



St Mary's past and present

We went out and about across campus to ask some of our current students and graduates what advice they would give to their 17-year-old selves on embarking upon and successfully completing the university application process.

Here is what they had to say.

Personal statement

- ▶ Start early!
- ▶ Don't be afraid to talk about what makes you special and stand out; your personal statement isn't a place to be modest.
- ▶ Choose a time every day, even if it's 15 minutes, to commit to working on your statement. Slowly but surely you will accumulate content and eventually you'll have something to revise and allow others to help you refine.
- ▶ When talking about your chosen subject in your statement it is worth looking in the prospectus or at the webpage of the institution you are considering. Try to appeal to what they are looking for.
- ▶ Make sure to express your appetite for learning. It's important to give a well-rounded account of yourself, showing your interests outside of your studies and sharing any relevant life experiences. These are all important because they are what set you apart.
- ▶ The great thing about the UCAS form is that you're able to save it and come back to it at a later date.

Picking your course

- ▶ I started looking in the first year of sixth form. Choose a course that you think you will enjoy. Definitely think about doing Joint Honours and study two subjects alongside one another if you cannot decide, and then you can have the best of both worlds!
- ▶ Actually look at the content of the courses and see what the modules entail. What do the courses specialise in? Two courses with the same name won't necessarily have the same content. Think of History... You can have two courses both called History, but one might look specifically at ancient civilisations, whilst the other is 20th century history.
- ▶ Will you enjoy it? Will it keep you interested for three years? If not, is it really worth it?
- ▶ I used the UCAS website to narrow down my options, using the course search and matching up my entry requirements.
- ▶ Play around on UCAS, you may find a course you didn't know about before.

Time management

- ▶ Listen to your tutors and follow their deadlines; they are trying to help you and make sure your application will be the best it can be.
- ▶ Start early. As soon as I got back to school in September we started the process. By October we had started going to UCAS fairs and writing rough drafts for our statements. It gave me the opportunity to have some time to allow others to look over it and tweak and perfect things.
- ▶ The system works. Make sure to hit deadlines, and use the time set aside for completing your application productively. Do little bits regularly; you'll save yourself so much panic and stress further down the line. There is no reason for you to get to that point.

- ▶ Set yourself achievable targets and make sure you see them through. Perhaps make an agreement with your teacher if it will help you to be more disciplined.
- ▶ Leave time to look over your application.

Importance of level 3 subject choices

- ▶ Think early and consider what subjects you may be required to have studied in order to go on to do your chosen degree.
- ▶ I always knew what it was that I wanted to do and so chose my BTEC course knowing it would be an expectation and a requirement for my entry at degree level, so certainly keep that in mind.
- ▶ The choices you make now are going to affect your choices at university.

Choosing your place of study

- ▶ Definitely go and visit the universities you are thinking about applying to. Maybe go to an Open Day or call and arrange to go on a tour of the campus and facilities. It all looks good in the prospectuses and on the websites, but until you go and visit you do not really know what it feels like and whether you could honestly see yourself spending potentially the next three years of your life there.
- ▶ Consider how far away from home you wish to be, whether or not you want to commute or live in halls of residence.
- ▶ Consider what the institution's strengths are and whether these can enrich your experience.
- ▶ If you get homesick easily, make sure to consider institutions closer to home. When you visit a university ask yourself, "Do you think you might, with time, feel at home there?"
- ▶ I would get your course choice right first before going on to choosing an institution. Your course isn't the only reason you're going to university, but it's the most important. It's no good going somewhere just for the social life or because your friends are there, if you have no interest in what you're doing.

Words of encouragement (final comment)

- ▶ Choose something you want to do, not what everyone else is doing just for the sake of it.
- ▶ Do not worry about it! You have plenty of time. Plan properly, maintain your focus and work hard. Keep the goal in front of you and, most of all, enjoy it. You're likely to only go through this process once.
- ▶ Do not worry and make it easy for yourself. Listen to your teachers.
- ▶ If it all goes wrong and you do not get the grades you wanted, try not to panic. There is always clearing or the following year. It is always there.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to show your quality.
- ▶ Once your application is complete and you have your place at university, the adventure will really begin and you won't regret the hard work.