

The Road Map to University

Choosing which university is right for you can be a daunting task. The current choice of institution and course is mind boggling as there are currently 164 institutions that offer degree level courses in the UK! Some have been delivering degrees for hundreds of years whilst many are much more modern institutions. Increasingly, many colleges also offer access to degree level courses and often these can offer very good value compared to the traditional university as they tend to charge lower fees. Currently there are over 30,000 degree courses available in almost any conceivable subject so it really does pay to put in the time and effort to research and consider which best suits your individual needs.

If you are interested in a particular university then you must make an effort to visit the official website, forums, blogs, chat rooms, alumni and so on. Understand the worth of online social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and make connections.

When choosing a university, bear one thing in mind: it's not all academic. As well as finding a course that matches your interests, think carefully about the whole student experience and whether it will suit you. If you don't like your surroundings or the educational culture of a place, remember that you will have to put up with them for three years or more.

Britain's universities and colleges are hugely diverse, but for many people the stereotype will be a campus university such as Keele, Nottingham or Warwick. These are like mini towns with entertainment, shops, banks etc all on site and you may never have to leave campus in your 3 years at University! However, you may get a little bored of just living in 'student ville' and the ability to pop into a city centre or countryside and even the seaside (Brighton, Exeter and Bangor) may be appealing. One good tip is to consider how easily accessible a university is, as you will have to travel home for three years. It sounds obvious, but a train journey involving several changes gets less and less appealing as the course goes on, not to mention the cost.

I guess the most frequent question we get asked at college about the application process is 'what should I include in my Personal Statement?' This could be your only chance to impress the admissions tutor so before you begin writing your statement, I would suggest that you make some notes around the following prompts which might make it easier than you think to get a really impressive Personal Statement completed:

1. What is it that really interests you about the subject you would like to study? Are there particular areas of the subject that really grab your attention and why do you want to study it in more detail for a further three years?
2. Have you read and researched widely outside of your exam syllabus? How has this reading and research changed your view of the subject? Has it identified any area that you would want to explore or research further? – you can be thinking about your final year dissertation already.
3. If you are applying for a joint honours or modular degree, can you show that you are really committed to studying all the subjects that the degree entails, and have you made connections between the various areas of study?
4. What do you hope following this course will do for you personally? What do you hope to get out of your time at university?

5. Do you have a particular career or area of work in mind which you hope your university course will help you with on this pathway?
6. Remember that the person reading your application form will want to know in what ways you 'connect' with your chosen subject. They will look for motivated students who can articulate their aims and have the potential to succeed on the course.
7. What extra-curricular activities and/or work experience have you been involved with and do these connect with your interest in your chosen subject? What subject or careers related skills have they helped you develop?
8. Make sure your statement reflects YOU and that you sound interested and interesting!
9. Finally, proofread, proofread, proofread!
10. Share your statement with as many people as you can who know you well – you are probably being far too modest about your talents and passion for the subject.