

# Open doors...

## How to get the most out of an open day

As soon as you've decided what you want to study, you're faced with the question of which university you want to go to. Choosing the right place to spend at least the next three years of your life is not easy but visiting different universities can help you reach a more informed decision. Open days offer the perfect opportunity to find out all the extra things you have been wondering about. You are likely to be offered the chance to speak to existing students about their experiences at university and members of staff will be on hand to answer your questions about the course. Most importantly, you will be able to get a 'feel' for the uni that you're visiting, which will help you decide whether or not it is somewhere you can see yourself 'belonging' in a year's time.

### What to do before you go...

- Find out when the open days are. Visit uni websites, check prospectuses for dates or visit [www.opendays.com](http://www.opendays.com). It's not the end of the world if you can't make official open days, you could visit on your own informally, but access to departments, students and staff will be more limited.
- Ensure the University you want to go to offers the course you want. Find out which site or campus it is taught at, as some universities have smaller campuses for particular courses out of town.
- Do your research! Read as much information as you can. Trying to form a picture of a university in a day is difficult but will be much easier if you know some things already. Get on the internet. Visit university websites and order prospectuses. Find out if the course appeals to you. What sort of things will you be studying?

What are the entry requirements? Then you can save your more in-depth questions for the academics on the open day.

- Check out the booking requirements. Some universities need you to book onto the open day in advance but for others you can just turn up.
- Get a copy of the open day's programme to help you plan the day. It may be available online or could be sent to you once you've registered.
- How are you getting to the open day? If you are visiting a city university, it is probably best to travel by train to avoid problems parking. However you travel, make sure you leave plenty of time.

### What to do on the day...

- Think about the journey from home. Is the university that you're visiting too close to where you live, or too far away?
- Think finances. The cost of living will vary depending on where you are studying. Some towns may be cheaper than others. Try to find out how much you will be paying for accommodation. Research what university bursaries, scholarships and Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and child support grants are available, and whether you are eligible for financial help.
- Ask the academics what they are looking for in a personal statement. Are there any work experience requirements? Are there any additional tests you need to take?

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■ Have a think about potential living arrangements. Would you like to be cooked for in a catered hall or would you prefer a self-catered flat? Are you happy to share a bathroom with other people or is an 'ensuite' top of your priority list? How do you feel about sharing a room? Or is distance your biggest concern and you'd do anything to avoid a 45 minute uphill walk to uni on a wet Monday morning? It's common for universities to give tours around some of their accommodation at open days and it's a really good idea to take a look.

■ Is the uni city- or campus-based? Campus universities are confined to one area, where students live among students, whereas a city university co-exists with a much larger and more diverse community.

■ Can you see yourself here? Do you love the peace and quiet of the countryside and would find the bright lights of London town too overwhelming? Or are you a fan of the fast paced, 24-hour city lifestyle, who could be left disappointed by a small town with just one nightclub?

■ What sort of social activities are on offer? What's its music and theatre scene like and is there a venue that hosts your sort of gig or club night? What are the shops like?

■ What types of university clubs and societies are on offer? Is one uni more appealing than another because it has a good student newspaper or chocolate appreciation society?

■ If you're a sports fan, see if you can have a look at the sports facilities. Find out if there are any local sports teams that you could get involved in and whether there are any notable sports events hosted locally.

■ Investigate other university facilities. You could find out about computers, libraries and laboratories, support available for D/deaf and disabled students, destinations of recent graduates and opportunities for part-time work.

### Top tips...

The best way to answer the above questions is to ask, ask and ask. Make the most of being in and around the university you're visiting. Speak to the students and lecturers – they'll be delighted to explain things to you and give you their point of view.

Decide if you want to visit the open day on your own. Is it possible for a parent or carer to go along with you, or do you worry that your Dad will cramp your style? Is there anyone at your school or college that is interested in checking out the same uni?

Don't worry about where your friends are going. You are guaranteed to make new friends at uni so don't sacrifice your decision to go where your girlfriend, boyfriend or friends are going.

If your visit to an open day involves an overnight stay, use it wisely. Go and check out the local sights, do some window shopping and maybe check out some of the renowned student haunts. It's all about whether you can picture yourself there in a year or so's time.

# UCAS application dos and don'ts

## Useful tips to help you apply to university

### Choosing your degree programme...

Wow. What a choice. With something like 50,000 programmes to choose from nationwide, it can be a daunting prospect. There are loads of things to consider. Where do you want your degree to take you? What subjects do you enjoy at school? Do you enjoy more practical subjects? Choosing your degree programme is one of the most important decisions you will make in the application process so make sure you take your time. Don't be limited by the subjects you've studied at school. With over 50,000 degree programmes, the perfect programme for you is out there....somewhere!

### Choosing your university...

Are you up for the hustle and bustle of city life or the laid back atmosphere of a rural university? There are lots of things to consider – halls of residence, nightlife, cost and even how far away it is from home. Choosing your university is a very personal thing. Try not to be too influenced by where your mates are going or where your parents or your favourite cousin studied. Only you know what will make you happy so make sure you get out to lots of Open Days to get a proper feel for the place.

### UCAS personal statement...

“... and when I'm not working towards world peace, I enjoy kite surfing, breeding orchids and playing first violin for the London Symphony Orchestra...”

Ok, so you've chosen your degree programme and your university. Congratulations. The only thing you need to do now is convince an admissions tutor to offer you the place. You've registered with [ucas.com](http://ucas.com). You've managed to fill in your name and address without any

spelling mistakes and have carefully entered your date of birth, but then writer's block hits you in the form of the personal statement. You have no idea how all the hours you've spent playing video games or working in the local café demonstrate your ability to study English Literature or Civil Engineering or Economics.

Try thinking of it this way. You are writing an essay – just like the hundreds of essays you've written at school except the question this time is “Why should I be given a place to study ? at ?.” Everything you say in your personal statement should relate back to that question. If it doesn't, then leave it out. Follow our handy guide and you'll do fine....

### Do...your research

By understanding why you want to study a particular subject, you will be in a great position to write your personal statement. There must be a reason you've decided to study Astrophysics or Ancient Greek so really delve deep and find out what those reasons are. Perhaps it is a particular element of the degree programme, or the fact that there is a large practical element. Whatever the reason, make sure your passion and enthusiasm comes across to the admissions tutor.

Don't just tell the admissions tutor that you like something, show them that you do. What is it that interests you specifically? Why does it interest you? What have you done to pursue that interest? If it helps, think about the admissions tutor sitting in their office on a Friday afternoon with 50 UCAS forms to read. What is going to make your UCAS form grab their attention and take notice?

# UCAS application dos and don'ts

## Useful tips to help you apply to university

### **Do ... tell the truth**

It may seem obvious, but 'expanding' your interests or massaging your achievements does you no favours in the long run. Claiming to speak fluent Russian may seem like a great idea when you are writing your form but when your tutor, Vladimir Kruschov approaches on your first day, you may feel a tiny bit stupid!

If you are selected for a programme based on a false personal statement then you might be selected for something you're not going to enjoy. If you work best on your own, making up examples of teamwork and being chosen on how well you work with others will backfire once you start the programme and find yourself working in ways that don't suit you.

### **Do...show, not just tell**

As with everything in the personal statement, you must show that you have the skills and qualities that the admissions tutors are looking for. Don't just say "I play football therefore I have good team-work skills." Say "I am an active member of my local football team and an excellent motivator when things aren't going well. I like to organise the team according to the particular strengths of all the players to make sure we play as a unit." Whenever you talk about your skills, give concrete examples of when you have demonstrated those skills.

### **Do ... check your work**

You may have won the school spelling competition three years in a row and your mum may still show off the photo they printed in the local paper, but no-one, not even you, is immune from the odd typo or mistake. Don't rely on the computer's spell check! Read and re-read

your work and then let friends, family, the postman read and re-read it too. They may spot things you have not but be careful that they don't try and force you to write it in the way they think it should be written. It is important that you write it in your own style rather than trying to conform to what someone else thinks is right. When it comes to spelling however there is only one 'right' way...

### **Don't ... cover too much**

You've been alive for seventeen years. You'll never fit it all in, so think about what is relevant and what isn't. You may be proud of your first prize in the pie-eating competition, but is this really what you want to put on your UCAS form?

### **Don't ... write it at the last minute**

This should go without saying but if you approach the whole thing the night before the deadline then you won't have time to do it properly. If you haven't already put the time and effort in, do you really want to send in a rushed application? Were your priorities elsewhere? Why was that? Do you really want to apply at this time? There's nothing wrong with taking some time to think about what you want to do. When you know what you want to apply for and where, you'll probably feel much better about writing the application and get it done in plenty of time.

Good luck!