

Applying to competitive courses



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#BelongatBath



Applying to competitive courses

**What makes a
course
competitive**

Your research

Applying



Competitive courses



Applications and Offers

In 2024 UCAS received around **595,000 applications by the January deadline** for around **560,000 places** each year

Universities make more offers than there are places available because not everyone will accept an offer and not everyone will get the grades required

At Bath for 2024 entry we had c. 4,400 places:

- received c. **36,500 applications** (8.1 applications per place)
- made c. **23,500 offers** (5.3 per place)



These figures vary significantly between courses and institutions



Features of a competitive course

High entry requirements

High volume of applications

High standard of applications

Graduate Prospects

Rankings and reputation



Applying to a competitive University

Research

**High entry
requirements**

**Effective personal
statement**

**Strong academic
performance**



Interviews

University interviews are typically conducted by **academic staff**. You may be interviewed more than once and with more than one interviewer present.

They are looking for your **academic ability and potential**, and how your skills and experience make you well-suited to your chosen course.

Interviews will tend to be **discussion based and involve academic content**. In a Medicine interview you can expect questions about chemistry or a discussion about medical ethics, rather than ‘Why do you want to be a doctor?’ or ‘What are your strengths and weaknesses?’



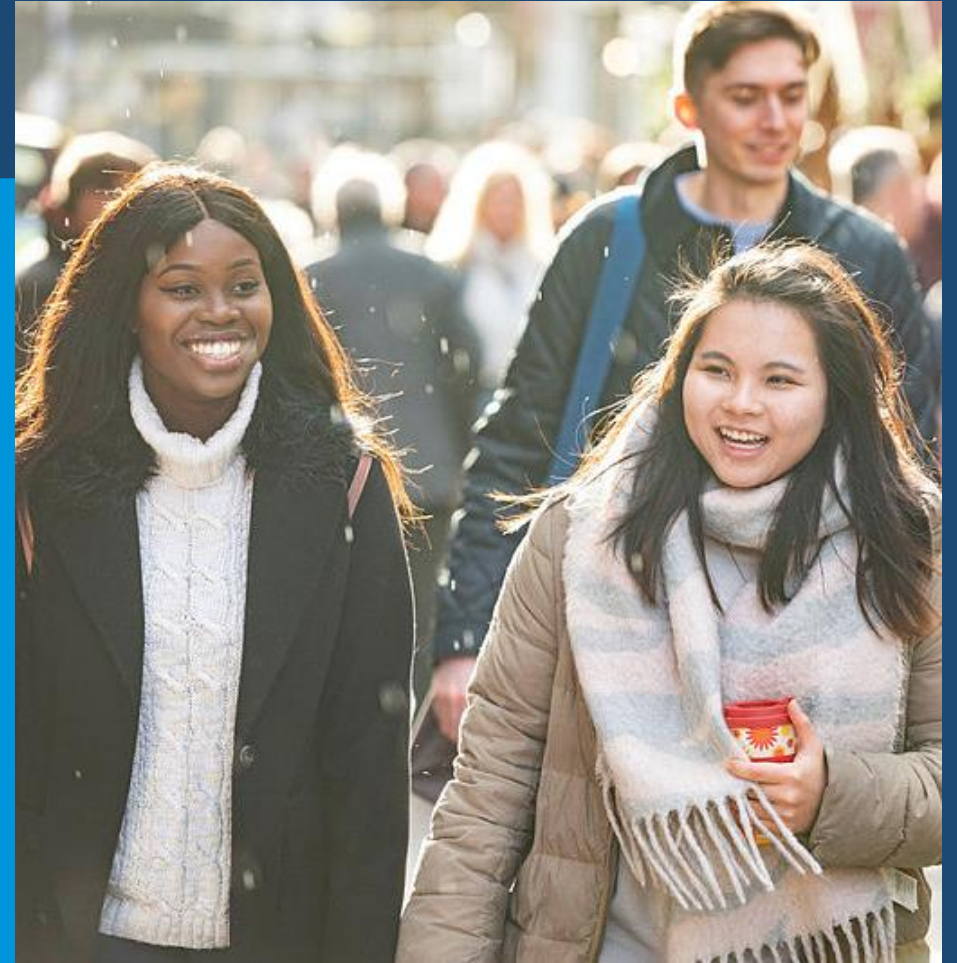
Admissions or Aptitude Tests

Used only by some universities for some subject areas.

Check the website or prospectus of the universities you're interested in

National admissions tests include the UCAT for Medicine, or the LNAT for Law. Some institutions run their own admissions tests.

A test of **skills and potential**, not of prior knowledge or memory



Your research



Bath or Barbados?



Ask yourself...

Why go to uni?

What university?

Which course?

What makes a good application?

When to apply?



Reasons to go to university

**Increase
knowledge**

**Independence
/freedom**

**Gain a
qualification**

**Develop
transferable skills**

**Investing in your
future**

Student life

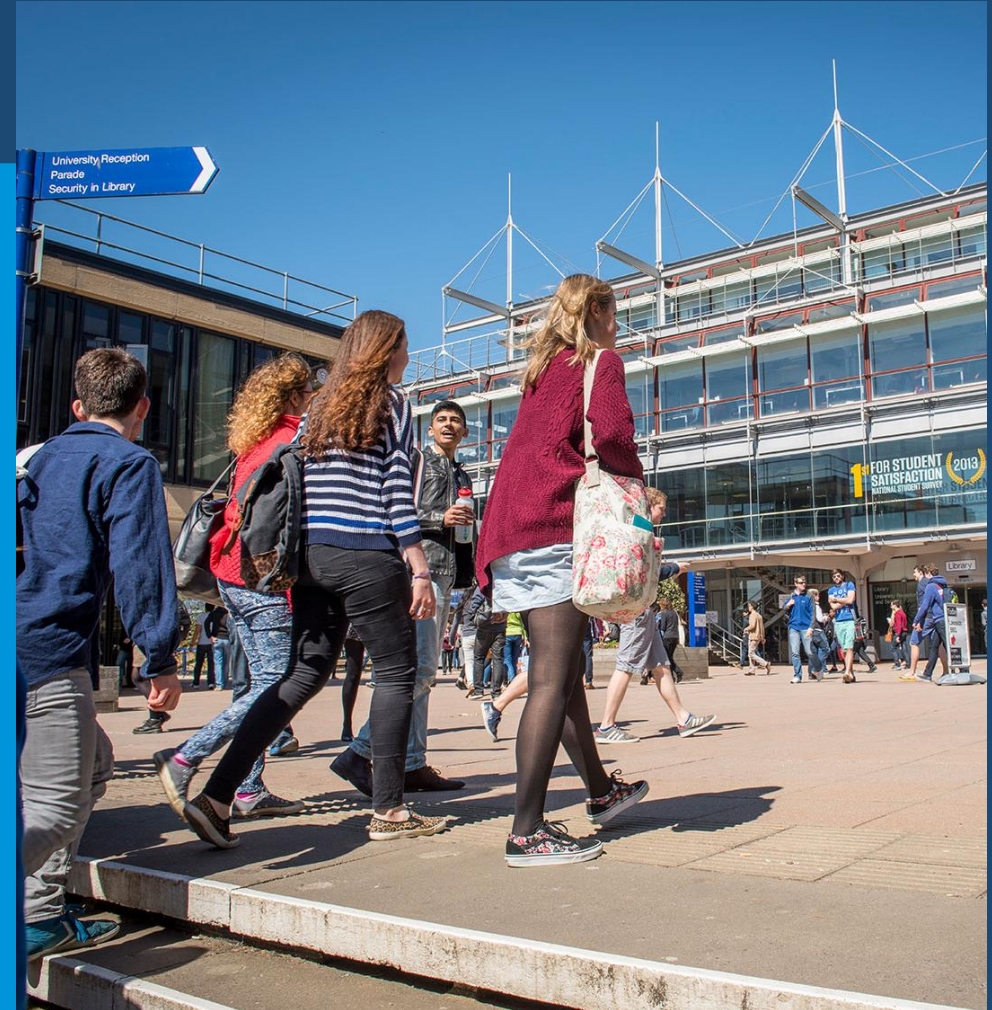


Your choice

400+ universities and colleges

35,000+ courses

- Bachelors Degrees
- Undergraduate Masters
- Foundation Degrees
- Degree Apprenticeships



TOP FOUR FACTORS IN FIRM AND INSURANCE CHOICE ARE UNCHANGED OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS

1. RANGE OF MODULES
2. STUDENT REVIEWS
3. SOCIAL LIFE OR ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE
4. UNIVERSITY'S LOCATION IN THE TOWN/CITY

Label	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Range of modules in course	1	1	1	1	1
Student reviews of this uni	2	2	2	2	2
Social life or activities available	3	3	3	3	3
Location in town or city	4	4	4	4	4
Graduate earning potential	7	6	6	5	5
Work experience as part of course	8	9	10	10	6
Communication before/after applying	5	5	5	6	7
Accommodation quality	9	7	7	7	8
Fit in with other students	6	8	8	8	9
Accommodation availability	11	10	9	9	10
League table position	10	11	11	11	11
Ease of travelling to this uni	13	14	14	14	12
Accommodation proximity to campus	12	12	12	12	13
Accommodation cost	14	13	13	13	14
Local part-time employment	15	15	15	15	15
Cost of travelling to this uni	16	17	16	16	16
Incentives to make firm choice	17	16	17	17	17
Sports facilities offered	19	19	19	19	18
Speed of getting an offer	18	18	18	18	19
Option to live at home	20	20	20	20	20

Academic factors/considerations

Course content

**Methods of
assessment**

Teaching style

Size of cohort

**Entry
requirements**

Course rankings





Entry requirements

What are the entry requirements for your course?

Traditional qualifications or UCAS points?

Are your EPQ or other qualifications recognised?

Require an interview?

Is specific experience required?



Entry requirements

Competitive courses more likely to require **essential subjects**

Preferred subject combinations may be advantageous

Important to check **GCSE requirements**, especially for Maths and English



Personal Statements



Let's start with...

Personal statements



True or false?

- 1. You need to write a separate Personal Statement for each university you apply to.**
- 2. The structure of the personal statement has changed ready for applications in 2026?**
- 3. The personal statement is now made up of 3 questions that you need to answer?**
- 4. Just listing your academic achievements and hobbies is enough.**



True or false?

5. Universities don't read Personal Statements anyway.

6. You can talk about TED talks and documentaries in your PS.



What are university offers based on?

Prior academic performance

Predicted academic performance

Personal Statement

Interview

Admissions or aptitude tests

Mitigating circumstances

Contextual data



A personal statement is a maximum of **4000** characters, split across **3** questions, with a minimum **350** character count in each

Only place to focus on relevant skills, achievements and work experience

Personal Statements

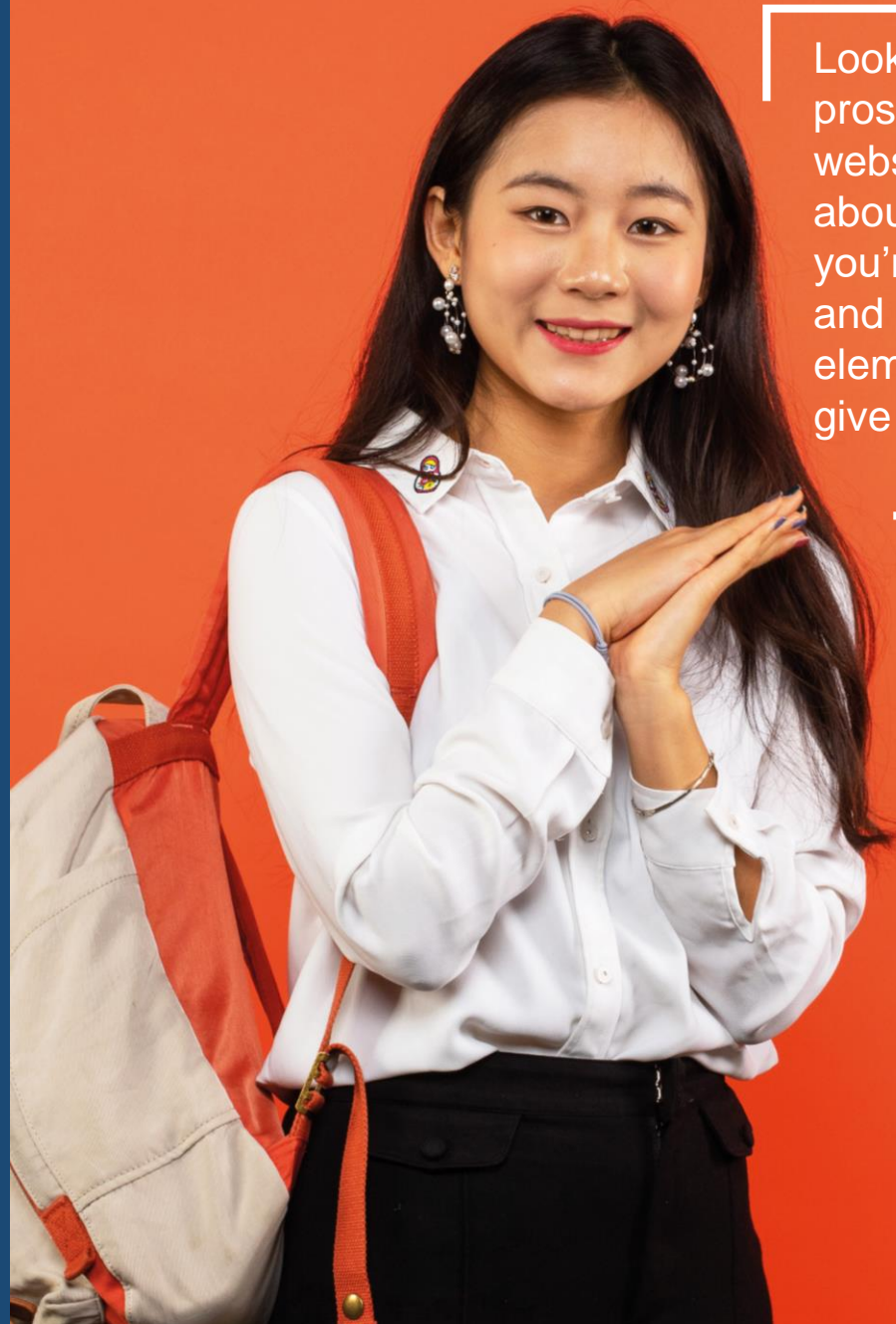
Sent to all of your choices - may be read by 2 or more university staff at each university

Could be the difference between a 'yes' and a 'no' or used in a 'near miss' situation



Statement Preparation

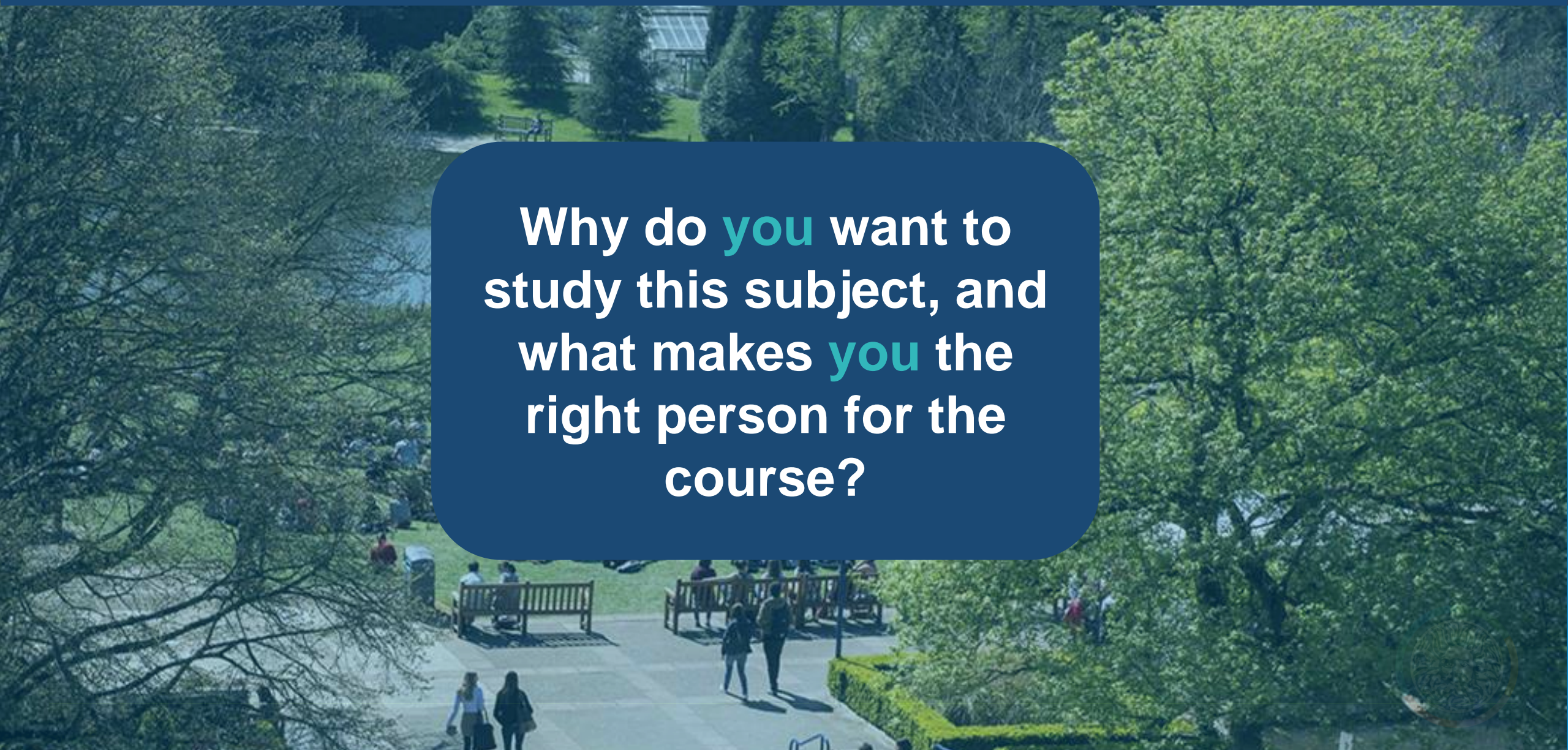
- 95% academic 5% extra-curricular
- Research
- Evidence is key
- Spelling and grammar accuracy
- Be clear with your language
- It will take multiple attempts to write
- Don't overuse quotes



Look at university prospectuses and websites to find out about the courses you're applying for and pick out the key elements you need to give evidence for.

The best personal statements clearly articulate...

Why do **you** want to study this subject, and what makes **you** the right person for the course?



Personal Statement Structure

1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?



2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?



3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?



Question 1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?

Key in this section is authenticity

Think about:

- **Your motivations for wanting to study your course**
- **Knowledge of this subject area and interests**
- **Future plans and why this course/subject is a good fit**



Question 2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

This is an opportunity to share:

- Why what you have studied is helping you decide your choice of degree (or perhaps why not)
- Chance for students to show evidence of the relevant or transferable skills they've gained from their formal education
- Any relevant educational achievements (outside of A-levels, BTEC etc)
- This section may well be the shortest



Question 2: Strengthening your application

Additional qualification

4th A Level
Additional AS

Project Qualification

EPQ or IPQ
Skills Challenge
Certificate

Extra Maths study

Further Maths
STEP/MAT/TMUA



Question 3: What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

-
- **This is your chance to outline anything else from outside formal education you want to highlight.**
 - **Things included here should demonstrate interest in the subject applied for and reflect on why its relevant.**
 - **Using the PEEL technique...**



Use the PEEL Method

P = Point



E = Evidence



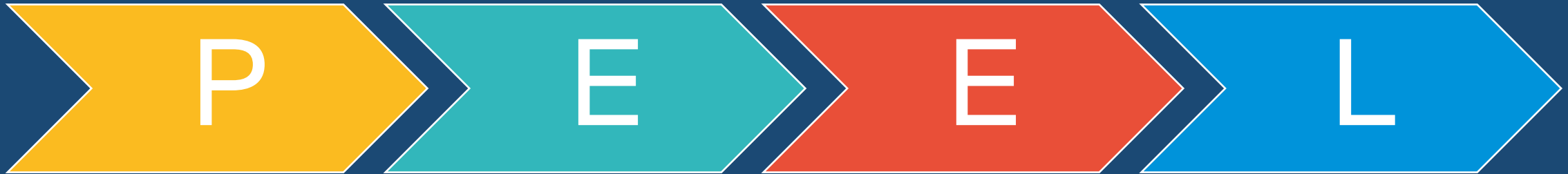
E = Explain



L = Link



Example of PEEL



Point

I've always taken a keen interest in politics & how it impacts the world around me.

Evidence

My school values the importance of a whole school president.
I campaigned relentlessly to be the next school president. This taught me that a clear manifesto and campaign is so fundamental to being politically successful.

Explain

I did not win, however I work closely with the successful candidate and it has taught me how challenging it is to lead and create an ethos where all students work happily together.

Link

This, however, only strengthened my love, ambition and drive to read the subject of politics. University is clearly the next logical step where I can debate all aspects of this discipline with people who share my enthusiasm.



Activities you could include in answer to question 3

Extra curriculars

Volunteering

Personal life experiences

Trips and visits

Work experience

**Job/employment –
part-time or full-time**

Shadowing

**Podcasts, TED talks,
documentaries etc.**



Q3 Online Resources



Q3 Wider Reading



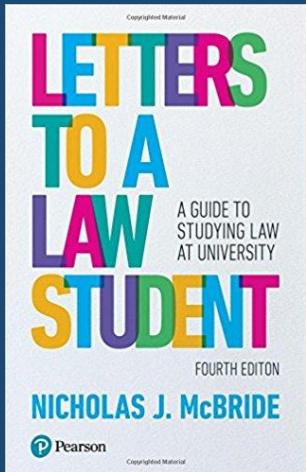
New Scientist

Very Short Introductions

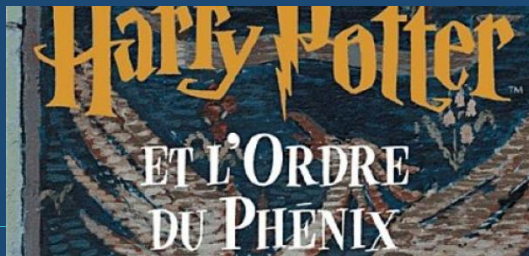


The Economist

THE NEW YORKER



Psychology Today



History Today



Question 3: Wider Research

When talking about what you've read, experienced, or done, give evidence and detail.

For example, if you've completed a work experience placement or attended an interesting lecture, tell us what you learned and why it was interesting.

Some courses might publish recommended reading lists, but don't limit yourself to these.

Quality over quantity is best.



Remember the purpose

Focus on
course

Brief

Simple
language

While I am no jetsetter, who bundles some outfits into her sleek hand luggage and disappears for the weekend, I am an excursionist. No stranger to experience, with every Duke of Edinburgh affixed like a step on the proverbial stairs of difficulty, I am a critical thinker, who, with the firm belief that to understand we must see, I packed my bags, and this summer I went.



Keep it simple

Focus on
course

Brief

Simple
language

Whilst I have always been fascinated by people, it was a talk by Dr Alex George on 'Apprenticeships and Your Wellbeing' that ignited my interest in studying Psychology at university.



Personal Statement Tips

DON'T - repeat information

DON'T - just list achievements & skills

DON'T – begin every sentence with 'I'

DON'T - be tempted to plagiarise

DO – Research your choices

DO – draft then re-draft until you are completely happy with it

DO – get external feedback

DO – Think carefully about spelling, grammar and vocabulary

DO – demonstrate your enthusiasm!



Key Messages

- **Personal statements still play a vital role in university admissions.**
- **Content included in new structure broadly the same as what would have been included historically.**
- **You won't be penalised for putting info in "wrong" section.**
- **Use the PS to demonstrate:**
 - **Why you are applying for your course**
 - **What makes you the right person for the course**
- **Chance to demonstrate suitability for HE alongside relevant skills, knowledge & experience.**



Resources

There are a range of amazing resources to support you when applying to university:

- University websites - [University Of Bath's page](#) on applying
- The UCAS website & HUB - www.ucas.com (Subject guides, city guides, student vlogs, personal statement guidance)
- Reach out to Admissions Teams
- Chat to students online via unibuddy
- Follow UCAS, universities, student finance etc on socials.





Thanks for listening!

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