

HOW TO:

USE AN UNNECESSARILY COMPLICATED ADMISSION SITE

A Blind Mice Guide to UCAS

BY



Disclaimer:

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She would like to add that the information presented is solely based on her personal experience and research. All advice given is in no way representative of the views of any institutions.

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Application	4
UCAS Key Components	5
Personal Statement	5
Teacher References	6
Admission Tests	7

INTRODUCTION

UK universities are generally “easier” to enter for Singaporean students as they generally do not have a foreigner quota (except for Medicine). Students are accepted on an **academic** basis, unlike US universities which look out more for non-academic traits like leadership. Singapore’s education is also closely tied to the UK’s system, where we take GCE O-Level examinations, which are certifications UK universities look out for.

Education in a UK university will be very academically rigorous, and you must have a strong passion in the course you are intending to take up. As compared to US universities, UK universities are not as flexible in curriculum, and typically focus more on theoretical knowledge.

Application

Application for UK universities is through the standardised **UCAS system**. You can only include up to five different courses from the various universities in the same application for the same cost. You do not have to rank the universities courses in order of preference.

For NS-bound boys, you can still apply in your graduating year. If you are offered a place, you can update the college on your NS obligations and defer your studies accordingly.

If you are looking to apply to Cambridge or Oxford, note that you cannot apply to both universities in the same admissions cycle. This means that you can only apply to **ONE** of the two universities each year.

UCAS KEY COMPONENTS

Please refer to the UCAS website if you wish to have a complete list of its components. The components mentioned below are those that require additional preparation and planning.

Personal Statement

The personal statement is essentially an essay to persuade the university to accept you. You have to sell your abilities and your achievements. There is no question or prompt to answer.

For polytechnic students, it's essential for you to sell your academic abilities depending on the course you're applying for. Top UK universities do have a preference for A-Level students, so showing them that you're equipped with the necessary skills is very important! **Remember, UK universities are more interested in your academics and skills relevant to the course rather than generic soft skills or experiences.**

For example, if you are applying for an engineering course — The main focus of your essay should be on your academics and engineering experiences, with community service and leadership as a minor topic!

There is a strict 4,000-character and 47-line limit. You can use this website for a rough guide: <https://www.studential.com/applying/personal-statement-writing/length-checker>

Things to take note:

- Bear in mind that the professors teaching the course will be reading your personal statement. The purpose is not to wow them with redundant flowery language, but to impress them with your knowledge and passion so that they will select you over all the other applicants out there.
- You should carefully choose relevant personal experiences that demonstrate your competence in the specific subject. When writing about these experiences, try to offer the reader a more personal take – what is it that you went through that differentiates you from everyone else? Any student can volunteer at a hospital, for example, but the way you go on to describe this volunteering experience and the key takeaways from it will make your account much more authentic. Make sure what you write does not sound too generic or standard (ie. Offer unique details such that no one else can write this but you).
- On that same note, don't simply regurgitate whatever is stated in your transcript. Only include selected experiences that you can value-add to in your essay.
- Try to keep the majority of your essay about your academic experience rather than your non-academic experiences. UK universities highly value academics above your student activities. However, do still include your non-academic experiences like leadership and

community service even though it shouldn't be your main focus.

- One tip to demonstrate deep knowledge with a limited number of words is to namedrop appropriate technical jargon when you can. Remember, a person with expertise in the field of study will be reading your essay so don't worry about simplifying the content.
- Optimise your use of words so you can pack in more substance. Put your summary skills to good use! At the same time, make sure your essay does not become too boring for the reader. Vary your sentence lengths and word choices.
- Avoid clichéd lines as far as you can. Try to show, not tell. For example, there is no need for a line that states "This experience was memorable, and I improved immensely as a person." There is no doubt the experience was memorable, that is why you are writing it in the essay. Similarly, don't just state that you improved; showcase how exactly the experience helped you improve so it is more convincing.
- Keep in mind that the UK university may not be very familiar with the Singaporean education system. It is better to refer to experiences by age as compared to education level (ie. "When I was 18, I won..." instead of "When I was in Year 2, I won...").
- When you finish your essay, edit it for a few rounds with the following question in mind: "Does this essay effectively convince the university that they should accept me?"
- Never include inaccurate information or get someone else to write the essay for you.

Teacher References

You will need one referee to write you a student's reference. It is more advisable for you to ask a lecturer from your academic school to write your testimonial for you but you can also opt to ask other lecturers to write for you from other faculties if they have better things to write.

It is advisable to choose a referee who knows well about your accomplishments and interests in the field you are intending to study. Choose your referee wisely and approach him/ her early so that he/she has sufficient time to write a good reference. Note that your referee's testimonial has to be submitted by the final date of UCAS submissions before you can pay to confirm your UCAS applications.

To help your referee, ask them to refer to UCAS's website for more information: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/how-get-ucas-undergraduate-reference>

Your referee should key their reference into the link in the email sent to them. You should not be able to see what they write for you (so that they can be open and honest).

Admission Tests

If you apply for a course that requires an admissions test, you'll need to check:

- 1) Registration deadline for the test
- 2) When you have sit for it
- 3) What the test covers
- 4) Deadline for your UCAS application

Discover the different types of assessment through the UCAS website: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/admissions-tests>