



Durham
University

'Ask Admissions'

HE Advisers Conference
3 Jan 2024

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Admissions Updates!

- UCAS reference was reformed for current admissions cycle onwards.
- UCAS personal statement reforms will now be 2026 cycle (2025-2026 applications) at the earliest.
- New Durham University webpages “[Admissions Guidance for Teachers and Advisors](#)” and “[UCAS reference](#)”.
- Following a recommendation from UCAS based on feedback they received, if we have a question about the application for the school, we’ll contact the referee where appropriate rather than the applicant.

Why is the Personal Statement Important?

- An opportunity to talk to the selector – especially where we don't interview
- In competition with other applications
- Chance to show how they stand out – why they're applying and what makes them an excellent candidate for the programme

Personal Statement Structure

- **80:20 – Subject Specific/ General Information**
- Enthusiasm for academic study of the subject
- Critical Engagement: what they think about the subject, not simply what they know
- What else have they done which will contribute to their course and the University community



Our selectors will be looking for....

English Literature

Don't just say you're captivated by a piece of literature, tell us why you're captivated by it!

Sociology

Substantive interest in Sociological issues

History

Why is one historical argument more convincing than another?

Law

A fluent statement with clear structure and consistency

Anthropology

How they became interested in the subject and what they hope to get out of the course

Accounting

A genuine interest in the course explaining where this stemmed from

Mathematics

Ability and enthusiasm in maths with evidence of independent study or maths prizes

Economics

Linking books and texts back to the course; comparing with texts and own thoughts

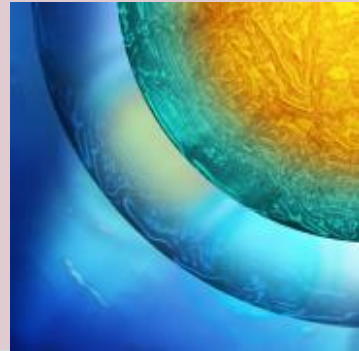
Personal Statement: Top Tips

Be original and avoid generalisations

Be specific; use examples and give evidence!

Interests and hobbies should be relevant

We want to hear about their aptitude for the subject, not why the subject is worthy of studying



Personal Statement: Top Tips



Don't try to be funny

Don't mention individual institutions

Don't write a chronological history

Don't waste characters!



UCAS Reference

This is split into three sections:

1. A general statement about your school/college (mandatory) – this can be a template and can be applied once to all your applications.
2. Any extenuating circumstances which may affect the applicant's performance in examinations or other assessments (optional)
3. Any other circumstances specific to the applicant you think universities/colleges should be aware of (optional)



UCAS Reference – How we use this

- We use the reference to understand the applicant's educational journey
- This is through considering their personal and school context.
- For us the first two sections are the most important.
- The exception is for applications for our BA Primary Education for which we will be looking for commentary on the applicant's suitability as a teacher, which we would expect to find in section 3 of the reference.

UCAS Reference – How we use this

- It doesn't matter if there's nothing to complete in section two of the reference – this is just there if there are extenuating circumstances to tell us about.
- It's okay if you tell us more than we're looking for – we know different providers will be looking for different things and your applicants won't be penalised for this.
- Make sure that the email address used in the reference

Section 1: General Statement about School/College

- **Tell us about the context of your school/college.**
- **But don't rely on URLs, include the information you need us to see in the box.**
- **This doesn't need to be long, but it's helpful if we know the performance of the school so we can understand how an applicant's grades compare in this context.**



Section 2: Extenuating Circumstances

Tell us:

- if there is a story behind the applicant's grade profile
- if the applicant has significant additional commitments
- if the applicant has or has had significant barriers to overcome
- if the applicant is in receipt of free school meals, has spent time in care or is estranged from their parents.



Section 3: Other circumstances

Tell us:

- **Any achievements relevant to the application (especially if it saves the applicant words in their personal statement)**
- **This might be e.g., if they completed an essay competition or other extracurricular activities**



Other Tips

If the extenuating circumstances you wish to report would not be appropriate to include within the UCAS reference (e.g. if it is sensitive in nature), we will also accept evidence submitted from the school or other third-party professional to:

documents.educators@durham.ac.uk

Please ensure a school email address is included in the reference (i.e. not a gmail, Hotmail, btinternet etc account).

Where possible, please ensure applicants apply using their own personal email account which they will have continued access to over the summer.

Ask Admissions!

Visit our website:

www.durham.ac.uk/study/undergraduate

Ask us:

www.durham.ac.uk/study/ask-us

Call our Enquiries Team:

Tel: 0191 334 1000

**Our phone lines are open Mon - Fri
9am – 5pm.**

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