main teams since I have been there. In addition I have represented my school in Cricket and was awarded the McIntyre Shield for Batting last year. I am enthusiastic about tennis too and last summer played mixed doubles in another unbeaten season.'

Bear in mind that the Admissions Tutor may have little interest in the sports you are so proud of. Unless you are going for a sports scholarship, you need to 'repurpose' this kind of information dramatically. Compare the version below with the original and see how much more compelling it is.

'I have represented my school in all the key team sports, and have learnt a great deal about self-motivation, discipline and working with others towards a common goal as a result. It has at times been challenging maintaining my commitment to the 1st XV Rugby team as well as the 1st XI Hockey side while keeping on top of my studies, but I have found new energy for my studies by doing so. I believe that my academic work is enhanced through the balance provided by sport and the team management skills I have learnt on the pitch have been invaluable in the classroom.'

Now the candidate is making intelligent connections between study and sport, and is showing that he has reflected on the possible conflict of interest, but has made a virtue of it through his determination to do both.

Reflect on the skills and qualities you have developed through extra-curricular activities - don't just list what you do.

Conclusion

Your closing paragraph should briefly summarise why you are suitable for the course you have chosen, highlight the qualities you will bring to your studies and what you in particular you have to offer to the university.

You can also mention future career plans here. If you have an interest in continuing with academic work to a higher degree, then mention that here too. Remember that you are trying to get a place from dedicated academics who live and breathe their subject. If you show similar enthusiasm, they are more likely to look favourably on you.

Some examples:

I am involved in many aspects of school life and maintain a balance between academic work and extra-curricular activities. I hope to keep this balance up at university by writing for student publications. I look forward to the challenges of-

ferred by my studies and university life, after which I hope to find new challenges by going into research.

I am sure that I can bring a great deal to the exciting field of Hospitality, Sport and Business Management: I have the personal qualities needed to make a success of independent study as well as what is required to excel in the business world.

In conclusion I am a strong candidate for a career in Spanish and Business: I am highly motivated, approach all tasks with enthusiasm, energy and the determination to succeed. I believe that the business world needs confident communicators and this is exactly what I can offer.

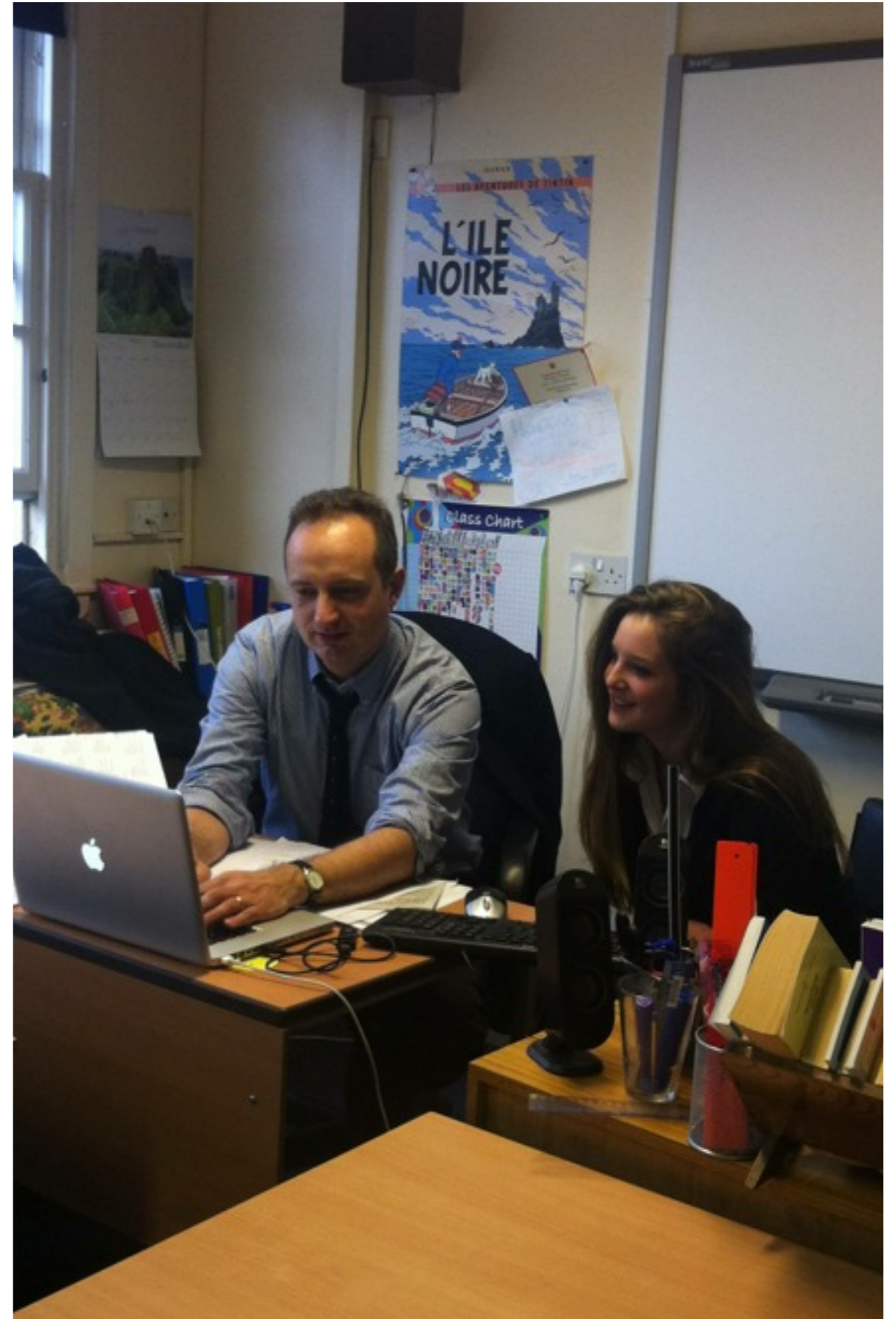
I am committed to training for a career in counselling, psychology and to helping those with mental health problems, and look forward to making a start in this field as soon as possible.

I have the motivation to succeed in this challenging but rewarding career where the clear communication of scientific concepts to different sectors of society is so important. The demands placed on a vet are like those found in few other professions, requiring a balance between the emotions and commercial reality. I look forward to starting a career in a field that has such scope for continuous research and development.

Need more help? Try our [personal statement planner](#).

The Reference

- Who is writing your reference?
- What influence do you have over the process?
- How can you help your referee to do a good job?
- What would you like to have mentioned?
- What are your rights? Can you see the reference?



TOP TIP!

ASK YOUR REFEREE TO READ THIS CHAPTER!

1. Who writes the reference?

If you are applying through a school, as we recommend you do if you can, your Form Tutor, Guidance Teacher, Careers Adviser, or some other teacher who hopefully knows you well enough will write the reference. This is attached to your application and sent off after you press 'Pay and Send'.

If you are not applying from a school (you are on a Gap year or left school a while ago), it can still be a good idea to link your application to a school if possible. Most schools worth their salt should provide support to leavers for a little while at least. In the school I work at we make it clear that leavers will get continuing support pretty much indefinitely - as long as there is someone in the school still alive who still remembers them, we can give them a reference.

You have two options:

- Link yourself to the school with a 'buzzword' - ask your school for it
- Apply independently and send a reference request to anyone appropriate through UCAS

2. What influence do I have over the process?

You are perfectly entitled to make suggestions as to what you think might be helpful, or what you'd like highlighted in your reference. Bear in mind that your referee may be experienced at writing references, but that he or she may also have a lot of them to write, and in some schools, may not know you well or at all, and will rely on reports from other subject teachers, who won't necessarily know what is required. We recommend you **send your referee a short e-mail or letter**, thanking them for agreeing to do the job, and highlighting any particular points that you would like to be taken into account.

Our feeling is that your referee should be willing to share what they have written. You can't demand that they say things that aren't true, but you can expect a full and fair representation of you in the best light possible.

3. What would you like to have mentioned?

Ask your referee to consider the following points - they could make or break your application:

• **Contextual data.** Universities are under increasing political pressure to prove that they are doing all they can to give students from disadvantaged backgrounds a fair chance. This might include:

- Disability, including Learning Difficulties
- Family background - are you the first in your family to go to university?

- Financial background - do you suffer from financial hardship? Are you at an independent school on a scholarship or bursary?
- Illness - were any of your exam results affected by illness? Have you been affected by the illness of a close relative?
- School background - is your school in a deprived area? Is there a record of low numbers attending university from the area or from the school? Are the exam results particularly weak?

All this is helpful in putting your own achievements in context: if you have done well in difficult circumstances, your achievement is all the more impressive. If you have had a bumpy ride academically, you are entitled to have this taken into account.

What about the other end of the spectrum? If you have had every privilege, been spoon-fed in classes of three while being handed work experience opportunities that others would kill for, then your referee should probably keep the 'contextual data' to a minimum, but anything that can indicate a hurdle that has been overcome is worth sticking in.

• **How does the reference support your Personal Statement?** This is essential: you must ensure your referee has seen your Personal Statement so that you are not contradicting each other.

• **Highlight the qualities of a successful student.**

These are likely to be similar for many different subjects and courses, but Admissions Tutors will be looking for evidence of:

- Independent learning
- Interest beyond the syllabus
- Maturity
- Reliability
- Punctuality

• **Ranking:** Are you one of the strongest in the year in your subject? Are you the best student of Geography your teacher has met in 20 years of teaching? Some sense of how you are doing against your peers, particularly for the more competitive courses, is helpful to selectors.

• **Contributions to school life beyond the classroom:** this is the best place in the application to get in that you were a superb captain of the First XV or swimming team, an outstanding president of the Debating Society, or whatever. You will have mentioned these achievements briefly in your Personal Statement, and expanded on what transferable skills you acquired as a result, but it is the referee's job to say that you performed these roles well.

Some big DON'TS for Referees:

- **DON'T get the student's name or sex wrong:** this just announces you don't know who you are talking about. Not helpful.

- **DON'T write a school report:** save it for the parents. This is not the place to talk about homework failure and your frustrations with poor discipline.

- **DON'T damn with faint praise:** *'It is a rare pleasure to see Jack arrive on time for class' or 'since her disappointing AS results it would be fair to say that Georgina has started to take her studies more seriously, and has often arrived in class with both books and a pen.'*

- **DON'T let your own prose style interfere with the application,** however much you like the applicant: *'Stella has been more than the best Head Girl this school has ever had, she has been nothing less than a friend, almost a second daughter and most of all leader to her peers and the younger forms. I glimpse the brightest of dazzling futures, a meteoric rise to fame and fortune that will prove her worthy of her name'* Yuk! Pass me a bucket.

And a few definite DOs:

- **DO highlight any contextual data** that might either explain academic hiccups or on the other hand make achievements stand out all the more.

- **DO be POSITIVE**

- **DO emphasize the most relevant school subject** to the university course chosen

- **DO end with a clear recommendation**

- **DO show the student what you have written about them.** They have a right to see it, so don't make them pay for it through UCAS. It may be they don't get much praise elsewhere, so make this a good experience. I've had pupils well up and say 'that's the nicest thing anyone's ever said about me'. A good reference from someone they respect can help your teaching relationship for the rest of the academic year.

Students: what are your rights?

Under data protection law, you are entitled to see anything written about you. Your referee should know this, and be prepared to show you what he or she has written. At the worst, you are entitled to obtain your reference via UCAS for a small fee.

Interviews

Who interviews?
What kind of interviews are there?
How do I prepare?



Interviews

A number of universities and courses will require you to attend an interview for admission. These are some of them:

Oxford and Cambridge

Imperial College London

Medicine

Veterinary Medicine

Teaching

Other universities are increasingly using invitations to Open Days as an opportunity to meet students, and some are implying that failure to attend will tend to result in no offer.

Oxbridge, Imperial, UCL ...

Probably the most challenging kind of academic interview, this is the place where you cannot get away with bluff and bluster. Some of the finest minds in the country are seeing whether they'd like to spend an hour or so a week in your company for three or four years.

There are some excellent videos on Oxford's website to show you what to expect. We have collected together some of the best ones [here](#).

TOP TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS

1. Prepare as if you were taking an exam
2. Revise your AS / Exam material
3. Re-read your Personal Statement
4. Have a mock interview with a subject specialist
5. Do a warm-up

Unlike for job interviews where you are being tested on a range of interpersonal skills, on how you might fit in with the ethos of the company, on whether your communication skills are up to scratch, on whether you are good with people and so on, Oxbridge are interested purely in your intellectual ability. You might well be an unpleasant fruit-cake, but, as one of the chief Admissions Tutors at Cambridge said recently at a UCAS conference ‘we will take people who are not very nice; with a heavy heart, but we will take them’.

So don't try to wow them with your rugby achievements, with your urbane manners, your polished shoes, your dad's tweed jacket, don't flash your legs at the crumpled old don fumbling for his pipe: he will notice everything but it won't make a blind bit of difference. You can only seduce him with your mind.

Do this instead:

- Read
- Read
- Read
- Re-read your personal statement
- Make sure you can talk about all the books you mentioned
- Revise your AS and A2 syllabus like you would for an exam

- Research what is current in your subject at the moment and have an opinion
- Have we mentioned reading?

Seriously - reading is one thing that Oxbridge admissions tutors keep emphasising. It's not rocket science (well, actually, it might be) it's just being genuinely interested in your field. If you are, then the reading is not a chore. If you're not, well, you really shouldn't be applying.

A few ideas to help target your reading though:

- Research the first-year reading list for your course and do some exploratory reading. Does anything connect with your reading to date?
- Find out about the research interests and publications of the lecturers and tutors at your college. I don't mean creep to them and say how much you admire their work. That is transparently pathetic, but a genuine interest that you can talk a little about is fine.
- If you are applying for literary subjects, read some criticism and literary theory as well as the literature itself. Try to acquire a critical vocabulary in whatever field interests you.
- Read reviews in newspapers and journals related to your field.

Medicine and Veterinary Science

Medical interviews can vary widely in style. You need to be ready for the traditional panel-type interview as well as a trendy OSCE experience. That stands for 'Objective Structured Clinical Examination' in case you weren't sure, in other words a series of mini panels, where competing candidates are presented with a problem or health-related scenario and asked to discuss the issue while an interviewer looks on or interacts with them, scoring them for their interpersonal skills and the quality of their interactions. You'll also come across MMI, Multiple Mini Interviews, somewhere between the two.

In this field, good communication skills and a pleasing manner are important. Think of what kind of doctor you'd like to be treated by, and let that part of your character show the most.

You should check with the universities you apply for what their actual procedure is as this can change. A few pointers at time of writing:

- Edinburgh and Southampton currently do not interview.
- OSCE interview is used at Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeen amongst others.
- As an indicator of the competition for places at just one university (Edinburgh): there are 2150 UK and EU applicants per year; 270 offers are made for 170 places. It's competitive!

Replying to Offers

- Got your offers? Now you need to reply:
- Firm
- Insurance
- What is a sensible backup?
- What am I committed to?



Replying to Offers

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Your Firm Choice is where you go if you get the grades they ask for
2. Your Insurance is a backup - IT MUST HAVE LOWER GRADES THAN THE FIRM!
3. Ideally you should allow yourself to drop two grades from your predictions for the insurance

FIRM CHOICE AND INSURANCE

This should be easy, but it's amazing how every year we get a few people who get in a muddle with their replies.

You need to understand that you are entering into a contract with the university, and that there is a commitment on both sides to fulfill certain obligations. Let's take an example.

Jamie is predicted AAA at A-level. He has 5 offers to read French and Linguistics as follows:

1. AAA St Andrews
2. AAA Bristol
3. AAA Leeds
4. ABB Glasgow
5. ABB Bath

He decides he'd prefer to stay in Scotland, so he declines the offers from Bristol, Leeds and Bath. This leaves him with St Andrews and Glasgow.

What next? Simple: St Andrews should be his Firm, Glasgow his Insurance.

What could change this? Maybe he's visited Glasgow and loved it, whereas he hated St Andrews. In that case, he'd better put Glasgow down as his Firm, and have no meaningful Insurance Choice.

THE ELEMENT OF CHOICE STOPS HERE!

This is what some students don't get: you can't wait until results day and then decide you prefer your Insurance choice. You are making the choice when you reply. On results day, if you get the grades required by your Firm choice, the Insurance automatically assumes you're going elsewhere and gives your place to someone else.

Insurance

If on results day Jamie gets ABB then Glasgow will be holding a place for him. St Andrews will, in most circumstances, have rejected him. At present, the university's decision is communicated on UCAS's Track system. This can take a little while to work through, depending on the efficiency of the university.

Near miss?

Sometimes, you can get lucky: a university may have asked for AAA, but on the day, due to supply and demand, and your excellent personal statement, they will let you in with AAB. If you have narrowly missed your offer, get in touch with the university early and see if you can persuade them to take you anyway: emphasise how much you want to go to that particular institution and how you just had one bad paper that pulled your mark down (if that is near enough to being true).

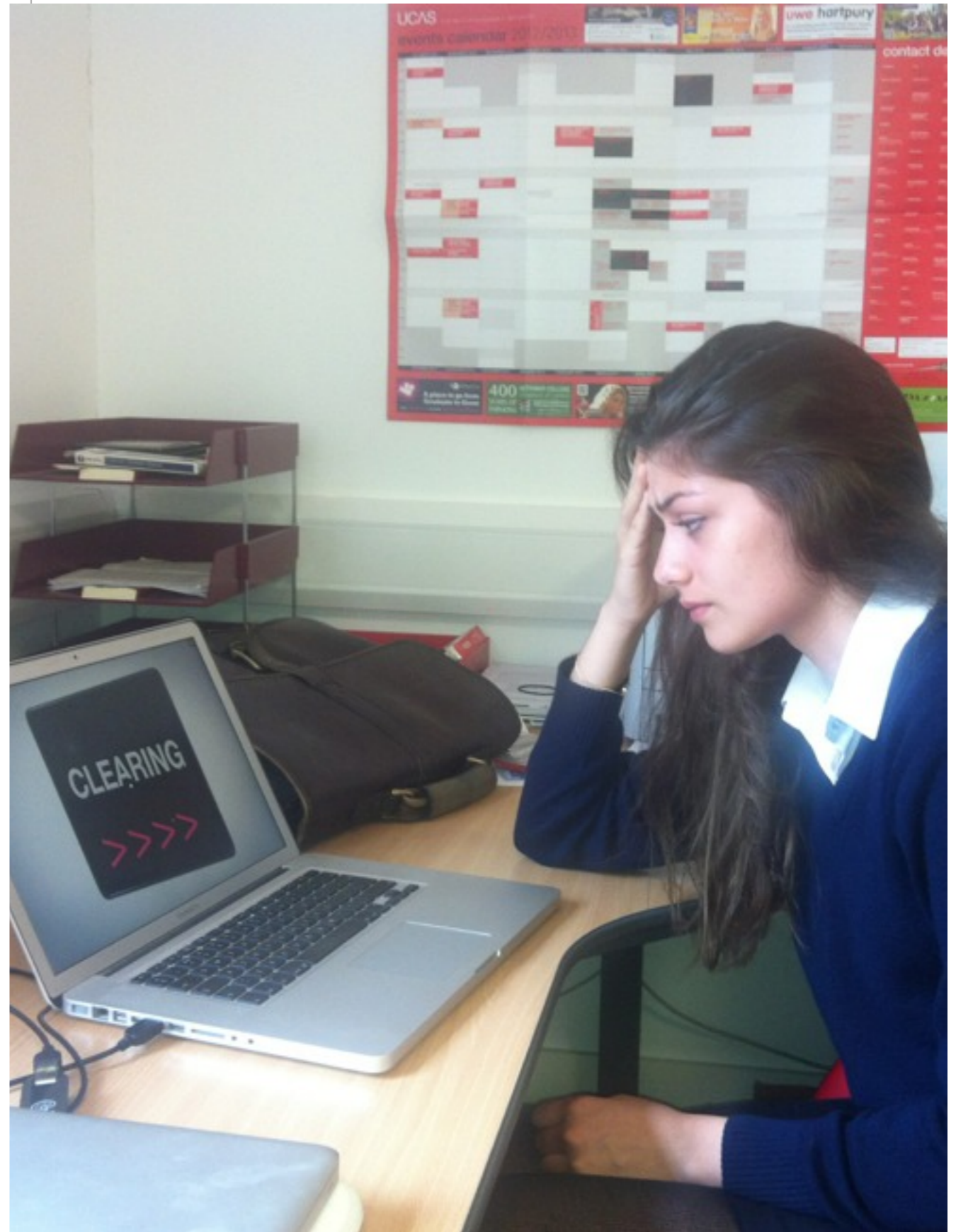
Changed your mind?

Once you have made your choices and pressed 'Submit' on UCAS Track, that's pretty much it. Work hard and wait for your results. However, if you have a major change of heart for a serious reason, DO contact the universities and UCAS direct and ask about changing your offers around. It isn't as impossible as they make out, but they don't want everyone to do it.

You might find you've completely gone off all your choices and want to reapply. You can do that too, but wait until Results Day to be sure. Then you simply need to contact the universities and UCAS and explain that your circumstances have changed, sorry, and that you won't be taking up any of the offers after all. You cannot hold them over into a Gap Year, you will need to reapply.

Extra, Adjustment and Clearing

- What is Extra?
- Am I eligible for Adjustment?
- How do I stay out of Clearing?



Adjustment, Extra and Clearing

WHAT TO DO IF THINGS DON'T QUITE WORK OUT

1. No offers? Try Extra.
2. Adjustment - if your results are better than expected
3. Clearing - a scary place

1. Extra

I'm not going to spend a huge amount of time on this: basically if you have followed the advice in this book you should have a good range of offers and you won't need it. Our students have never found they needed to apply through Extra, but just in case...

If you receive 5 rejections from your chosen university, you are then eligible for Extra: you can search for places still available, but have to contact the universities direct to see if they'll take you. The whole process is a bit clumsier - UCAS's own video explains it [here](#). Essentially it's a bit like early Clearing - you've got longer to worry about it, but the most competitive courses will not be available as Extra choices anyway.

2. Adjustment

Adjustment is like positive Clearing - if your results turn out to be better than expected you can hold your existing offers and hunt for something better without risking losing what you've got. Again, UCAS have a nice little video explanation [here](#). It's still unlikely I'm afraid that the really competitive courses will have places - you aren't going to get into Oxford to read PPE through Adjustment, but you might improve your lot if you did manage to prove that horrid Maths teacher wrong and get an A* instead of the C he predicted.

3. Clearing

Clearing is the one to avoid if you can possibly help it. That's down to you: get the grades you need for your first choice or your insurance - work hard and get your teachers to help you to do your best.

Accidents do, however, happen. If you have fallen below your Firm Choice and your Insurance offers on Results Day, you need to be prepared to face Clearing. At my school, we phone by 7am on Results Day if the student has a problem which might mean they have to go into Clearing. This allows them to have a cry and a cold shower, and for their parents to finish shouting at them/commiserating with them by about 8 o'clock, when the universities and UCAS system starts to open up for business.

First of all, check **TRACK**: if you are in Clearing, you need your Clearing number and it will appear when you login, along with the sad news that you are no longer holding any offers.

Check the **Clearing Vacancies** on the UCAS website in August. Be prepared to think laterally - you may have fancied being a Mechanical Engineer, but you will probably need to accept some kind of compromise where course choices are concerned. If you really don't feel confident - **PLAN AHEAD!** Do some research, prepare what you are going to say on the phone to the universities when you phone them and try to persuade them that you really always wanted to study their course anyway.

Conclusion

A few final tips...



Conclusion

SOME CLOSING REMARKS...

1. Get started EARLY
2. Apply for courses you are passionate about
3. It's your degree - study what matters to YOU
4. Write your personal statement and redraft it lots.
5. Get someone you trust to check it.
6. Be ambitious but realistic in your applications
7. Have an insurance choice you are prepared to go to.
8. Work hard on your exams!

GOOD LUCK

If you follow the advice in this book, and you get something like the grades you are predicted by your teachers, you should get a place you are happy with. What happens next is up to you...

Make the most of your university years - they can be hugely rewarding if you throw yourself into the experience.

Good luck, and if you need any help with the process, get in touch.

Get Me Into Uni is only a click away.