

# UCAS Survival Guide



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## **UCAS - Applying to University A Survivors Guide**

This survivor's guide to applying to university, through UCAS, has been written for the benefit of the student (applicant) and the academic tutor (referee). When you first start the university application process, it can be a daunting task, so please use this guide and the different sections within it to guide you through the process.

The following members of staff are available for advice for both students and academic tutors:

- 1) Form Tutor - is the students first calling point as they are the ones who will write the references for every tutee and complete the checks of the students personal statements.
- 2) Head of Sixth Form - Leading the process for this year group and can give further advice and guidance on all parts of the process.
- 3) Head of Year and Sixth form admin and PSO- Can give as much advice on the UCAS process and parts of the online application form.
- 4) High Attainers Coordinator - Coordinates the Oxford and Cambridge applications as well as applications for medicine related degree courses. Please remember - Oxford and/or Cambridge applications along with Medical and Vet courses have an early deadline of 15th October!

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**UCAS**





## **Samuel Whitbread Academy University (UCAS) Application Timeline**

### **Year 12 January – UCAS Information evening**

Students research courses at different Universities along with attending open days for universities and courses. Use this website to find dates: <http://www.opendays.com>

### **Year 12 MARCH – UCAS and APPRENTICESHIP FAIR - EXCEL CENTRE**

A day visit to Excel to speak with universities and gather information on courses available. Prospectuses for a large number of universities will be available, plus apprenticeship providers.

### **Year 12 June - NEXT STEP DAYS**

Two days that will include the following:

- 1) Introducing the UCAS application process
- 2) Writing a personal statement for the UCAS application.
- 3) Creating a student account on UCAS website - you will be given log in details and will begin completing the first part of the application form.
- 4) **Alternative routes e.g. gap years, work experience, apprenticeships.**

**The Next Steps evening presentation can be found on the 6th form site of the school website.**

### **Year 12 June July ON-GOING (into Year 13) UNTIL APPLICATION IS SENT**

Begin writing your personal statement for your application. Use advice and guidance in this booklet and from the UCAS website.

Continue completing all sections of the online application form.

Get your personal statement checked more than once by your academic tutor. Final checks will be made by the sixth form team when your application is ready to be sent.

**Make sure you have gone through your school reference with your tutor so you know what it contains.**

### **REST OF TERM & SUMMER HOLIDAYS**

- 1) Students are then asked to complete as much of the online application as soon as possible. Over the holidays, students are urged to do all of their basic research about courses and universities and to make sure that applications and draft personal statements are ready for checking by the time they return.

Tutors - Encourage your tutees to attend as many open days as possible and make sure this happens early on in the process. The sooner they get to see an institution, the sooner they can decide on which course and institution is suitable for them. No student should apply for a course at a university if they have not visited the campus first.

### **Year 13 Autumn Term DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS TO BE PAID AND SENT End of Term**

You are advised not to leave the paying and sending of your application until this time. The sooner you get your application during the autumn term, the sooner you will start to receive offers from universities. Places will fill up quickly and you are in competition with applicants from across the UK, therefore the sooner you apply the more likely places are still available on the courses you want.

**REMEMBER:** OXFORD/CAMBRIDGE & MEDICINE/VET courses have a deadline of OCTOBER 15th.

**Conservatoire courses may have an even earlier deadline - make sure you look at these BEFORE the summer of Year 12.**

When you pay and send the application DOES NOT go to UCAS, it goes to the UCAS supervisors (sixth form team) at Samuel Whitbread Academy

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Once you have paid and sent the application, it is the student's responsibility to book a meeting with a member of the sixth form team in order to check the entire application and upload your predicted grades and the tutor reference. The application will then be sent to UCAS - this is when you have officially applied to university!  
**GOODLUCK!**

### **THE TUTOR'S ROLE**

- serve as their first point of contact for queries about the process.
  - check through with them their personal statements, looking to help them to improve them in terms of content and accuracy,
  - write a reference aimed at university admissions tutors using subject references supplied by teaching staff, and the student UCAS profile form (to be found on the shared google classroom).
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# Samuel Whitbread Academy University (UCAS) Application Timeline

## ACADEMIC TUTOR TIMELINE:

### Year 12 - May

Briefings and tutor meeting given to all Year 12 tutors on the UCAS process and outline of their role as an academic tutor in the UCAS process. Resources on the shared drive; tutors to start writing teacher references.



### Year 12 - June - Next Steps Days

During period 5 on ONE of these days the tutor will attend the session to oversee students logging on to the online application form and completing the first few sections. Subject references will be completed on Sims, deadline early July. Students start writing personal statements.



### AFTER NEXT STEP DAYS

Tutors to gather as much information on their tutee's as possible: in school achievements and activities, out of school achievements and activities, students' plans for university and course they want to study etc. Fill in the document in the google classroom.



### Year 13: EARLY SEPTEMBER

Subject references will be completed by departments and downloaded in the shared area for tutors to access. Tutors will finish full UCAS references for each of their tutee's - writing intro and concluding paragraphs from scratch AND incorporating the department subject references into the final reference.



### Year 13: BY OCTOBER HALFTERM

Tutors must have amended all of the references for their tutees. These must be uploaded into google classrooms for each form group, set up and shared by the year teams.

## HOW TO DO IT – TUTOR'S: PROCESS

- If you use the step by step guide your head of year has given to the students, you should find most of answers there.
- If there are specific queries about what to say in response to questions on the application, please read the UCAS online help first (there's a question mark next to every question with guidance, plus a more general help guide accessed via the buttons on the left of each page). Our students tend to be reticent about using these, but it's essential they do.
- If you have a question your tutor can't answer, and the UCAS help buttons don't provide a clear answer, it's probably better to send them to the sixth form team for guidance.



## PERSONAL STATEMENT – WRITTEN BY THE STUDENT – THEY HAVE TO SELL THEMSELVES FOR THE COURSE AT THE UNIVERSITY!

You need to read through the personal statement and to give guidance on the following areas.

### CONTENT/ STRUCTURE

- The main area to check for in terms of content and structure is that they don't spend too much time talking about their wider experiences at the expense of explaining why they want to take their course.
- Wherever they do mention their wider experiences, they must make sure they clearly link them to their desire to do that course and/or to succeed at university.
- Students have got detailed guidance on this in their packs, along with examples of excellent personal statements use in previous years, which you might want to look at as well. Please remind your tutees that plagiarism will result in an application being declined and them being blocked from applying to any university! Universities have very good plagiarism software that can easily pick up if the personal statement has been copied from a previous applicant. If one university picks this up then all universities are notified and the applicant is blocked from applying.
- In addition, you will find some good examples written by previous students at the end of this guide to help.
- You'll also need to make sure it's no longer than 4000 characters (including spaces) and/or no more than 47 lines. No need for you to count: just make sure each student is aware of this and has checked using google doc's word count and character count tools.

### GOOD ENGLISH

- The fluency and accuracy of the statement is very important. I have included a basic guide to common technical errors made by students with this guide to help with accuracy.
- You also just need to guide the students with their expression as this is a difficult area for some.

### YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT – FURTHER GUIDANCE:

#### Tell the universities and colleges why they should choose you

The personal statement is your opportunity to tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study. You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd.

#### Worksheet on UCAS google classroom

This worksheet is designed to help you think about information you could include in your personal statement. We've included space for you to write down any thoughts you have as you work through it.

The section on personal statements on the UCAS site is very useful.

Do not be tempted to copy even small sections from anyone else - and be cautious about using quotes which are not your own words.



## MORE DETAILED ADVICE ON WHAT TO INCLUDE AND HOW TO WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

### WRITING ABOUT THE COURSE – ADVICE FOR STUDENTS WHEN WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT:

Two of the most important things to include are:

- **why you're applying for the course you've chosen:** this is particularly important when you're applying for a subject that you have not studied before. Tell the university the reasons why that subject interests you, and include evidence that you understand what's required to study the course, e.g. if applying for psychology courses, show that you know how scientific the subject is.
- why you're well suited for the course: tell the universities the skills and experience you have that will help you to succeed on the course.

#### Also think about:

- how your current or previous studies relate to the course(s) that you have chosen
- any activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)
- why you want to go to university or college.

We looked at some of the reasons why applications were unsuccessful and here's a few that were sent to applicants in previous years:

- Your personal statement does not strongly support your desire to study your chosen degree.
- Your personal statement did not show sufficient understanding, relevance or knowledge about the course you are applying for.
- You failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and interest in the subject in your personal statement.
- There is a lot of competition for places on this course and your personal statement and experience was not as strong as other applicants this year.
- Application form (including personal statement, reference and predicted grades) does not evidence accurate understanding of or motivation for subject.
- Unsuccessful as you have not expressed a strong enough interest in the subject area in your personal statement.

This should give you an idea of how important it is to show why you want to study the course and what you can bring to it - especially because it might be compared with other applicants applying for the same course.

### SKILLS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Universities like to know the types of skills you have that will help you on the course, or generally at university. They also like to see if you've been involved in any accredited or non-accredited achievements.

#### Include:

- non-accredited skills and achievement which you have gained through activities such as:
- ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) awards, for example, Universities Award
- CREST awards
- Diploma of Achievement
- Duke of Edinburgh Award - these can be entered as a qualification too; as can many dance, drama and music grades
- vInspired Awards
- Villiers Park Scholars and Residential Programmes
- WorldWide Volunteering Certificate of Volunteering Achievement
- Young Enterprise
- MOOC's - Massive Open Online Courses
- University Subject Days and masterclasses

## HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

Think about how your hobbies, interests and social activities demonstrate your skills and abilities. If there's anything that relates to your course or to the skills needed to complete a higher education course, include it - the more evidence the better.

An Assistant Registrar for Undergraduate Admissions from University of Warwick said that: 'The strongest applicants are those who can link their extra-curricular activities to their proposed course of study.' Your statement will be more convincing and personal if you write about why an experience, activity or interest makes you a good candidate for the course. Include enough additional information to make it interesting and to demonstrate your own interest.

Rather than making a statement such as 'I enjoy badminton' try to provide context and show what you have learnt.

'I play badminton twice a week with a club that plays in local competitions and I play in both singles and doubles matches. Doubles matches requires good team working, an ability to support your partner, to devise a game plan but be able to adapt it as required and fast reactions. I enjoy the social side of the club and take responsibility for organising the social activities and fundraising events. This gives me an opportunity to develop my time management and planning skills. Fitting in all these activities while keeping up with my academic studies demands good time management and I think I do that very well.'

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen course(s). Try to link any experience to skills or qualities mentioned in the course descriptions. For example, rather than just saying 'I spent two weeks working at a department store. I enjoyed speaking to customers and helping them with their enquiries' you could say:

'I spent two weeks managing customer enquiries at a department store. I learnt how to interact with customers and handle complaints. The experience highlighted the importance of positive communication between a business and its customers, and taught me how to manage difficult enquiries effectively. I would like to develop this skill further by studying a degree in public relations.'

If you are not in full-time education, you should give details of any relevant work experience, paid or unpaid, and information about your current or previous employment.

## REFERENCES – WRITTEN BY THE TUTOR – YOU NEED TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS:

**THESE SHOULD BE A MAXIMUM OF 4000 CHARACTERS LONG  
AND/OR NO MORE THAN 47 LINES, INCLUDING SPACES.**

1) Departments will be writing a paragraph in SIMS for their subject - this paragraph will be focussed on the skills and what the student has achieved in their subject area. These subject references will be uploaded for each student on the staff area for you all to access when putting the final reference together. Grades will be amended 2 weeks after we return in September in order to give departments a chance to comment on achievements from Year 12 results.

2) Once you have access to the subject references, you'll need to use them, plus your knowledge of the student generally, to put together a positive reference. As with professional references written about you, only positive comments can be included - it isn't a report! Ensure it's no more than 4000 characters long and 47 lines.

3) Please also make sure your own writing is accurate (you might find the "frequent errors" sheet students use when writing personal statements useful here - copy in this booklet).

4) Once your tutor reference is written, you will need to upload this into the google classroom which has been created for your form group. There will then be a folder for your tutor group. Your completed references need to be written and uploaded to this area by October half term.



## **COPYING AND PASTING**

Avoid just copying and pasting from subject references. You might want to copy and paste particular phrases, but the reference needs to be obviously written by an individual who knows the student. Just copying and pasting tends to lead to copied and pasted errors, and the inclusion of sentences that were obviously not written by you, which can have a negative effect on admissions tutors (it suggests you might not know the student very well, making your recommendations less convincing).

## **LENGTH**

Please don't submit a very short reference. As with professional references for employees, a short reference usually means you have little that is positive to say about the student. If you find that subject references themselves are quite short, making your job more difficult, simply contact the reference writer and ask if they can say any more.

Please don't write a reference that is over 4000 characters long and/or 47 lines. It means one of us has to edit it down to fit, which takes a considerable amount of time.

## **ACCURACY OF TUTOR REFERENCES:**

Please make sure your reference is accurate (the guide I've provided for students writing personal statements would be useful for this). We do have to check through each reference to spot typos and other errors, which adds a considerable time to the process.

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## **UCAS GUIDANCE ON REFERENCE WRITING**

What follows is taken straight from the UCAS site (with a little judicious editing)

### **SOME TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE THE REFERENCE**

- The space available for the reference allows no more than 4000 characters, including spaces, and should not exceed 47 lines of text.
- You cannot use any formatting such as bold, italics and underlining in your reference statement.
- Universities and colleges cannot see what other choices the applicant has made. However, they will all be able to read the personal statement and reference. The reference should be written in a way that supports the applicant's intentions for progressing to higher education as directly as possible without disclosing the names of the universities and colleges they have applied to.

### **What information do you need to provide?**

#### **REFERENCE**

- Existing achievement, with particular reference to subjects relating to the courses for which they have applied
  - Motivation and commitment towards the chosen course or courses.
  - Any relevant skills achievement, whether certificated or not.
  - Powers of analysis and independent thought.
  - Their suitability for the courses or subjects they are applying for, including where relevant their suitability for training for a particular profession, for example teaching.
  - Any factors that could influence their performance.
  - Their career plans.
  - Relevant work experience, work placements, voluntary work and so on.
  - Information about any disability, special needs and other requirements. The reference should not give information about an applicant's health or disability without their agreement.
  - Other interests or activities.
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## EXAMPLES OF REFERENCES

To preserve anonymity, I have obliterated the names of these students (you'll see XXXXX wherever their names would have appeared)

### UCAS Reference: XXXXXX

#### Future Aspirations: Languages

XXXXX entered the sixth form at Samuel Whitbread Academy with a good set of GCSE results. This is testament to the hard work that XXXXX has shown throughout her academic career. Her subject choices were broad including German for which she achieved a B grade and demonstrates her interest in not only the English language.

Samuel Whitbread Academy is a large upper school with over 1800 students and 400 currently studying in the sixth form. XXXXX is at ease in this large setting and will therefore take, what some may see as a daunting task, the move to large University 'life' in her stride.

XXXXX has a very mature attitude to her studies and is always thinking about her wider future and not just the current moment. Her AS and A2 subject choices reflect this maturity. XXXXX was clear from an early age that language was to play a large role in her career.

Praise cannot come highly enough from her English teacher who notes that her creativity, knowledge and reproduction of genre conventions is excellent. Written work shows clear understanding of a range of language concepts with developed discussion of ideas. Her English teacher believes that A level suits XXXXX and she has a naturally enquiring mind.

XXXXX is a team player both within form and her academic subjects. In Drama she is able to offer constructive advice to her peers as well as take direction herself. Her ability to articulate in both English and Drama show a deep knowledge of the structure of the English language.

XXXXX's field work unit in Geography achieved an A grade and earned her the accolade as the 'one of the hardest working geographers in the year group'. XXXXX has a keen and enquiring mind with regards to her Geographical studies and is able to apply key geographical concepts concisely to her written work. XXXXX's dedication and analytical approach will ensure that she is an excellent candidate for university study.

In Maths XXXXX is hailed as a competent mathematician who can see a variety of ways to tackle a problem using concepts and techniques from a wide range of mathematical ideas. The quality of her written work is consistently excellent. The positive attitude that XXXXX has towards her studies is evident in each of her subjects. With XXXXX's determination it is easy to see that there will be grades at the end of A2 that reflect her ability in each of her subjects. XXXXX has the will power and determination to ensure that she achieves the grades that she deserves and her independence along with her team work skills will enable her to do this.

XXXXX is a very community orientated individual who gets involved in many activities out of school. Her guidance to the individuals in the Rangers echo's the guidance she gives to those in her academic classes. XXXXX is ready for University and will be an asset to any institute.

### UCAS

### Reference:

### XXXXXXXXX

#### Future Aspirations: Natural Sciences (Biology) – Cambridge

XXXXXX is a dedicated student with high self-expectations. She joined Samuel Whitbread Academy in the sixth form with outstanding GCSE results. XXXXX then quickly entered into our school community. XXXXX is has given her time willingly to support younger students as a 'peer mentor' and mentored a year 11 student in maths. She has also actively participated in music and drama productions. XXXXX is highly motivated, impeccably organised and thoroughly grounded! Her academic achievements were rewarded in her receiving both the biology and German prizes in our annual awards presentation.

In chemistry, XXXXX is described as an exceptional student of considerable ability. Gaining 100% in two of her AS modules certainly supports that! Her verbal and written contributions are of an excellent standard, showcasing her extensive knowledge. She has extended her understanding in chemistry through a great deal of extracurricular study, often reading far ahead of what is taught in class. She has, on a number of occasions, even taught some aspects of the course to her peers! XXXXX achieved very high grade As in her AS biology modules, including two with full marks, and I fully expect her to sustain this high level of achievement at A2. She is passionate about biology and demonstrates a keen interest in all aspects of the subject. She always asks questions to further her understanding, and she enjoys contributing to discussions and debate. She approaches biology methodically and with rigor; her work is always thorough and prompt. During the course, she has become skillful in a range of practical techniques, which she has utilized in her individual study on factors affecting the permeability of beetroot membranes. XXXXX's ICT skills have enabled her to use the internet as well as a range of other sources for research. She demonstrates a high level of competence in presenting and analysing data for reports.

XXXXXX is also a gifted mathematician who learns easily and works hard to remedy the few concepts that she does find more challenging. XXXXX has studied modules in statistics, Core 1 and Core 2 (both pure maths) this year and has already attained very high A grades in all three of her AS modules, one gaining full marks! Her class work and homework are always produced beautifully, and all set deadlines are consistently met. XXXXX is a complete joy to teach, and her teachers believe that she will excel equally in the further maths AS course which she has now started to supplement her studies.

Her German teachers describe XXXXX as 'delightful in every respect'. She is extremely conscientious and has built up a wide and reliable vocabulary. She has German contacts of her own and made use of these to visit the country and practise her spoken German in preparation for the oral examination. She is an organised student who works quietly but enthusiastically. Her contributions in class were always quietly respectful, but effective, and the department were very disappointed that she chose not to continue the subject to A2, where she would have been likely to achieve an A grade, instead deciding to follow the AS course in further maths.

Outside school, XXXXX has a breadth of experience including leadership of the Bedford County Youth 2nd Orchestra and awards for Duke of Edinburgh (bronze) and St. John's Ambulance (Life Saver Plus). Her intrinsic interest in science is reflected in her attendance at relevant Science Forum lectures held at a local public school. She completed a work experience placement at Bedford hospital and has shadowed research scientists at Unilever.

XXXXXX is a reliable and well-respected student who has a natural aptitude for working with people and the self-motivation required to succeed. I have no doubt she will thrive at the very highest level. She has excellent academic and social skills, and I wholeheartedly recommend her application and wish her every success in the future.

## UCAS Ref for XXXXXXX

XXXXXX is an extremely capable, highly self-motivated young man who has excelled in many fields whilst a student at Samuel Whitbread Academy. There is no doubt that he is academically gifted; indeed, after gaining outstanding GCSE results, he could have undertaken a myriad of A level courses. To be gifted is one thing; to manage your gifting is quite another, and XXXXXXX's self-effacing, personable character speaks volumes about this well-rounded, balanced, yet deeply focused and determined student.

In both biology and chemistry, XXXXXXX has demonstrated the ability to flourish at the highest level, having already attained high quality A grades at AS level. His biology teachers comment on the consistently high quality, coherent, insightful and detailed work that he produces throughout the course, as well as his ability to work fruitfully through abstract concepts. XXXXXXX's practical skills are very strong, and he has already decided on a microbiology practical for his A2 coursework. In addition, he has shown particular interest in the microbiology and respiration aspects of the A2 course. As a result of his evident aptitude, staff have every confidence in recommending him for his chosen course. Likewise, XXXXXXX is equally proficient in chemistry. His open paper at AS level demonstrated his capability to research independently, show his understanding and to communicate scientific ideas effectively in writing. He has an unerring facility for translating difficult concepts and making them accessible to his peers: a teacher's dream. Staff describe XXXXXXX as an accomplished experimentalist, being methodical and having a keen eye for detail.

In mathematics, XXXXXXX has always shown considerable flair and interest. He possesses a logical mind as well as a determination not to be beaten by any challenge. His clarity of expression and pertinent questions display the depth of his knowledge, and he persists in understanding the derivation of rules rather than passively accepting them. XXXXXXX is equally successful in economics in which he has used his oral skills to excellent effect in making presentations. He has a thorough and insightful grasp of economic theory and principles, some of which he was able to apply in his role as managing director in a young enterprise group last year. The group was exemplary in its commitment and organisation, being runners up in the regional finals.

XXXXXX's academic achievements are even more meritorious when one considers the raft of extracurricular activities in which he participates: teaching piano, acting as a life guard at a local pool and Duke of Edinburgh to name but a few. In every instance, XXXXXXX gives his full energy and effort; he cannot bear to do things half-heartedly or produce anything less than his best. His contributions both in and out of school made him a natural choice as head boy of his house this year, a role which he clearly relishes. Perhaps yet more remarkable is the fact that everyone who has dealings with XXXXXXX continues to be impressed by his sense of balance, perspective, genuine care and humility.

I cannot think of a student more ready or able to enter the world of university, and, therefore, I am delighted to recommend him to you wholeheartedly.

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## UCAS Reference for XXXXXXX

XXXXXX joined Samuel Whitbread Academy in year 12 having relocated from Cornwall, where she was the "highest achiever in year 11" with an outstanding set of GCSE results. She enrolled in the sixth form to study chemistry, biology, mathematics and French. From the start of her sixth form career, XXXXXXX has had a faultless work ethic in all subjects, stemming from a clear passion for learning and, in particular, for medicine.

XXXXXX is a highly motivated biology student. She possesses a great deal of enthusiasm for the subject and has developed a self-disciplined and mature approach to her work. She is very thorough and pays great attention to the finer details. Her comprehensive understanding of biological principles and concepts was demonstrated in her AS examination results in which she obtained full marks in two of her three units. During the course she has become skillful in a range of practical techniques, which she used to achieve full marks in her AS investigation into the tensile strength of arteries and veins, a topic indicative of her overwhelming desire to read medicine. As proof of the strength of her vocation, she even organised and acquired her own biological material.

XXXXXX is an outstanding student of chemistry whose consistently mature approach to the subject has ensured that she has very little difficulty understanding the detailed conceptual nuances of the subject as well as showing her capability with practical investigations. She has developed excellent research skills and shows the ability not only to understand ideas but also to explain and communicate them freely through both verbal discussion and written work. An assured independent learner, XXXXXXX is self-disciplined, always meeting deadlines with work that is of a high standard while taking responsibility for her own learning, seeking assistance in her own time when necessary. She works well in groups, freely contributing and listening to the thoughts and ideas of others.

In mathematics XXXXXXX is highly conscientious and thorough and is able to grasp concepts very quickly. Her work rate is second to none, and she completes tasks at great speed, though maintains thoroughness and accuracy throughout. XXXXXXX is able to work independently and solve problems on her own, and she's always willing to ask questions to confirm her understanding.

XXXXXX has also shown herself to be a mature, intellectual and committed student of French. XXXXXXX has worked extremely hard to ensure that her French is of a high standard, and each piece of work is completed diligently, in line with the high expectations that she consistently sets for herself. XXXXXXX frequently leads discussion work carefully and thoughtfully, whilst always taking account of the opinions of her peers.

In all her courses, as well as in other areas of school and wider life, XXXXXXX continues to prove herself as a highly committed and caring individual. As her personal statement demonstrates, she devotes large amounts of time to working with and for other people, often in supportive and caring roles, from the gold award of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme to church youth groups. She has been an extremely valuable member of her tutor group, whose empathy, gained from her own challenging experiences, has allowed her to provide effective support and guidance to other students of all ages. Her unassuming and humble nature endears her to those she works with. As a result she has been handpicked to take on a number of leading roles within the school, including leading a house parliament and mentoring programme, which she executes with excellent inter-personal skills. Her ability to manage her time in order to thrive academically and socially indicates a highly organised approach.

These attributes, coupled with an overwhelming passion for medicine, suggest that XXXXXXX would not only succeed in her chosen career or medicine, but absolutely thrive in it. I recommend her unreservedly for a course in medicine at university.



## UCAS Reference for XXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXX is a friendly, mature, enthusiastic young woman who has committed herself wholeheartedly to Samuel Whitbread Academy and the tutor group. She is a positive role model for other members of the group, is well liked by her peers and relates well to teaching staff. Her attendance and punctuality are excellent. A house parliament leader, peer listener and a prefect of the debating society, XXXXXX plays a major role in house activities. Her hardworking and conscientious approach to studies is outstanding.

XXXXXX is extremely enthusiastic about geology and it shines through in her written and verbal work. She communicates her ideas and theories very well, and can debate points eloquently, backing them up with justification and evidence from wide ranging sources. Her written work is very detailed, and well researched and presented. In the three exams for AS, she achieved full marks in one and dropped only two marks in the others: an amazing achievement. The fieldwork skills that she has gained during trips to North Wales and Shropshire are very well developed, and she approaches fieldwork in a detailed manner; her observations are accurate, perceptive and very well recorded. Her geology teachers are extremely confident that these skills will be reflected in her two coursework projects, which will be completed this year in Cyprus, almost undoubtedly gaining her an A grade.

In chemistry, XXXXXX displays a quietly confident determination. She constantly and conscientiously works to the best of her ability and has a good grasp of the complex concepts involved in the course. She works well to improve her knowledge base, taking the responsibility for her own learning seriously, asking questions whenever necessary and accepting correction and guidance when appropriate. She will voluntarily offer thoughts and is able to explain her ideas to those around her. She works well within a small group and is able to relate well to both staff and students. She has a great deal of motivation to do well, and her teachers are confident that she possesses the ability and desire to do well in her chosen course.

Maths is another strength of XXXXXX's, and she is an excellent student. Hard working and quick to grasp concepts, she works at an exceptional rate. All her work is done thoroughly and set out in a logical and appropriate fashion. From her previous school, XXXXXX brought with her an excellent work ethic, which has continued throughout year 12.

In biology, she is an enthusiastic student. Her interest demonstrates itself through her contributions in discussion where her comments are often very perceptive and show that she is aware of developments in biology and medicine. Her scientific practice is sound and well developed, and she is more than able to propose hypotheses to problems and suggest methods to explore new topics and concepts. She is an able thinker and is able to follow arguments through to conclusion and then to ask very insightful questions. She is coping well with the increased difficulty of A2, and, as a mature and autonomous learner, I feel that she can maintain the high standard of work which she achieved at AS level throughout A2 and beyond. She ably conducted an AS practical into the various effects on the rate of transpiration in privet plants.

XXXXXX shows a very strong motivation to learn and succeed academically. XXXXXX's passion for archaeology was derived from many earlier experiences, including her trip to Pompeii, and the influence from a relative that works at the British Museum doing conservational archaeology. XXXXXX has good organisational skills and is a very sociable young woman; she is currently looking for work experience at a nearby museum and is very much looking ahead to her future career. I recommend her to any higher education institution

## EXAMPLES OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS – STUDENTS WRITE THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

### Example 1

Quizzing my mum, a paediatric nurse, about her patients made me intrigued by their vast array of medical conditions and first triggered my desire to become a doctor - a vocation inextricably linked with the lives of myself and those around me.

Once hooked on this idea, I became fascinated by the intricacies of the human body. I remember being amazed to find out that every human being develops from just two tiny cells! Studying biology and chemistry at A-level became an imperative, but it has since become clear that these studies can do little more than scratch the surface of what I want to know about human anatomy and the treatment of medical conditions. Becoming a doctor will fulfil a deeply held desire to delve into the world of medicine.

My passion to study medicine led me to seek an insight into the realities of life as a doctor; I was recently able to spend two weeks doing work experience in my local hospital. By spending time with a cardiologist, I realised the value of a doctor's ability both to allay anxieties and remain calm in highly pressurised situations. These are both qualities that others recognise in me. Attending the Medlink and Medsim conferences fuelled my enthusiasm for medicine as they highlighted the diverse range of medical specialties to explore. I gained further experience by observing nurses at a GP surgery where I was able to recognise the importance of collaboration within the multi-disciplinary team. My own teamwork and leadership abilities are demonstrated in my commitment to enrich and expand our school's Christian Union and in my nominated role to improve the student parliament and mentoring scheme in my house of 300 students. Whilst participating in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme to gold level, I learnt that encouraging the slower walkers improved morale, and, with everybody pulling together, we accomplished all our goals. As a youth group leader, I have responsibility for ensuring the safety of the children who attend; it was rewarding to motivate a group of girls to overcome their fear of heights on a residential camp. Doctors must have a high level of dedication in order to successfully treat patients; I am able to demonstrate this ability through my achievement of 'Honours' (80%) at grade 8 flute and my commitment to passing grade 8 piano. Playing in both an orchestra and as part of a church music team have greatly improved my confidence. The personal qualities that I have developed will be vital in a career which demands a well-rounded character.

Exploiting my love of science and problem-solving, whilst showing compassion to others, makes medicine a natural choice for me as a Christian. At church I have friends from many diverse backgrounds; my experience of seeing the homeless reintegrated into society and the church has been invaluable. This has helped me to develop good communication skills without showing any prejudice - an important quality in a doctor. When a relative in his 30's was recently diagnosed with a degenerative illness, I became acutely aware of the heart-wrenching and ethical challenges that doctors face, particularly in the field of palliative care. However, I believe I can rise to these challenges, and this experience has confirmed beyond doubt that medicine is where my future lies. It will be a privilege to use the diverse skills I will learn as a doctor to improve the quality of life for others.

In my gap year, I aim to enhance my cultural awareness and personal maturity through participating in an overseas mission. Thereafter, with dedication and enthusiasm for life-long learning, coupled with a curiosity for medical science and compassion for others, I eagerly look forward to fulfilling my medical aspirations.

## Example 2

To explore and work within the field of archaeology has long been my goal. I have been aware of this interest for a long time, especially after I visited Pompeii and Paestum on a family holiday. I also used to have long, fascinating conversations with my aunt, who works in paper conservation at the British Museum, which has made me more interested in conservational archaeology. I used to visit the Natural History Museum at least once a month when I lived in London (I moved away in 2001), and I am now applying to do some work experience there to see all of the amazing collections they have. I am also actively seeking a work placement in other museums closer to home.

I took Latin at GCSE, which was partially integrated with the history of the Roman Empire. I learnt about Roman architecture, wars, towns, villas, food, gods and their way of life, as well as about the Romans in Britain, including things like the Boudican revolt. I also learnt about castles and churches from history and how they have changed over time, along with the people that used them. This increased my interest in archaeology, as well as my knowledge. After visiting Stonehenge, I became very interested in prehistoric remains and read *Standing Stones* to gain a better understanding.

Although archaeology is not available to study at my current school, I do study geology, which I enjoy greatly, especially the fossils. I also have the ability to work well in the field, a skill I gained from doing geology fieldwork for my A level. I am particularly looking forward to studying archaeological conservation and human osteoarcheology, as well as prehistoric remains because they will tie in with the career path I would like to pursue and interest me greatly. I would like to do a masters course after the degree (and possibly a PhD) and then move into a career in either forensic archaeology, because I find that I work best with the chemical side of my subjects, or conservational archaeology.

Work experience at London Southbank University doing administrative work gave me useful and transferable skills. These included: working independently; working to deadlines; computer literacy, through setting up and developing a database of over 400 contacts; communicating efficiently (I had to telephone everyone in the database to confirm their details before entering them); and using initiative, as it was my idea to set up the database as they had wanted me to put it in spreadsheets, which was a less effective way of managing the data. It also gave me an insight into university work and life.

I was a senior prefect at my last school, and I am now involved in the student parliament, meaning that I have gained communication skills and responsibility, as well as teamwork and team-leading skills. I trained as a peer listener, which gave me the responsibility of helping others with their problems, and later trained peer listeners, which gave me more confidence to participate in class. I am also part of the debating society, which has advanced my analytical skills, as well as developing arguments. I used to play the violin, was involved in concerts at Blackheath Music Hall with an orchestra, which has given me self-confidence and independence. I enjoy reading, and often read factual books (e.g. Bill Bryson's "A Short History of Nearly Everything") that make me think. I swim regularly and have achieved 1000m, which has given me perseverance.

I have always wanted to do archaeology, and I would love to have the opportunity to follow my ambition to study and work within this field.

## Example 3

Geography is a compelling subject because it relates to almost all areas of life. My passion has been ignited by a number of field trips, most significantly by my exposure to unexpected environments when visiting Naples; I was shocked by the way those residing in a supposedly western culture lived in such appalling conditions.

Contemplating such issues has increased my fascination in Geography and my realisation of its importance has led to a belief that there is no better subject. My main interest falls on the human side but I recognise that the two fields are interdependent, and therefore, knowledge of both is crucial in developing a comprehensive understanding.

Academically, studying other subjects has complemented my A-level Geography. Undertaking my Extended Project on Hatfield House, in Hertfordshire, was an enlightening experience. I found investigating the economic and social factors, such as income generation and effects on the local community, highly intriguing. English Literature has enhanced my evaluative and analytical skills, which are vital in contemplating geographical issues, whereas studying History has further fuelled my passion for Geography. Examining the past has encouraged me to consider how the Geography of today has been shaped over time. To investigate this I read Brian Graham and Catherine Nash's 'Modern Historical Geographies', which helped to explain how the geography of the Earth has developed to provide today's highly globalised world. My membership of Bedfordshire East Schools Trust's Archaeological Society also provides me with the opportunity to consider how humans lived in the past.

To help address environmental issues I joined my local conservation group, Arlesey Conservation for Nature. I initially became involved through my Explorer Scout group and have taken a more active role over the past two years. We work to create a more congenial environment for wildlife but also look at ways of safeguarding the local area. One project we undertook was the building of a sluice gate and bank reinforcement on the River Hiz to limit discharge downstream, thus minimising flood risk in the immediate area. Here, I was able to contribute my understanding of river processes, of which I had practical experience from fieldwork in Snowdonia, to aid decision making. Furthermore, working in this organisation has allowed me to acknowledge the views of different stakeholders, and this has provided me with a clearer view on the interaction of human and physical factors in shaping the environment. I now have an understanding of the tentative approach mankind needs to create a sustainable Earth, whilst taking into account the interests of different groups of people. A geography degree would provide perfect preparation for solving issues of this nature.

Through my extra-curricular activities I have concluded that a developed world, with attendant globalisation, has led to as many problems as benefits. At school I became involved with raising money for our sister school in Ghana. This gave me an opportunity to explore the process of bridging the development gap through aid. The unwillingness of large companies to assist, forced me to question whether the developed world does enough to help the developing world. Moreover, a recent Geography trip to the Bay of Naples demonstrated that there are areas of the western world which need economic improvement. Viewing Mt. Vesuvius and Solfatara was extremely interesting but I was equally intrigued by the gap in wealth between people in the region. Many lived a comfortable existence, but I saw people living in makeshift homes in disused car parks, akin to the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

For these reasons I am determined to study Geography at University; I want to make a notable contribution to the lives of those around me. My exam results prove that I am a dedicated and able student and I would relish the opportunity to learn in such a challenging and stimulating environment.



#### Example 4

As a young adult, I have witnessed my Father carry out a career as an Ambulance Technician, providing care on a day to day basis. When he told me about his first delivery assisting a Midwife, the fascination that overwhelmed me when I learned of his experience and the care provided by the Midwife, led me to have a strong interest into the Profession. This then rapidly developed into a passion and ambition to pursue it as a career. My A-level studies in Health and Social Care have developed my passion as it increased my knowledge of Midwifery in depth and I knew immediately that it was the perfect career for me. I am also striving to gain direct experience in observing professional practice at the Orchards Children Centre.

Health and Social Care and research tasks within my course have centred on Midwifery. I have extensively focused on the skills required in the profession, the high levels of care involved and the diverse levels of vocational demands and responsibilities associated with being a Midwife. Alongside this, I have been fortunate to explore a diverse range of cultures within our society during my studies of Sociology. This is essential to bring to midwifery as it allows me to understand and appreciate the different cultures clients exist within, along with their norms and values, enabling me to provide them with the best care possible.

Psychology has educated me on the importance of being able to understand individual differences and how certain aspects of life events, such as pregnancy and labour, can affect individuals. This will allow me to evaluate how my actions and the processes of labour and pregnancy can affect women both emotionally and psychologically, and furthermore, why some women are more susceptible to ante- and post-natal depression. Both Sociology and Psychology have furthered my ability to analyse and extract relevant information from research and empirical data, whilst improving my ability to independently approach, listen and question issues in a considered and measured way. Additionally, I am well practiced in taking on board others views before coming to a final decision, by working as part of a team; taking into account the skills, knowledge and strengths of others.

I have always endeavoured to make the most out of all opportunities. I am very proud to have been elected the Academy's Deputy Head Girl as of July 2012, voted by 1,800 students and over 150 staff members. Within this role I have worked cooperatively with students, staff, the senior team, and the board of Governors to encourage positive learning and develop professional practice across the Academy. I have also directed 30 prefects; coordinating and developing them within their own roles across the Academy; as well as facilitating the many significant Academy Events. Within my role I am called upon to offer advice by a range of staff including the Principal, in an appropriate and productive manner. Highlighting my ability to prioritise and handle high pressured situations whilst offering professional and suitable solutions. I have also been praised by staff members across the Academy for my ability to utilise leadership and communication skills to a diverse range of individuals. Valuable experience has also been gained through working in a local bar and salon. I have been able to further my team working skills alongside colleagues; developing and highlighting my ability to communicate effectively, whilst offering advice and answering questions professionally and respectfully.

I feel that the presented experiences and skills make me ideally suited for Midwifery, along with the dedication and enthusiasm I will bring to University. I am thoroughly looking forward to starting my tertiary education. I hope you will consider my application.



## Common Errors Explained

This is a guide to some of the more common technical errors made in personal statements. This is, of course, not a complete list of all common errors, as that would be far too long!! Instead, I have restricted myself to those errors likely to appear in personal statements. They are split into four sections:

### Grammatical Errors

However  
For example  
Could of/have/'ve  
Who/Whom,Whoever/Whomever  
I/Me/Myself  
Fewer/Less  
That/Which  
None is/None are

Off of/Off, Inside/Inside of, Outside/Outside of, etc...

### Punctuation Errors

Capitals  
Commas  
Apostrophes  
Semicolons  
Colons  
Inverted Commas

### Spelling Errors

|                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Affect/Effect           | Extracurricular     |
| All ready/Already       | Focused/Focussed    |
| All right/Alright       | Into/In to          |
| All together/Altogether | It's/Its            |
| Anymore/Any more        | Lead/Led            |
| Anyone/Any one          | Maybe/May be        |
| Anyway/Any Way          | Practice/Practise   |
| A part/Apart            | Principle/Principal |
| Coursework.             | There/Their/They're |
| Everyday/Every day      | To/Too              |

### Made Up Rules and Miscellaneous

Split Infinitives  
Ending a Clause With a Preposition  
Beginning Sentences With Conjunctions  
None is/None are  
Fascinated

## COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

### HOWEVER

Generally, this word appears at the beginning of a sentence. Its task is to link the *idea* in the sentence it begins to the one in the sentence immediately before it (it is a **connective**, but *not* a conjunction).

**e.g.** Jane's writing skills are excellent. However, she does need to make sure her handwriting is legible.

The very common error is to try to use it to join two sentences together, as in the example below. In fact, it cannot join two sentences together as it is not a conjunction.

**e.g.** Jane's writing skills are excellent, however, she does need to make sure her handwriting is legible.

This is always wrong!

The probable reason for this error is that the word does not necessarily have to appear at the beginning of a sentence to fulfil its job of linking two ideas together. Good writers will alter its position to keep their writing varied in structure.

**e.g.** Jane's writing skills are excellent. She does, however, need to make sure her handwriting is legible.

All we've done here is to move the word from first position in the sentence to one in the middle of the sentence. Its effect is the same.

**Note:** when used at the beginning of a sentence, “However” is always followed by a comma. When shifted from this position to somewhere in the middle of the sentence, it should come between two commas.

### FOR EXAMPLE

**e.g.** This phrase shares the same common error as “however”. Again, it is most usually to be found at the beginning of a sentence, and, again, its job is to link the idea in the sentence it begins to the one in the sentence immediately before it (it is another connective, but not a conjunction).

**e.g.** Jane’s writing skills are excellent. For example, she recently achieved full marks in her English language investigation coursework.

The common error, again, is to try to use the phrase to join those two sentences together as if it were a conjunction.

**e.g.** Jane’s writing skills are excellent, for example, she recently achieved full marks in her English language investigation coursework.

### This is always wrong!

Again, it is perhaps because the phrase does not necessarily have to appear at the beginning of a sentence to fulfil its job of linking two ideas together (as with “however”) that people have been misled.

**e.g.** Jane’s writing skills are excellent. She recently achieved full marks, for example, in her English language investigation coursework.

Another very common error with this phrase is to use it properly at the beginning of a sentence, but then to leave that sentence incomplete, as in the following example.

**e.g.** John is accomplished in a range of subjects. For example, English and maths.

The error here is to miss out the subject and verb of the second sentence.

**e.g.** John is accomplished in a range of subjects. For example, he excels in English and maths.

Here he is the subject and excels is the verb.

**Note:** when used at the beginning of a sentence, “For example” is always followed by a comma. When shifted from this position to somewhere in the middle of the sentence, it should come between two commas.

### COULD OF/HAVE/’VE (ETC.)

Could, should, would, might, may, can, will (etc.) are all used as modal verbs. Under those circumstances, the word of can never follow them. It should always be have.

**e.g.**

It is always

I could have won the race.

It is never

I could of won the race.

The error has occurred because of the way we often contract these verbs in speech. Thus, “would have” becomes “would’ve”. In speech, this sounds like “would of”, but this can never be right.

### WHO/WHOM, WHOEVER/WHOMEVER

The distinction between these two is dying out in common usage. It’s unlikely many readers will notice if you simply use who and never bother with whom. However, it’s perhaps worth getting it right in formal writing.

Who is the subject form of the pronoun, while whom is the object form. If the word is being used as a subject (i.e. as the person or thing carrying out the action of the verb in a clause), it should always be who. If it is being used as the object (i.e. the person or thing upon which the action of the verb is carried out in a clause), whom should be used.

**e.g.**

Who kicked John?

Here, Who is the subject of the clause as it refers to the person or thing doing the kicking.

John kicked whom?

Here, whom is the object as it refers to the person or thing being kicked.

You apply the same rules for whoever and whomever.

It sounds simple, but sometimes it can get quite tricky. If in doubt, stick to using who throughout (fewer people will notice, if any), or ask an English teacher.

## I/ME/MYSELF

This is similar to the who/whom issue.

I should be used when it refers to the subject of the clause.

**e.g.**

I lifted the chair.

John and I lifted the chair.

In both of these cases, I is the subject of the clause (i.e. I is the one “doing” the verb).

Me should be used when it refers to the object.

**e.g.**

John lifted me into the chair.

John gave the chair to me.

John gave the chair to Dawn and me.

In all of these examples, me is used as the object of the clause (i.e. me is the one having the verb “done” to it)

Myself is usually not supposed to be used where I or me could also be used (though people do). Instead, it is used as an intensifier. As a result, there are few occasions where it should actually be used.

**e.g.** I want to carry the chair myself.

Here, it is simply being used to intensify the meaning of the “I” already used as the subject of the sentence. It could just as easily be removed altogether.

**Note: You should apply the same rules when using he/him, she/her and we/us in place of I/me.**

## FEWER/LESS

You should use fewer when you are referring a number of specific, individual things.

**e.g.** We have fewer parts in this kit than the instructions suggest we should.

You should use less when you are referring to quantities that cannot be expressed as a number of specific, individual things (such as the volume of a liquid, or the amount of fear you have about doing something)

**e.g.**

I have less beer in my glass than you.

I am less fearful than I was before.

Interestingly, we use the word more in both cases to express the opposite meaning.

## THAT/WHICH

The distinction between these two is a matter of debate. The two are, largely, interchangeable in common modern usage. Traditionalist grammarians, though, argue as follows.

That (relative pronoun) is restrictive - it provides essential information about its antecedent (an antecedent is the noun that came before it and to which it refers).

**e.g.** The ball that broke the window belonged to Tony.

In this example, that refers to a specific ball (i.e. that particular ball responsible for breaking the window, not just any ball), thus restricting the meaning of the noun that came before it (The ball) to a particular, single thing.

Which is non-restrictive. It is generally used just to add an extra, non-essential piece of information about the noun that it refers to (its antecedent).

**e.g.** The ball, which belongs to Tony, broke the window.

Here, the phrase beginning with which is just giving us extra information about the ball. It could easily be removed.

**Note: As illustrated by these examples, it's worth noting that a comma is never inserted before that when used in this way, but it always is before which.**

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## NONE IS/NONE ARE

Quite a few people get hot under the collar about this one. The truth is that modern usage is such that few would question the use of either. If you don't want to get involved in the intricacies of this one, just go for none is, as most people presume this is the formal, "correct" usage. If you do want to know the truth, however, read on...

The choice of is or are to follow none depends entirely on whether it is used as a singular or plural pronoun. It can be used as both. That's because it always refers to its antecedent noun, and takes on the number of that noun (as do all pronouns used in this way). An antecedent noun is, simply "the noun to which a following pronoun refers, and to avoid the repetition of which it is used." (OED)

**e.g.** Hobbies are important, but none are as important as work.

Here, Hobbies is the antecedent noun to which none refers. As Hobbies is a plural, we should use are after none as none takes on the plural status of Hobbies.

A hobby is important, but none is as important as work.

Here, A hobby is the antecedent noun to which none refers. As A hobby is a singular, we should use is after none as none takes on the singular status of A hobby.

## OFF OF/OFF, INSIDE/INSIDE OF, OUTSIDE/OUTSIDE OF, ETC...

This is another one that's in the process of change. Traditional British usage suggests that off (or inside/outside) need not be followed by of as it serves to add no meaning.

**e.g.**

Get off the table

Get off of the table.

Here, the addition of of in the second example does not alter its meaning.

In fact, the usage of off of is now so universal that it is largely accepted

## COMMON PUNCTATION ERRORS

### CAPITALS

These are not really punctuation, but as they are a source of a great deal of confusion, I thought I'd include them here.

There is a tendency these days for writers to capitalise the first letter of any word that they happen to think is important at the point of writing it, for whatever reason (such as the name of the subjects they teach, or their job title, etc...). This leads to all sorts of varied uses of capitals, and often in a single document a writer will forget to use even their made up rules in a standard way. So, s/he might capitalise the name of a subject wrongly in the first paragraph, but then not capitalise another subject later on, and so on. However, when sending out personal statements, we have to stick to one way of correcting such errors, so we choose to follow the accepted rules for capitals. Here they are.

You **should** use capitals for the following:

- The first word of a sentence
- A proper noun  
**e.g.** John, London, Tesco
- The pronoun 'I'
- The name of a language  
**e.g.** English, Spanish, Latin
- The name of a nationality  
**e.g.** English, Spanish, French
- The name of an ethnic group  
**e.g.** Afro-Caribbean, Caucasian
- The name of a day  
**e.g.** Monday
- The name of a month  
**e.g.** January
- The first and all the major words (i.e. not of, the a, an, etc., unless they are the first word) in a title.  
**e.g.** "The Guinness Book of Records"
- The first word in a new utterance in direct speech.
- The first word in a direct quotation that is also the beginning of a complete sentence.
- The name of historical periods/epochs.  
**e.g.** the Middle Ages, the Ice Age
- The name of annual/significant holidays  
**e.g.** Easter
- Religions and important religious terms  
**e.g.** Christianity, God (not when referring to gods in general), the Bible, the Koran, Ramadan, etc...
- Roman numerals (apart from when being used to number the introductory pages in many books)

## YOU SHOULD NOT USE CAPITALS FOR THE FOLLOWING

- School subjects are not capitalised, unless they are the name of a language.

**e.g.** maths, history, English literature

However, titles of units/modules taught within a subject follow the same rules as for any other title.

**e.g.** In English language, I teach the module “Editorial Writing”. In media studies, “Advertising and Marketing” is taught.

- The word university on its own should not be capitalised. It is capitalised when it forms part of the name of a particular university.

**e.g.** I hoped to go to university. Getting into Southampton University was great!

- Seasons are not capitalised

**e.g.** summer, winter, autumn, spring

- You do not need to capitalise names of places when they are used as part of a fixed expression (though you can).

**e.g.** danish pastry, russian roulette

## COMMAS

The main error with these tends to be in missing them out, or putting too many in. Some commas are grammatically necessary, while others are optional, and there are times when they simply should not be used. I’m not going to go through all of them here, just the more common ones.

### Lists

Lists of words or phrases require commas between them.

**e.g.**

I like football, cricket, rugby, tennis and baseball.

### Introductory phrases and clauses

These appear at the beginning of a sentence. Introductory clauses contain both subject and verb and are closely linked to (or dependant on) the main clause. Introductory phrases are also linked to the main clause, but they do not have both subject and verb (they tend to refer to the subject of the main clause).

**e.g.**

After they washed the car, the girls put the hose away. (clause)

Reeling in the hose, the girls tidied up after themselves (phrase)

### Introductory Words

Connectives like however, meanwhile, still, for example, nevertheless, etc. all tend to appear at the beginning of a sentence, and must be followed by a comma.

**e.g.**

Jane’s writing skills are excellent. However, she does need to make sure her handwriting is legible.

John was finishing his dinner. Meanwhile, Jane was doing her homework.

Other introductory words (usually other adverbs) also should be followed by commas.

**e.g.**

Unusually, I decided to stay in that night.

Angrily, I tore up the picture.

### Linking Independent clauses with Coordinating Conjunctions

It’s possible you were taught not to do this when you were learning to write as a youngster. That was wrong!!!

When you are joining two independent clauses together (clauses that could be sentences on their own, including a subject and verb and expressing a complete idea) with a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet), you should always put a comma before the conjunction.

**e.g.**

I sliced the bread, and I spread the butter.

I like to eat meat, but I don’t like fish.

I need to catch the train, or I will miss the concert.

Each of these examples has two clauses that could be independent sentences in their own right, so they're called independent clauses (or main clauses). I've joined them with coordinating conjunctions, so they all need a comma before the conjunction.

### Parenthetical (or bracketing) Commas

These are very common, but often missed out. We often take a clause and add extra, non-essential information to it. When we do, we need to demarcate it with commas. They're called parenthetical commas because, wherever we do it, we could just as easily use brackets instead to show that the phrase contained is extra to the main clause.

#### e.g.

My brother, who lives in Australia, is a great fan of motor sport.

In this example, you could easily remove the phrase in italics altogether. The sentence would still make clear sense. You could just as easily replace these commas with brackets as well!

### Comma Splices

Comma splicing is one of the most common errors in writing (and one of the most irritating for your English teacher). It is where a writer inserts a comma at the end of a sentence, rather than a full stop. It occurs because lazy writers just insert a comma as a do-it-all punctuation mark wherever they detect a pause or break in their writing. To check for it, just look at what comes before and after the comma. If both of these things could be a sentence on its own, you should not be using a comma. Instead, you should be using a full stop (or question/exclamation mark), semi colon or coordinating conjunction (with a comma before it - see above).

#### e.g.

This is an example of a comma splice (which is always wrong)

I like football, I hate baseball.

You could rewrite this accurately in any of the following ways:

I like football. I hate baseball.

I like football; I hate baseball.

I like football, but I hate baseball.

## APOSTROPHES

There are only two reasons for using apostrophes.

### Omission (creating contractions)

The first is where two words have been joined together and one or some of the letters have been left out (omission) to shorten them (contractions). Here, wherever letters have been omitted, an apostrophe should appear.

#### e.g.

Do not - don't

I am - I'm

Could have - could've

### Possession

The other reason for using apostrophes is to indicate that one part of the sentence belongs to another (possession). This is the one that tends to cause most problems, though it's fairly simple really.

#### e.g.

In the following sentence, the ball belongs to the child (singular), so we add an apostrophe followed by an s after the word child to show this.

- It is the child's ball.

In the next example, the ball belongs to the children (plural, but not ending in s), so the same rule is applied.

- It is the children's ball.

In the next example, the ball belongs to the boys (plural, ending in s), so we add the apostrophe without an s after the word boys to show it refers to more than one boy.

- It is the boys' ball.

If we were to move the apostrophe in the last example to appear before the s (and, therefore, after the word boy), then we would be indicating the ball belonged to one boy (i.e. singular).

- It is the boy's ball.

If we are adding an apostrophe to a singular word that already ends in s, we can choose either to add the apostrophe and an s as before, or we can simply add the apostrophe and omit the s, as long as it is clear.

- It is James's ball.
- It is James' ball.

You should never use apostrophes when adding an s just to make a word a plural, even when adding it to initials or numbers.

For the experts out there, there is, however, one situation in which it's ok to add an apostrophe to letters of the alphabet when pluralizing. That is when not doing so would make your writing difficult or impossible to understand without doing it.

**e.g.** There are two u's in queue.

In this example, omitting the apostrophe would make it very difficult to read the sentence accurately.

Similarly...

It is best not to use e.g. 's in formal writing.

---

## SEMICOLONS

My advice is, if you're unsure about these, choose alternatives instead. However, here are the rules.

A semicolon has two major uses. The first is to separate items in a list where each item is a phrase, rather than a single word (though commas can also be used). If one or some of the phrases in the list contains commas anyway, then you should use semicolons to separate each phrase to avoid confusion.

**e.g.**

My favourite things include walking in the park; eating at good restaurants; playing football, though less often these days; and reading, of course.

The second major use is to join two independent clauses (clauses that could be sentences on their own). This should only be done where those two clauses are closely linked.

**e.g.**

I like football; I hate baseball.

A good way of checking to see if a semicolon can be used in this way is to mentally replace it with a full stop. If it still makes clear sense, the semicolon is probably ok, unless, of course, it should be a colon (see below).

---

## COLONS

Colons are used after an independent clause where the words that follow the colon explain the independent clause that came before it in some way, or where what follows is a list.

**e.g.**

The reason for my dismissal was obvious: I had lost the company a great deal of money.

The school has a number of separate blocks: history, science, English and art.

What follows the colon may be anything from a single word to a series of independent clauses, as long as they explain whatever came before the colon in some way.

---

## INVERTED COMMAS

These should be used for the following reasons:

- Direct quotation of someone else's words, either written or spoken
- For citing titles of books (and their chapters, if named rather than numbered), plays, poems, essays, newspapers (and their articles), magazines (and their articles), TV/radio programmes, films, songs, short stories, etc... These days, however, the use of italics in place of inverted commas is more and more common as word processors replace handwriting, though mainly for major titles.
- Around words being used in an unusual or ironic way.
- Direct speech (I have not explained this in full as it's unlikely to occur in a personal statement).

## COMMON SPELLING ERRORS THE SPELLCHECKER MISSES

I'm assuming that everyone will be using their (not so) trusty spellcheckers when writing personal statements. For that reason, I've only included common spelling errors that the spellchecker won't notice here.

### THERE/THEIR/THEY'RE

Rather than explaining these in full, just stick to the following guide:

- Their can only be used to state that something belongs to something else.
- They're can only be used wherever the words they are make sense too (it's just a contraction of those two words).
- For everything else, it's got to be there.

### IT'S/ITS

Another common "spelling" error is to mix these two up.

- It's is a contraction of It is.
- Its is an entirely different word. It is the possessive form of the word it, meaning that something belongs to, or is associated in some way with, it.

You can check for this simply by mentally substituting it is in place of its. If the sentence still makes sense with it is inserted, then you know you should use the it's spelling. If it doesn't, then you should use the its spelling.

**e.g.** The car will not start. It's clear that its engine is broken.

### TO/TOO

The common error here is to use these two spellings interchangeably.

To is a preposition (put very simply, a word that indicates a relationship between a noun and another part of the sentence)

**e.g.**

I am going to the cinema

Here, to is used to indicate that the cinema is the place I is visiting, thus establishing a grammatical relationship between these two parts of the sentence.

To is also the first part of an infinitive verb

**e.g.**

to eat, to drink, to hope, to write...

Too can mean as well/also/in addition

**e.g.**

Can I come too?

Or it can mean "more than necessary"

**e.g.**

It is too hot in here.



## PRACTICE/PRACTISE

The two different spellings you see above exist because one is a noun (practice) and one is a verb (practise).

**e.g.**

### **Noun (practice):**

I put in a lot of practice to improve my skills.

Though the theory is simple, in practice, it is much more difficult.

The practice of cleaning as you go saves effort later on.

The doctor's practice is situated on the high street.

### **Verb (practise):**

I must practise my spellings to avoid making errors.

The need to practise is clear.

John practises regularly.

Advice/advise follow the same rule, but are easier to get right because we pronounce them differently. If you're unsure, try mentally replacing the word practice/practise with the words advice/advise in the sentence you are about to write. Whichever one seems to fit best will tell you which spelling of practice/ise to use.

**e.g.**

The need to advise is clear.

John advises regularly.

John gives a lot of advice.

---

## AFFECT/EFFECT

The common error here is to use these two spellings interchangeably.

Affect is a verb

**e.g.** I don't want to affect your concentration by making any noise.

Effect is a noun referring to the result or consequence of something.

**e.g.** If I make any noise, the effect will be to disturb you.

Perhaps the error here is caused by a second, but less often used, meaning for effect, which is to bring about something.

**e.g.** This guide is intended to effect a change in the accuracy of people's reference writing.

---

## PRINCIPLE/PRINCIPAL

Principle usually refers to a fundamental moral belief about the right thing to do, or one of a basic set of ideas or rules in a particular profession (or similar).

**e.g.**

It is against my principles to steal.

Principal refers to the head of an organisation or group (often used to refer to the head of a college), or the most important or significant or highest in rank of a group of things.

**e.g.**

The college principal gave everyone the day off.

The principal reason for practising is to get better at whatever you're trying to do.

---

## LEAD/LED

This one's easy!

Led is the past tense of to lead

**e.g.** I led him to the exit.

Lead is a dense and heavy metal

### ALL READY/ALREADY

All ready is a phrase (adjective) meaning fully prepared, though it is not often used.

**e.g.**

I am all ready for the race.

Already is a word (adverb) meaning that something has been previously completed or done. This is the most often used.

**e.g.**

I have finished the race already.

---

### ALL RIGHT/ALRIGHT

A good example of language in the process of change, both of these spellings are correct, and have the same meaning. Alright is simply a contracted version of all right. A few years ago, you would have been deemed incorrect to use the “alright” spelling. It is now so commonly used that it has become accepted and can be found in all the major dictionaries.

---

### ALL TOGETHER/ALTOGETHER

All together is an adverb, meaning “in total/in a group”.

**e.g.**

All together, there were 24 goals in the football tournament.

Altogether is also an adverb, but it means “completely/entirely”.

**e.g.**

We were altogether hopeless in the football tournament

---

### ANYMORE/ANY MORE

Unless you're American, this should always be spelled as two words. Don't let Microsoft's spellchecker fool you (it's American!).

---

### ANYONE/ANY ONE

Anyone is a pronoun meaning any person at all.

**e.g.** I can't find anyone.

Any one is an adjectival phrase (or a noun), meaning any single item from a group.

**e.g.** Any one of those cars would be too expensive for me.

---

### ANYWAY/ANY WAY

Anyway is an adverb meaning “in any case”.

**e.g.**

I don't care, anyway.

Any way is an adjectival phrase (or a noun), meaning any specific method, or route, etc.

**e.g.**

You can do this any way you want to.

---

### A PART/APART

A part means a specific section or segment of something.

**e.g.** I gave a part of my winnings to my friends.

Apart means to be separate from something.

**e.g.** I hate being apart from my wife.

## COURSEWORK

The correct spelling of this is coursework - it is a single word (as is, of course, homework).

---

## EXTRACURRICULAR

The correct spelling of this is extracurricular - it is a single word.

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## EVERYDAY/EVERY DAY

Every day means each day

**e.g.**

I read every day.

Everyday means commonplace

**e.g.**

I had to wear my everyday jeans as my best ones were being washed.

---

## INTO/IN TO

Into/In to

Into is a preposition (see above). It usually refers to someone or something entering a particular place:

**e.g.** Go into the lounge and switch off the TV.

It can refer to taking up an occupation:

**e.g.** He is going into business.

It can also refer to time:

**e.g.** The party went on into the early hours of the morning.

It can also refer to being particularly keen on something:

**e.g.** Jane is really into hockey.

In to is written separately when the to is forming part of an infinitive verb:

**e.g.** I am going in to get my coat.

Here, the to is simply the first part of the infinitive verb to get (put simply, an infinitive verb is a verb with to in front of it, such as to hope, to eat, to climb, etc.)

---

## MAYBE/MAY BE

Maybe (adverb) means perhaps:

**e.g.**

Maybe you could visit Tony soon.

May be (verb) is a form of the verb, to be, indicating something may or may not take place.

**e.g.**

I may be visiting Tony soon, but I am not sure.

---

## FOCUSED/FOCUSSED

Either of these spellings is correct, but the single S version is by far the most commonly used. Whichever way you choose, just make sure you stick to it throughout the piece.

## ERRONEOUS OR MADE UP RULES & MISCELLANEOUS

There are a number of so-called rules that many people swear by that are actually not rules at all. I've included a list of some of them here,

### Split Infinitives

An infinitive is a form of verb. It is made up of the word to, followed by the verb itself.

**e.g.** to walk, to hear, to be, to climb, to succeed...

Many people believe you should not put any words in between the to and the verb part of an infinitive. This is not true. If splitting an infinitive can be avoided and the sentence kept fluent, then fine! If not splitting an infinitive makes your sentence clumsy, go right ahead and split it.

**e.g.** In the following examples, the last two options both make clear sense and read fluently. The first two, however, are very clumsy indeed.

I am going quickly to unbutton my coat. (not split)

I am going to unbutton quickly my coat. (not split)

I am going to unbutton my coat quickly. (not split)

I am going to quickly unbutton my coat. (split)

## ENDING A CLAUSE WITH A PREPOSITION

Many grammarians suggest we should not do this. This is a made up rule, however. Once again, if you need to end a clause or sentence with a preposition to keep it fluent, go ahead and do it. There is a universally quoted statement, apparently made by Winston Churchill, in which he ridicules this erroneous "rule":

This is a rule up with which I will not put.

Here, in order to follow the rule and avoid ending with the preposition with, he ends up with a ridiculously convoluted sentence that is difficult to understand. If we unravel the syntax, though we end on a preposition, it makes much more sense:

This is a rule that I will not put up with.

## BEGINNING SENTENCES WITH CONJUNCTIONS

You may have been taught never to begin a sentence with a conjunction, such as and, but, so, because, etc... Again, this is not true. Many writers do this very effectively in order to achieve a clear emphasis.

**e.g.** Many people believe in astrology. But how could such an obviously ridiculous idea convince so many?

## NONE IS/NONE ARE

See my explanation in the "Common Grammatical Errors" section above.

## FASCINATED

There's nothing at all wrong with this word. However, it is often overused by personal statement writers. If you can find an alternative word, or a phrase in its place, it's worth using.

## MORE COMMON ERRORS...

As I said, I restricted myself to the errors that come up most often in personal statements. If, however, you want to read about more, there is a much more comprehensive list to be found at the following website:

<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html#errors>

Be a little careful with this site, though, as it originates in America, so a few of the spellings will be different over here. There are many other such guides out there! **Havefun.**

## CONCLUSION

This booklet is for your guidance. There is a lot of information, guidance and examples. If you are still struggling please speak with **the sixth form team in the sixth form office.**

