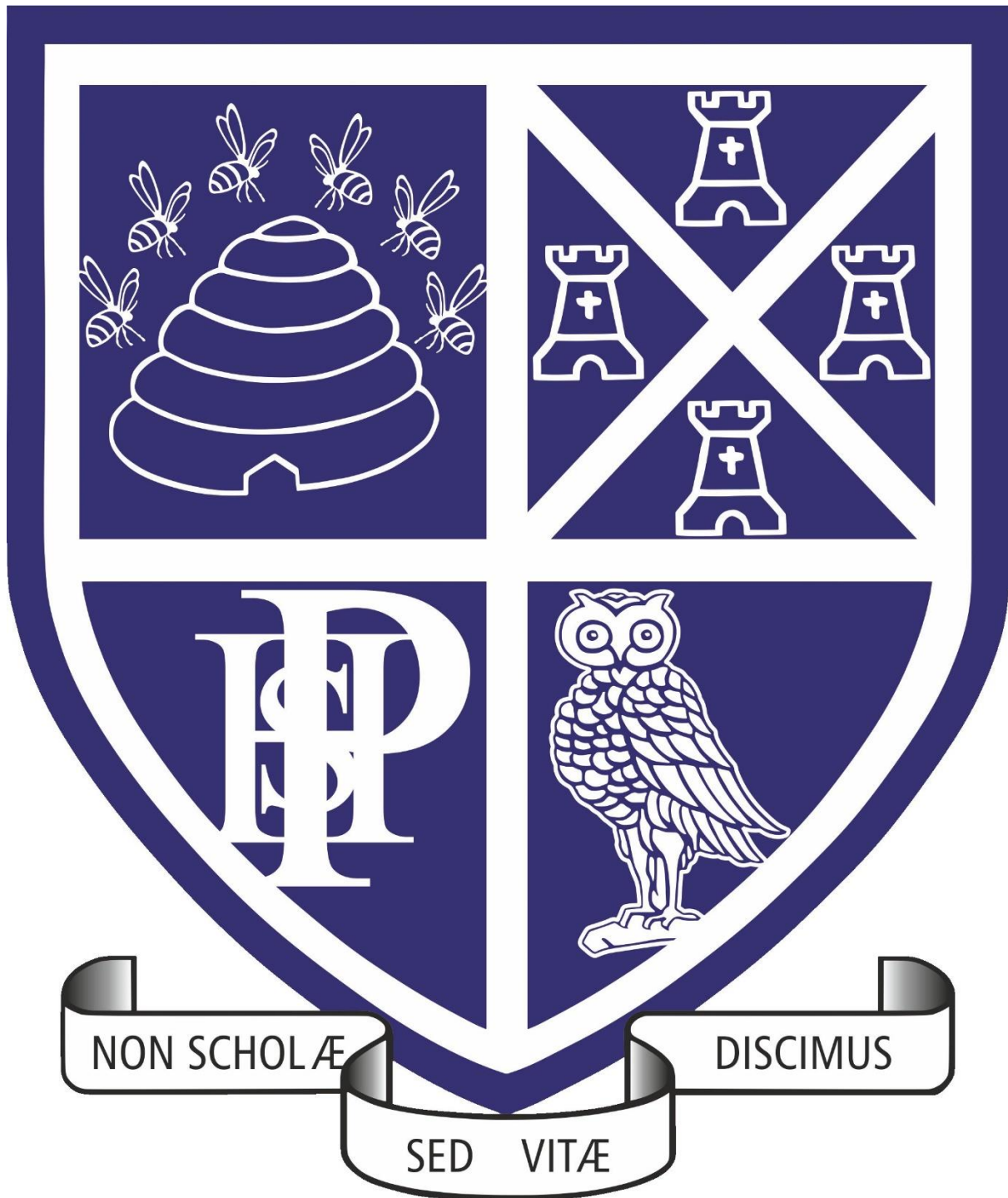


Crafting your Personal Statement

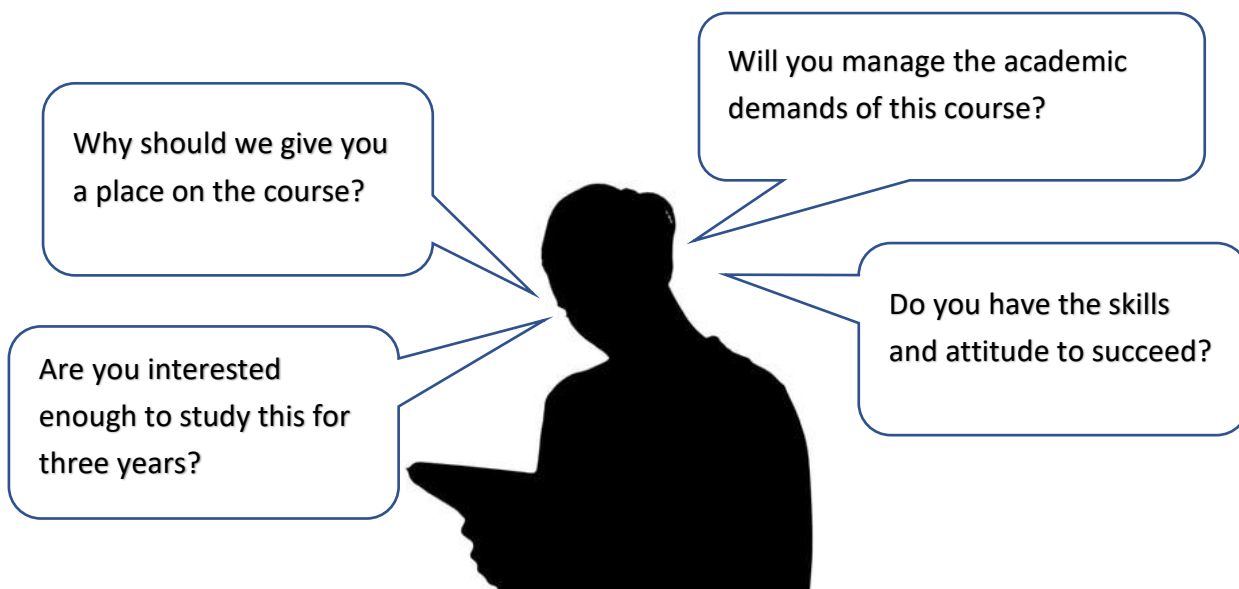
2025 leavers



About your personal statement

The personal statement is your chance to make the case for being a great candidate for the course you are applying for.

The admissions tutor will use it to answer these questions:



The basics

You have a limit of 4,000 characters (including spaces). That's about 600 words and roughly one typed A4 page, so you need to be concise.

You can apply for up to 5 courses but usually only do one personal statement. This is straightforward if you are applying to courses in a similar subject area. If the courses you are applying for are very different, see Ms Findlay for advice (sometimes they will accept a further, specific personal statement).

Where do I start?

Course descriptions mention the qualities, skills and experience it's useful to have for the course – take note of these.

Use the following pages to start gathering ideas about what makes you a suitable candidate for the course. Work through in any order, adding rough notes of what you might include.

Gathering ideas – use these boxes to make rough notes

Why have you chosen this course?

What excites you about the subject?

How are your current studies relevant to the course?

Have you taken part in activities or investigated the subject beyond A level study? (e.g. reading, visits, lectures...)

Have you held any positions of responsibility at school or had work experience?

Do you have any life experiences or achievements that are relevant or you are proud of?

What skills do you have that make you suitable for university and this course particularly?

What appeals about university and what are your future aspirations?

Writing your personal statement

At least 75% of your personal statement should be about your academic interest, strengths and motivation, with a smaller amount on your personal achievements and aspirations.

Everything you write should be made relevant to these two points:

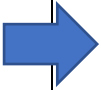
- 1. Why you are applying – your motivation and interest.**
- 2. What makes you suitable – your skills and experience.**

General drafting advice

- ✓ Your first draft is simply a draft - get ideas down and perfect it later
- ✓ It will take several drafts so start early
- ✓ Come across as passionate about the subject and studying
- ✓ Write formally – no contractions (I've -- I have)
- ✓ Use concise, clear language and don't over-use the thesaurus
- ✓ Capitals for course name but not subject area, e.g. I have studied A level History / I am interested in many aspects of history
- ✓ Be bold – it is not arrogant to highlight your skills in an application
- ✓ Ask friends and family for help identifying your qualities and abilities
- ✓ Be truthful

Sentence openings

Avoid too many that start with "I". Instead, consider:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am captain of the Hummingbird team...• I enjoy playing netball...• I am a member of the Bar Mock Trial team...• I achieved skills from...• I am studying A levels in...		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being captain of the Hummingbird team...• Having enjoyed playing netball...• As a member of the Bar Mock Trial team...• The skills I achieved from...• The study of A level ... has ...
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Structure

Put the most impressive things at the start of paragraphs rather than burying them in the detail.

There's no set overall structure but the following can be used as a guide to get started for most universities (Oxbridge and Medical are slightly different):

Introduction: justify your choice

Convey your passion for this subject in a personal way. You could describe what sparked your interest, how your interest has grown or what is appealing about studying this at a deeper level. See next page.

*This is the hardest part. Don't try to perfect it straight away - come back to this after writing everything else.



Evidence of passion and independence

Describe the super-curricular activities you have done related to the course (reading, lectures, visits, MOOCs, work experience...). Reflect on what you found learnt or found interesting. Were you inspired to pursue anything further?



Current studies

Relate how your A levels are equipping you for the course and university. This should demonstrate an understanding of the requirements of the course.



Achievements, responsibilities, interests

Consider the relevant skills or knowledge you have developed from what you do outside the classroom (hobbies, a job, school positions of responsibility, clubs, volunteering...)



Conclusion

Remind of your passion and that you are equipped to study at higher level. You can mention career aspirations if you wish.

The first paragraph

Ensure you stand out by avoiding clichés and over-used openings:

- X From a young age ... (*they're interested in your recent and current motivation*)
- X I have always been interested in ... (*always?*)
- X I am applying for ... because ... (*over-used, dull*)
- X "Quotation" (*about YOU – only use if it's a springboard to YOUR opinion*)

Ever since I was a child, I have always had a passion for science.	In the sciences, every answer raises a new question. It is this continuing quest for knowledge that excites me.
I am applying for Psychology because I am interested in how the human mind works.	Watching Boris Johnson's fall from grace on the basis of a lie led me to question: why do people lie? Is it always about power and control? The opportunity to explore questions such as this are what inspires me to study psychology.

*There are lots of annotated examples on Unifrog

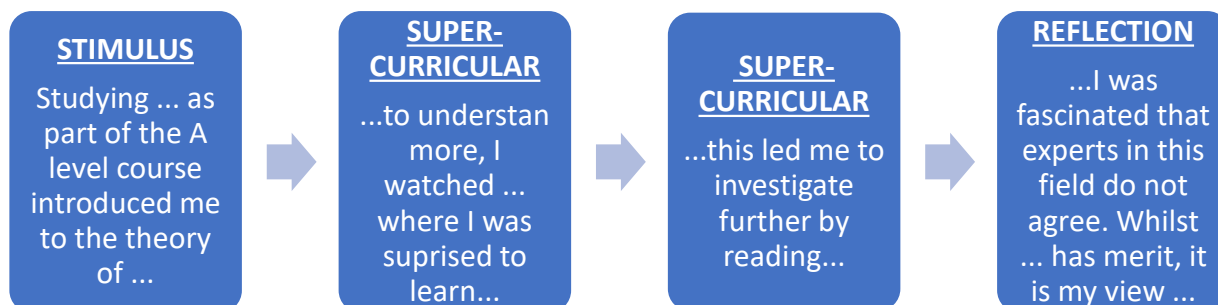
Other paragraphs

Think 'depth' not 'breadth'. Don't list everything you do/have done; choose the most relevant and reflect in detail on the skills and qualities you developed from them. Use the **ABC** method:



ACTIVITY	What did you do?	I play piano in a jazz band.
BENEFIT	What skills or qualities has it given you? Or reflect on how it furthered your interest.	...which allows me to be creative because we do jazz improvisation. Playing gigs has not only improved my confidence but has also developed teamworking skills.
COURSE	How is this relevant to the course you are applying for?	... These skills are directly transferable to a degree in Law, where the ability to present in front of an audience will be vital, particularly for the advocacy module, and the creativity to look at cases from a different perspective will be valuable.

For top universities, aim to create a chain of independent research and reflection:



Excellent examples

Pharmacy

After making aspirin in a Chemistry lesson, I became fascinated by drug synthesis and decided to consider a career in Pharmacy. Researching the undergraduate courses available, I found a new interest in cells and how our knowledge of the body can be applied to producing medicines.

To gain a deeper understanding of the human body, I read 'How We Live and Why We Die' by Lewis Wolpert. This book delved into the microscopic world of cells and how they affect our lives, from getting ill to ageing. This gave me a huge insight into why various processes in the body happen, for example ageing and respiration, and how our very own cells contribute to our wellbeing and, inevitably, our demise.

To understand more about the pharmaceutical industry, I read Ben Goldacre's 'Bad Science'; I discovered how some anti-ageing creams work using specific active ingredients such as Vegetal, but also how unethical companies can deceive consumers by, for example, not declaring the exact concentrations of active ingredients. This opened my eyes to the way companies can mislead consumers and benefit from their own malpractice. Working at a retail pharmacy, I learned how to endorse prescriptions, compile medication trays for patients and make up oral suspensions. I gained an appreciation of the work of a pharmacist behind the counter and learned about some of the medicines prescribed, such as Amlodipine, a calcium-channel blocker, used to treat angina and hypertension. I also improved my communication skills by dealing with patients daily.

Last July, I participated in the CEPMaBC Polymath competition at **** and was proud that my team came second. This experience helped me to develop team-working skills; show leadership; work well under pressure and to adapt to new environments. It also helped me think outside the box and apply my knowledge across all sciences to solve challenging questions. By reading 'New Scientist' regularly, I am developing my pharmaceutical vocabulary and enhancing my understanding of treatment concepts. In an article concerning the clues to aspirin's anti-cancer effects, I was astonished to discover how this versatile drug can be used to treat so many different conditions. I already knew that aspirin is an analgesic and anti-inflammatory used for pain relief, but the recent discovery that it could be used to treat cancer could mean that better cancer treatments will be available. The Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition in July was also inspirational and an exhibit about insect birth control particularly interested me. It demonstrated that, as male mosquitoes carry dengue fever, scientists could, by changing their genes to make them sterile, significantly reduce the number of mosquitos and thereby the number of people contracting the disease. I reasoned that the same principle could be applied to other insect-transmitted diseases, like malaria, to save more lives in developing countries. Through the various talks I have attended, I have gained a better understanding of research projects being conducted and how simple things like bubbles have the potential to be used to treat people suffering from cancer.

I share my interest in science at school as Chairman of the Science Committee through which I helped organise and run a science fair. We started a homework club, too. This involved organisation and collaboration with other committees, teachers and students. We also taught younger students and helped to prepare them for a chemistry competition. I became Captain of the Economics class after an audition.

By undertaking a Pharmacy course, I hope to develop my knowledge of medicines and their manufacture; learn how drugs are metabolised within the body; gain a better insight into the legal processes involved in marketing new products and ultimately become a pharmacist myself.

Consider what is appealing about these applicants and how they have conveyed this. Also, see subject-specific, annotated examples on Unifrog. Be inspired, but do not copy any aspect, as every personal statement goes through a plagiarism detector.

History of Art

Art fascinates me: it's a medium through which any human experience can be explored. When I went to the Tate's 2006 'Kandinsky: The Path to Abstraction' exhibition, I was struck by the explosive colours on the canvas. Having studied Der Blaue Reiter in my art A-Level, I discovered Kandinsky's use of colour stemmed from his synaesthesia: he described 'colour as the keyboard' and 'the eyes as harmonies'. We feel the same level of energy radiating from the vivacious colour in his paintings, as we do when listening to a symphony orchestra. In 'Fugue' (1914) he displays a collision between intellect and intuition to form the 'inner sound' of a fugue as an image. He expresses his knowledge of musical and artistic form by replicating musical motifs through use of repeated shapes, while his intermeshing of coloured crescents and sharp white lines mimic the thick texture made by layers of melody.

As both a music and art student, I have a keen interest in Cubist art, finding that learning to read the code of Cubist works is similar to reading a piece of music. As with Der Blaue Reiter, the Cubists created a theory for their art - like that of music - but I think they took it one step further and created their own artistic code as well. In 'Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece' (1911) for example, Braque uses three sorts of code: music notation, words, and - what Norbert Lynton describes as - a 'compilation of signs and signals' to represent subject. This third code is the deconstruction of 3D objects into 2D signifiers; for example, the violin on the right is implied through curved and straight lines. This work corresponds with Simon Shaw-Miller's idea in 'Visible Deeds of Music', that the Cubist style and musical notation are similar as both can be read only by those who have learnt to decipher it. I was greatly fulfilled when I felt I could understand this code; I could piece together the signifiers to read the work in more depth.

I regularly visit exhibitions to further explore different areas of art; for example, I visited 'Vermeer and Music: The Art of Love and Leisure' where I found that the concerns of Dutch Golden Age society were often displayed in art through musical subjects. In 'Lady seated at a Virginal', the woman appears respectable and engaged in music making, yet elements of the painting contradict this. Her direct gaze at us reminded me of the powerful, provocative gaze of Manet's 'Olympia'. Perhaps, both paintings have the same theme: a woman's position of sexual power. Marjorie E. Wiseman in 'Vermeer & Music' notes that the foreground curtain unveils a viol laid temptingly awaiting a player and the painting behind is Dirck van Baburen's 'Procuress'. This has inspired me to question the accuracy of stylistic labels; despite being categorised into entirely different styles 200 years apart, their central message is the same.

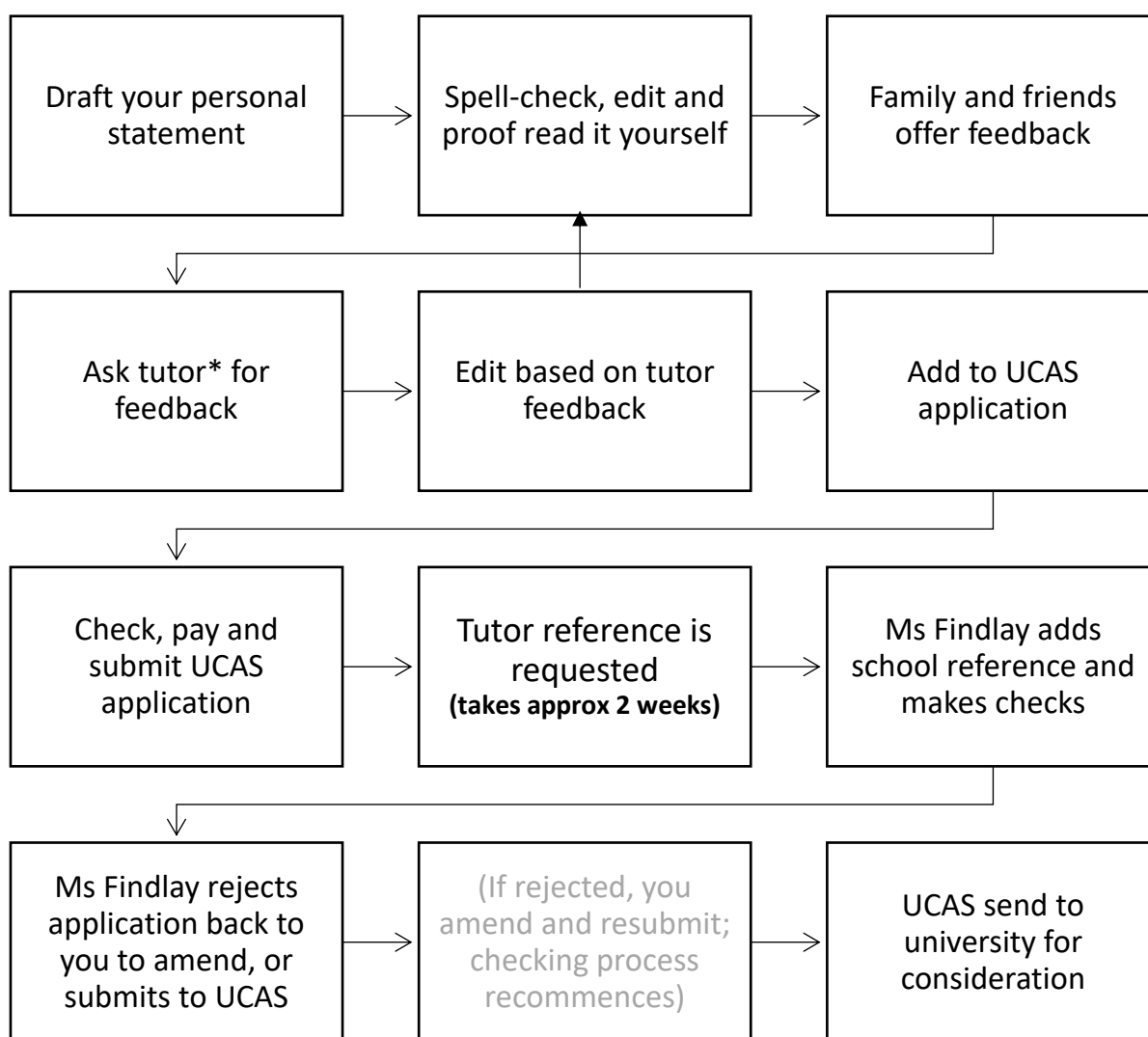
Recently, I completed work experience with artist-blacksmith Sam Sherborne. Just as Vermeer did, Sherborne uses the concerns of his time - manufacturing in the technological age, for example - to create his art. During his exhibition, I noticed how he was able to guide his audiences' understanding to show them these concerns through his unusual medium of metalwork. His work is much more raw than the art I had been studying, leading me to watch Katerina Gregos' TED Talk on art and socio-political change - a topic I would like to study further at university.

Alongside my academic work, I have been the lead viola of the Ealing Youth Orchestra for 3 years and was elected onto its committee to spearhead outreach projects in local schools where I've worked with younger students to encourage them to take up musical instruments. I have used this experience alongside my leadership and creativity skills to improve my practice as a prefect and academic mentor. I hope to develop these skills alongside my appreciation of artistic concepts further in a degree in History of Art.

Timeline

Act now. 'The best applicant is an early applicant' for many reasons:

- Although every application is considered if the deadline is met, universities start filling their courses as soon as they start receiving applications, so there are fewer spaces closer to the deadline.
- Get it done before workload increases.
- The earlier you draft, the more quality feedback you can get and act on. Staff will have less time to help when dealing with a greater volume of references later.
- The turnaround time from you submitting to school and the application being sent to UCAS is NOT instant – see below for a timeline.



***Much of this will take place in registration and tutorial. If you do not regularly attend, you cannot expect feedback.**

***Tutors are likely only to have time to feedback once.**

Key dates

*****IMPORTANT***** After you submit your application, a lengthy process of checking (most are returned to be amended) and adding of documentation is done by one member of staff for the whole year group – this takes time!

EARLY APPLICANT SCHOOL DEADLINE

(Oxford / Cambridge / Medical / Dentistry / Veterinary):

TUESDAY 1st OCTOBER 2024

(to meet external deadline of 15th October 2024)

GENERAL APPLICANT SCHOOL DEADLINE:

TUESDAY 10TH DECEMBER 2024

(to guarantee meeting external deadline of 29th January 2025)

Standard	What this means	
GOLD	Application thoroughly checked; quality bespoke reference attached; guaranteed to meet deadline	Submitted before 10 / 12 / 2024
SILVER	Application checked for obvious errors; reference less tailored to course; may not meet deadline if has to be returned due to errors	Submitted before 08 / 01 / 2025
BRONZE	Application processed without checks; basic reference attached; application may not arrive with UCAS by equal consideration deadline	Submitted after 15 / 01 / 2025



Consider how the admission tutor may respond to:

- a) an applicant who applies early (evidence of being certain about the course, organised, proactive), and
- b) an applicant who applies at the deadline?

FINAL NOTE: Don't let your grades suffer at the expense of writing a great personal statement – don't agonise over it, just get it done!