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How do I help my students...
apply to university?

Get started >

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Introduction

This resource guides you through the important aspects of the applications process.

The **Admissions process** 🛈 section provides an overview and includes tips for supporting your students' applications to university.

In the **Helping your students prepare** 🛈 section we provide information on how to help your students build their knowledge and experience of the subjects they are interested in.

The **Personal statements** 🛈 section gives advice on how you can support students completing their personal statement and the questions to ask to help them get started with the process.

The **References** 🛈 section gives advice on how to complete your school reference and the most important information to include.

The **Admissions tests** 🛈 and **How to prepare for interview** 🛈 sections include a brief overview of the different types of tests and interviews and practical advice on how you can prepare and support your students.

Finally, we have some useful links to external resources in the **Further information** 🛈 section including resources to help develop your students' knowledge of the subjects they are interested in. This section also provides web links to the admissions policies operated by Advancing Access university partners.

This resource has been designed so you can easily find what you want:

🛈 provides a link to more information in this guidebook

🛈 provides a link to another website with more detailed information.

Keep an eye out for:

⬤ provides key questions to ask your students

◉ highlights key information

❓ tells you how to find out more.

We wish you and your students every success!

Section 1

The admissions process

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A calendar

September	October	January
Universities begin to receive applications submitted through **UCAS** ⓘ for the next academic year.	Application deadline for Oxford, Cambridge, medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and veterinary medicine courses.	Application deadline for most courses.

February	March	May
UCAS Extra ⓘ opens.	Most students who apply by the January deadline will receive university decisions by the end of March. Application deadline for some art and design courses.	If the student's application was received by the January deadline, and they received offers by March, this month is the deadline for students to respond to offers.

July	August	September
Any applications received after June will be considered as a part of **Clearing** ⓘ, depending on whether the course has any places available. Late applications for the universities of Cambridge and Oxford will not be considered.	University places are confirmed. **Clearing** ⓘ and **Adjustment** ⓘ start.	The admissions cycle closes for this year.

UCAS Extra ⓘ provides students with another choice if they have used up all five choices. Students are eligible for this if they have received decisions from all five courses and received no offers or have declined the offers received.

Adjustment ⓘ is a chance for students who have met and exceeded the conditions of their firm choice to reconsider where and what to study. If they are eligible, they can swap their place for one on another course (if there are places available). There is no vacancy list for Adjustment, instead students need to contact universities to ask about possible vacancies.

Clearing ⓘ is another opportunity for your students to find a course and university that suits them. In Clearing, students can see which courses have places remaining. Clearing can be useful for students who did not apply before June, who did not receive any offers (or none they wanted to accept), or who did not meet the conditions of their offer. Although an increasing number of universities, including leading universities, are taking part in Clearing, some universities do not take part at all. Many universities only enter some of their courses into Clearing and some of the most selective programmes will not be available. Clearing will be different every year and there is no certainty about which courses will be available.

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Remember that the exact dates may vary by a few days every year, so check the

UCAS website ⓘ

which provides the key dates for UCAS undergraduate applications.

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Deferred entry

Not all universities and courses accept deferred entry.

Deferred entry decisions will be made in light of the number of places available the following year and any changes taking place in the higher education environment. It is important that your students check the latest university and course information both on the UCAS and university websites. If your students wish to apply for deferred entry (that is, if they want to take a year out before university), they should indicate this on the UCAS form.

More information is available in strand three, **How do admissions processes work?**⬆.

Late applications

If your students miss the **deadlines** ℹ set by UCAS, they may not get a place on the course they want, as many popular courses will have filled their places. Courses can close to new applications in January. Students will need to check the UCAS website for any available places.

Students submitting their application after the last UCAS deadline in June will have it held by UCAS for Clearing, which opens at the beginning of July. Universities only place courses in Clearing that still have places available. It is worth bearing in mind that some universities do not offer any places through Clearing, and many do not put courses in Clearing before results day in August.

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Offer making

All applications received by the deadline for the relevant course and university (usually January) are guaranteed equal consideration, and places will be available. Many students will not receive an offer until after the January deadline. They should not worry if they do not hear back immediately and should not make a judgment based on the speed of response. Different universities have different approaches and some universities wait until the application deadline before making decisions. For these reasons, universities respond at different times.

Tests and interviews

For some programmes of study, your students may be asked to do a **test** 🛈 or attend an **interview** 🛈. These are used to find out more about an applicant's aptitude and ability. For many courses leading to the professions (such as medicine, social work and nursing), tests and interviews are an essential component to test a student's aptitude for the role.

Further information, including detail on the points above, is provided in strand three, **How do admissions processes work?** 🛈.

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Top tips for supporting your students' applications to university

1. Check the deadlines, both on the UCAS and the individual university websites. Some courses ask for additional requirements (for example, for your student to sit a test) or have different deadlines.

2. Ask universities to run information sessions at your school or college. These can support students in their applications. Contact university recruitment, widening participation or outreach teams. Links can be found on the **Advancing Access** website.

3. Spend time on the school reference. It should be personalised to the individual student.

4. Encourage your students to start thinking about their **personal statement** as early as possible. Ensure they consider their spelling and grammar alongside the content.

5. Build the student application process into the school calendar. Make sure you have sufficient time and that the process starts early enough.

6. Ask other experienced colleagues to review personal statements so you have a fresh perspective.

7. Attend teacher conferences run by universities and UCAS to refresh your knowledge. You can search for events and virtual conferences on the **Advancing Access** website.

8. Work with groups of students who have **interviews** or specific **tests** to support their preparation.

9. Keep a record of your students' applications, predicted grades, entry requirements, course(s) applied to and overall suitability. Encourage your students to get feedback from universities. This will help you to understand the outcome and assist future students.

10. Gather feedback from your students who have attended interviews or taken tests. Encourage them to feed back on the type of interview, the questions asked and any areas that might help them or other students in the future.

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Advancing Access delivers CPD sessions in schools and colleges on topics including personal statements, interviews, admissions tests, UCAS references and qualifications choices.

Section 2

Helping your students prepare

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Preparing for an application

Encourage your students to prepare for their application as soon as they start their A-level or equivalent studies (if not before).

As soon as they start studying with you, ask them to:

- **develop their knowledge** ⓘ of the subject they are interested in; encourage them to express their views on different topics related to the subject

- engage in **other activities** ⓘ outside their lessons to build their transferable skills

- undertake a voluntary or **work experience placement** ⓘ to gain further understanding of a future career or to build transferable skills.

The balance of these activities will depend on the subjects your students are considering taking at university. For professional courses, such as medicine, nursing and dentistry, work experience can help students understand more about the profession and draw on their experience in their application. Many courses leading to the health professions require applicants to have work experience before applying. For other subjects, additional reading and keeping up to date with the latest research may be more important. The most important thing, whether students need to do work experience or additional reading, is reflection. Encourage your students to reflect on the skills and knowledge they have gained. Ask them to consider what they have learned about themselves or their chosen subject.

Leading universities offer many opportunities to support students from under-represented backgrounds in preparing their university applications. **Advancing Access** ⓘ provides signposts to many of these opportunities.

Your students need to:

- build their knowledge of the subject
- enhance their transferable skills
- undertake work experience if applying for professional courses
- reflect on the skills and knowledge they have gained.

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Knowledge of the subject

Many students will be considering university subjects that they have not studied before. Even if they are thinking about taking one of their level 3 studies further, the degree course may be very different, will be much more in depth and cover a broader range of topics.

Encourage your students to build their knowledge of the subject and become further acquainted with the key topics and themes. They should refer to their knowledge of the subject in their personal statement and it can also help if invited to interview. Your students should be able to express their views and thoughts, and be able to comment on key developments in that subject.

Remind your students to read intelligently and to keep a reflective log of what they have learned. This log may be useful for their personal statement and interview.

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Recommended sources

There are many excellent resources to help build your students' knowledge and many of them are free. We recommend:

1. Newspapers and news websites will help your students keep up to date with the latest developments and thinking in their subject. Many newspapers focus on different topic areas (for example, science) on certain days of the week. Some schools and colleges subscribe to certain publications that are then made available to the students. Encourage your students to share their views on these latest developments.

2. Specialist periodicals and magazines provide further insight into the subject. For example, psychology applicants could read *The Psychologist* and those interested in science could read *New Scientist*. Often these magazines have really good websites, so a subscription is not always necessary.

3. Some universities publish sample reading lists for modules studied in the first year. This material can be a useful introduction to the subject at university level.

4. There are some very useful websites that provide subject resources. **Bright Knowledge** ⓘ is a bank of resources with articles and revision guides for most subject areas. Many universities have developed online learning programmes that are designed to support students' learning about particular subjects. **Future Learn** ⓘ has a list of some of the programmes available.

5. Encourage your students not just to read but to experience the subject too. Encourage them to download lectures and podcasts and to visit museums, theatres and places relevant to the subject. Many universities have podcasts and lectures available on their websites. Also visit **TED Talks** ⓘ and **YouTube** ⓘ.

6. Help your students access subject-specific outreach opportunities at universities. These can include residential summer schools, masterclasses, public lectures and online resources. Information on these programmes are available on university websites. **Advancing Access** ⓘ has information on opportunities delivered by its partner universities.

7. Taking the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) can provide your students with an opportunity to learn more about the subject. Students will be able to reference what they have learned in their personal statement.

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Building transferable skills

Subject knowledge is important, but for some courses it is also important that students are able to demonstrate that they have the skills necessary to succeed on their chosen course at university. For some courses, admissions staff will also be assessing suitability for a profession. Encourage your students to develop their life skills and other softer skills, both in and outside the classroom.

Students can develop their skills in many ways, through:

- **work experience** ⓘ

- volunteering

- participation in clubs or societies

- responsibilities at school or college (for example, being a student representative or running an event)

- their existing family or caring responsibilities.

Your students need to think carefully about the activities they get involved in. In particular, encourage them to consider:

- how their extracurricular activity might support their application to university

- what they could learn about their chosen subject

- what they could learn about themselves and their skills, strengths and capabilities.

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Many leading universities would agree that it is important for students to reflect on the experiences and the skills they have gained. They should then use this in their personal statements.

Encourage your students to keep diaries and to log their views and thoughts.

We advise that students commit to a limited number of activities, so they can focus on the skills they are developing and do not overstretch themselves, to avoid a negative effect on their studies.

To find out about opportunities your students could get involved in, visit the government's volunteering **website**, which provides information on where to find placements.

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Work experience

Relevant work experience can help your student's application, particularly if it builds knowledge of their chosen subject or career pathway or provides them with useful skills.

Work experience is often an essential component for application to vocational subjects, such as teaching, veterinary science, medicine, dentistry, nursing, and other health-related programmes including social work and physiology. It can show that your students:

- have an understanding of their chosen profession

- can display the attitudes and behaviours essential to that profession

- are well-suited to their chosen course and career pathway.

In many vocational subjects, students will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge of the profession. Encourage your students to check whether the courses they are applying for require or would benefit from work experience.

We know how difficult work experience can be to find. However, relevant work experience can help your students not only in their application but also to understand what careers their chosen course could lead to – and whether they would like it!

How do I help my students choose a university and course? ⓘ provides tips on how to support your students in gaining work experience.

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Section 3

Personal statements

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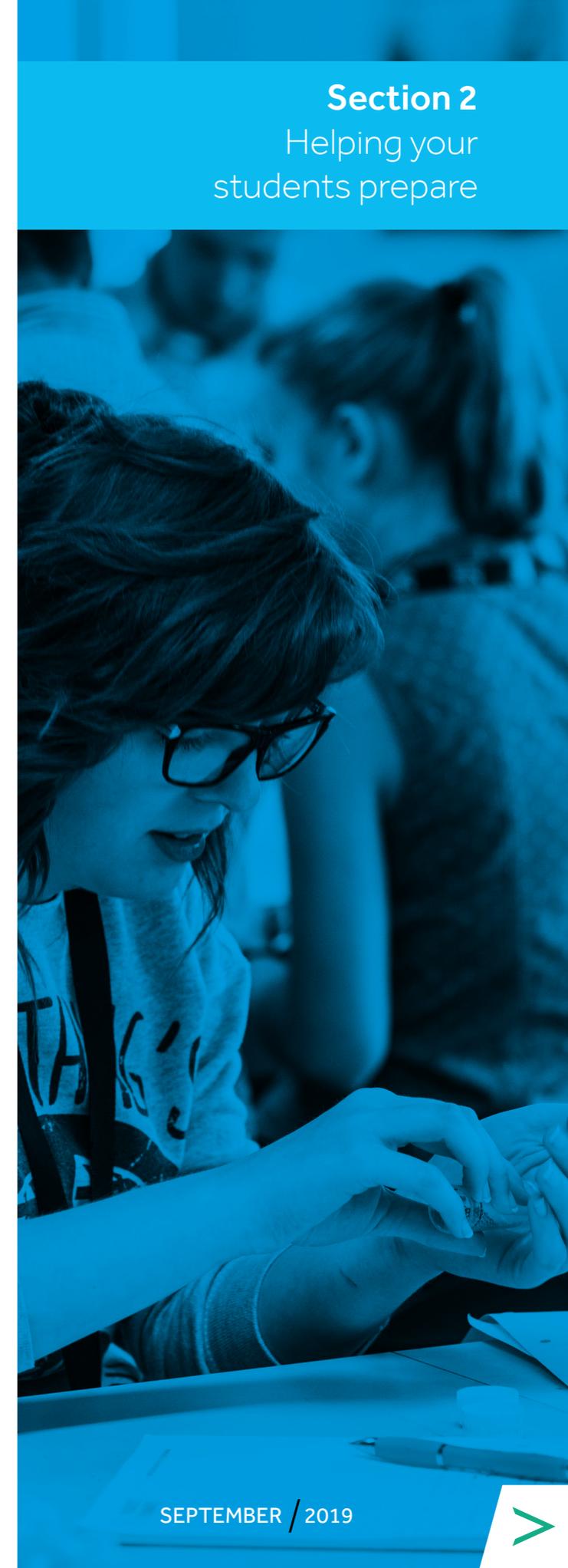
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What are personal statements for?

Leading universities value the personal statement as it helps them to understand the person applying, their motivations and interests.

We know that writing a good personal statement can be a long and challenging process for many students.

The personal statement is limited to 4,000 characters or 47 lines of text (including spaces) – whichever comes first. Ensure that the content is relevant to the course your student has applied for.

The personal statement provides an insight into why a student has applied for a particular course. It enables admissions staff to determine whether an applicant is likely to succeed on the course and helps them decide between similarly qualified applicants.

Different courses and universities will consider the personal statement in different ways. For many highly selective or competitive courses the personal statement can make a difference between an offer and an unsuccessful application. For these courses there are often many more applications than places available. Some courses may place less emphasis on the personal statement (they may, for example, have fewer applications per place) and instead may focus on other aspects such as predicted grades, interviews or test results.

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Your students will be applying for up to five courses; all will have different requirements and follow different admissions processes. It is therefore important that they develop a good personal statement that accurately describes their skills, abilities, knowledge and interests.

In general, leading universities suggest that between 70% and 80% of the personal statement is focused on academic and course-related information. The remaining 30% to 20% could include relevant information on the student's extracurricular activities.

30% 70%
20% 80%
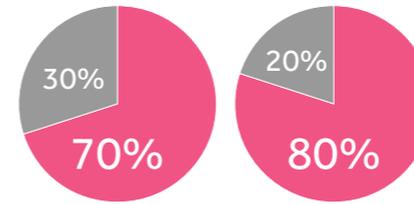
Remember, applicants should avoid listing their experiences and should always explain how each experience has helped prepare them for their chosen course. For example ...

It is nice to hear that the science applicant has learnt Japanese but how does it add to their application?

It means that the student enjoys learning new things, can set challenging targets and is hard-working.

Why has a history applicant undertaken work experience in a shop?

The work in the shop helped the student to develop time management skills - balancing study and other commitments.

See our **Personal statement information sheet** ⬆ for our top ten tips.

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Developing the personal statement

Leading universities receive tens of thousands of applications, so it is important that the applications from your students are unique and personal to them. Universities need to see enthusiasm, motivation and focus in a personal statement.

Ensure you and your colleagues have sufficient time to ask your students:

● Why they are applying for this course

Admissions staff want to see enthusiasm for and interest in the course. Ask your students what excites them about the course they have chosen, which aspects interest them in particular and how it fits into their long-term plans. Question them on why they have chosen this course over others.

● What they know about the subject and which aspects particularly interest them

How are their current studies helping to prepare them for university? Ask your students to outline how particular aspects of their current studies have generated an interest for the subject. Have they studied a particular topic that they researched or investigated further? Why did the topic interest them?

● What personal qualities, skills and experience will help in this subject and how were they acquired

How have their activities outside their studies taught them about their suitability for this course? Have they undertaken any relevant work experience? Have they taken part in any university outreach activities? Ask them to reflect on what they have learned from this. It is important that your students do not end up listing activities but reflect on the insights these activities have given them, and the knowledge and skills they have gained.

If the students can answer these questions, they are on the way to developing a good personal statement. Ask them to write down what they have just said; this will help them start the first draft of their personal statement.

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UCAS 🎧 has useful information on writing a personal statement.

Section 4

References

How to write a good academic reference

The reference you write is valued by admissions staff because it provides an informed view from an educational professional who knows the candidate.

Leading universities are used to assessing applications presenting a wide range of different qualifications. They recognise that there are different curricular and examinations in use across the United Kingdom (and internationally) and there will be different patterns of post-16 study as a result. Universities also understand that there will be variation in the ways different English schools and colleges implement the changes to qualifications.

You can provide details about your school or college's qualifications policy in your reference, especially if your school or college does something slightly different to others.

Advancing Access deliver free CPD sessions for teachers on reference writing. For more details and to request a session visit the **Advancing Access website** ⓘ

The best references are often written by a member of staff who knows the student well and can provide admissions staff with:

- an understanding of a student's achievements in the education and home context
- a fair assessment of the applicant's potential to succeed at university
- additional information on the applicant's academic suitability for the chosen subject
- information on the school and its social context.

Universities are interested in contextual information about the school or college, such as your post-16 provision (for example, whether you offer AS-levels), the catchment area, the proportion of students eligible for free school meals and the percentage progressing to higher education.

Tell us about your school or college

- What type of school is it
- What is your curriculum policy (including AS- and A-level)
- How big is the school
- What are the class sizes
- What is your typical provision
- What percentage of students are eligible for free school meals or receive pupil premium
- How many students progress to higher education
- How many students progress to:
  - the universities of Oxford or Cambridge
  - a Russell Group university
  - a university ranked in the top third (defined by the UCAS A-level tariff score of entrants)? *

* Available on the **Department for Education website** ⓘ.

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It is important that the majority of your reference focuses on the applicant. Three or four lines on contextual information should be enough for the most relevant points.

If you want to include more information about your school or college, put the additional information on your website and provide the web address in your reference. Remember that some admissions staff will view the reference in paper form and may not be able to access your website easily. You should therefore ensure that you include the most important pieces of contextual information in the main body of the reference.

Predicted grades

You do not need to include predicted grades in the reference text. These are given in a separate section.

Universities know that predictions are not an exact science. If your predictions for a student's achievement at A-level (or equivalent) are significantly better than their level 2 results include reasons for this in your reference. If your predictions are based on in-school examination results or mock examinations, you should note this in the reference too.

See our **Academic references information sheet** for our top tips.

Students can request to see their academic reference under the Freedom of Information Act.
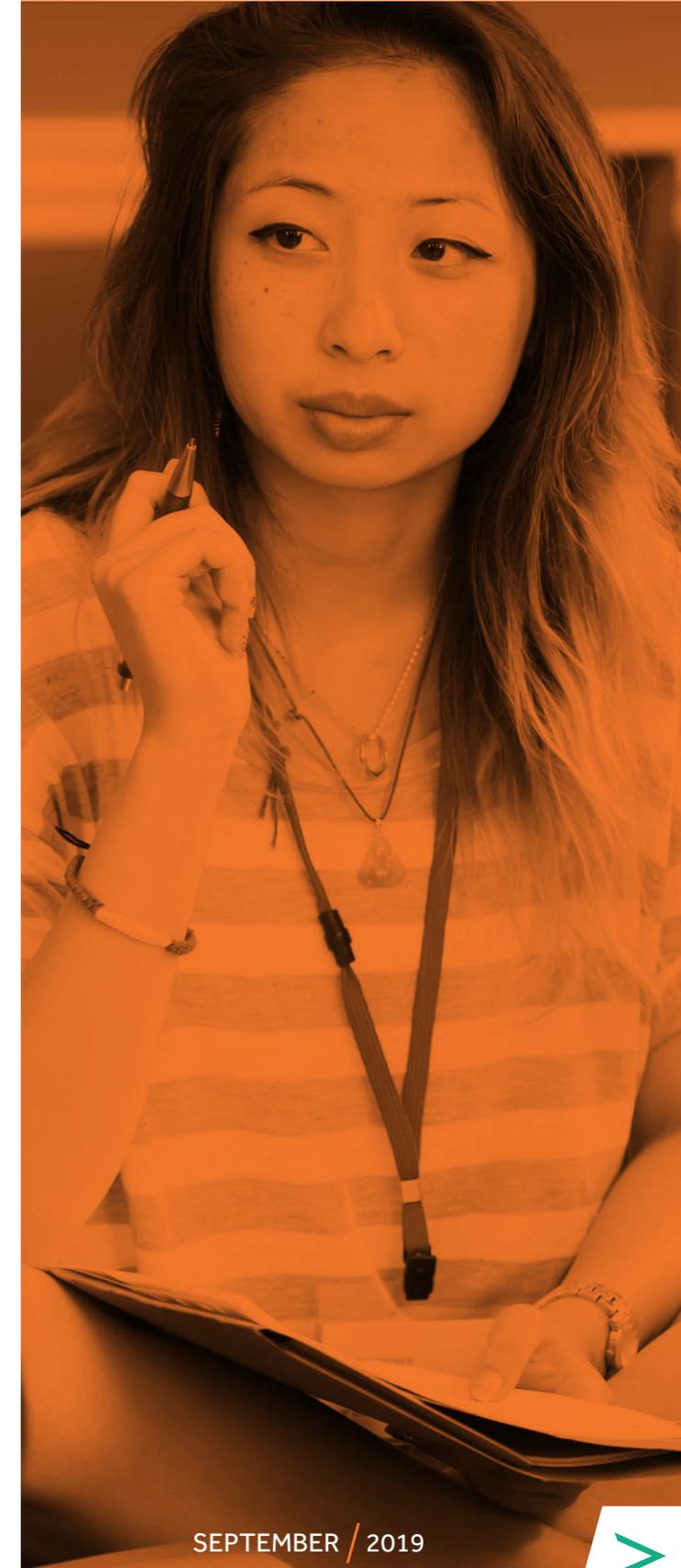
Section 5

Admissions tests

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How do I help my students with admissions tests?

Many leading universities use admissions tests for all or some of their courses.

Admissions tests are used to inform the decision-making process. They are often used to help assess a student's aptitude for a particular course and are used for many professional courses, such as medicine, law and nursing. They can be used by leading universities in different ways:

- to inform whether an offer should be made

- to decide whether to invite a student to interview

- following interview, to decide between two equally ranked applicants.

Some tests have a cost associated (approximately £50 to £100); however, there may be bursaries available.

Not all universities use tests and, where tests are used, universities may use different ones depending on the course.

For example, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge have a range of tests for specific courses. Please refer to individual websites for more information. **Further information** ⓘ provides web links to many leading universities' most up-to-date admissions policies.

Admissions tests

- BMAT ⓘ
- ELAT ⓘ
- LNAT ⓘ
- MAT ⓘ
- STEP ⓘ
- Thinking Skills Assessment ⓘ
- UCAT ⓘ

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BMAT ⓘ

The Biomedical Admissions Test is a two-hour test for students applying for medicine, veterinary medicine, biomedical science and dentistry. Tests can be taken in school (if it is an authorised test centre) or at one of the centres located across the UK.
Students need to register for the test by mid-October and the test is normally taken in early November. Check the current dates on the website. There is a charge for the test but there are bursaries available to help cover the costs for students who need financial support. The website has specimen and past papers.

ELAT ⓘ

The English Literature Admissions Test is a pre-interview admissions test for applicants to English courses at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. It is a 90-minute test designed to enable applicants to demonstrate their ability in close reading. Candidates write one essay. Centres are located across the UK. The test usually takes place in October or November, and is free of charge. The website has practice tests and preparation guidance.

LNAT ⓘ

The Law National Aptitude Test is a 135-minute admissions test for applicants to law. It is an online test in two parts, with multiple-choice questions and an essay. Students can register from August and the test can be taken at centres across the country during September and October. Check the current dates on the website. There is a charge for the test but there are bursaries available to help cover the costs for students who need financial support. The website has sample papers and tips on how to prepare.

MAT ⓘ

The Mathematics Admissions Test is used to test a candidate's mathematical ability. It is used by the University of Oxford's undergraduate degree courses in mathematics, computer science and associated joint degrees. Imperial College London also uses MAT for all its undergraduate mathematics course applicants. Most MAT candidates sit the test at their own school or college. There is no charge for sitting the test, although some centres may charge an administration fee. The website has practice tests and preparation guidance.

Admissions tests

- BMAT ⓘ
- ELAT ⓘ
- LNAT ⓘ
- MAT ⓘ
- STEP ⓘ
- Thinking Skills Assessment ⓘ
- UCAT ⓘ

STEP ⓘ

The Sixth Term Examination Paper is a mathematics examination designed to test their ability to study undergraduate mathematics. Universities use it differently in their admissions processes. The test consists of up to three paper-based examinations, each lasting three hours. It takes place in test centres across the UK. Your school or college might already be registered as a test centre. Depending on the university, candidates are usually required to sit one or two of the examinations. Tests are taken during June and there is a cost. The website has past papers.

Thinking Skills Assessment ⓘ

The Thinking Skills Assessment has been designed to help universities identify critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In the UK, there are three different thinking skills tests used by the universities of Cambridge and Oxford and University College London. The tests vary between institutions. There is no charge for the test, which can take place in test centres across the UK. The website has past papers.

UCAT ⓘ

The University Clinical Aptitude Test is used for some medicine and dentistry courses. It has been designed to test the mental abilities, attitudes and the professional behaviour required of new doctors and dentists. The test lasts two hours and includes subtests involving verbal reasoning, decision-making, quantitative reasoning, abstract reasoning and situational judgment. There is a cost associated with the test but there are bursaries available to cover the full test fee. Test centres are available nationwide. The website has practice tests and preparation guidance.

The universities that currently require these tests for some of their courses are listed on page 26. Details may change, so you are encouraged to check individual university websites.

Admissions tests

- BMAT ⓘ
- ELAT ⓘ
- LNAT ⓘ
- MAT ⓘ
- STEP ⓘ
- Thinking Skills Assessment ⓘ
- UCAT ⓘ

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Overview of the five main admissions tests

Universities	Tests				
	BMAT	LNAT	STEP	TSA	UCAT
University of Birmingham					✔
University of Bristol		✔	✱		✔
University of Cambridge	✔		✔	✔	
Cardiff University					✔
Durham University		✔			✔
University of Edinburgh					✔
University of Exeter					✔
University of Glasgow		✔			✔
Imperial College London	✔		✱		
King's College London		✔	✱		✔
University of Leeds	✔				
University of Liverpool					✔
London School of Economics and Political Science					
University of Manchester					✔
Newcastle University					✔
University of Nottingham		✔	✱		✔
University of Oxford	✔	✔		✔	
Queen Mary University of London					✔
Queen's University Belfast					✔
University of Sheffield					✔
University of Southampton			✱		✔
University College London	✔	✔	✱	✔	
University of Warwick			✔		✔[1]
University of York					✔

✱ May take results into account. STEP is used in different ways. Some universities see STEP as good preparation but recognise that many students may not have access to support to take these papers. STEP may therefore be considered in offers but will not be a requirement for all students. Some universities use STEP at confirmation and may consider STEP if a student has narrowly missed the grades for their offer. Check individual university websites for more information.

This table is subject to change; please check individual course and university websites.

[1] Postgraduate entry only.

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Universities use tests to give them more information about applicants and their potential for university study.

The tests can seem challenging, particularly when compared to school examinations. The nature of assessment and the grading can be very different. **Students should not be deterred if they struggle in comparison with their school examinations**.

It is important that students prepare for the tests. Practice tests are available on the test websites. **We strongly encourage students to practise as much as possible**. Students can perform better and to the best of their ability if they understand the type of questions they will be asked and the time they have available for each question or section.

Practise, practise, practise

Top tips on how to help your students prepare for the tests

1. Encourage your students to complete the practice papers under examination conditions. Timing is often important. Encourage your students to think about how they will approach the paper and manage their time.

2. Ask your students to read the guidance for candidates. They should understand the structure of the test. Parts of the test may be weighted differently. Some universities may also consider parts of the test more important than others. Understanding this can help your students allocate their time.

3. Check the deadlines, as some are very early in the year. Some tests will need to be taken before the UCAS application deadline. You may also find that some courses may not accept a student if they have not taken the test.

4. Encourage groups of students undertaking the same tests to form study groups to support each other.

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Section 6

How to prepare for interview

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How do I support my students who have interviews?

Leading universities may use interviews to help them decide which candidates should receive offers.

Purpose

There are different types of interview. The purpose ranges from testing students' subject knowledge to assessing whether they would be suitable for a particular profession. Some interviews may be used to select applicants for a course while others are used to help recruit applicants.

Universities may:

• interview for all courses

• have two interviews, one for for the course and another for the college/university

• interview for specific courses only

• use interviews where a student may benefit from the opportunity to discuss their application and provide further information

• use interviews as a chance for applicants to experience the university and course to make sure they make the right decision for them.

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Type

The structure of interviews can differ too. Some interviews will be with one or two members of staff focusing on the subject; others may be more general.

Some professional courses (like medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and nursing) may use multiple mini-interviews (MMIs). These comprise a series of short, structured interview stations that assess qualities required for that course and profession (for example, teamwork or communication skills).

Encourage your students to prepare for their interview

- Ask them to research the subject and gain a good understanding of the university.

- Ensure they use their personal statement for reference.

- Encourage them to practise with friends and family, and get used to answering questions about the subject, course and themselves.

See **page 33** ℹ️ for our top tips.

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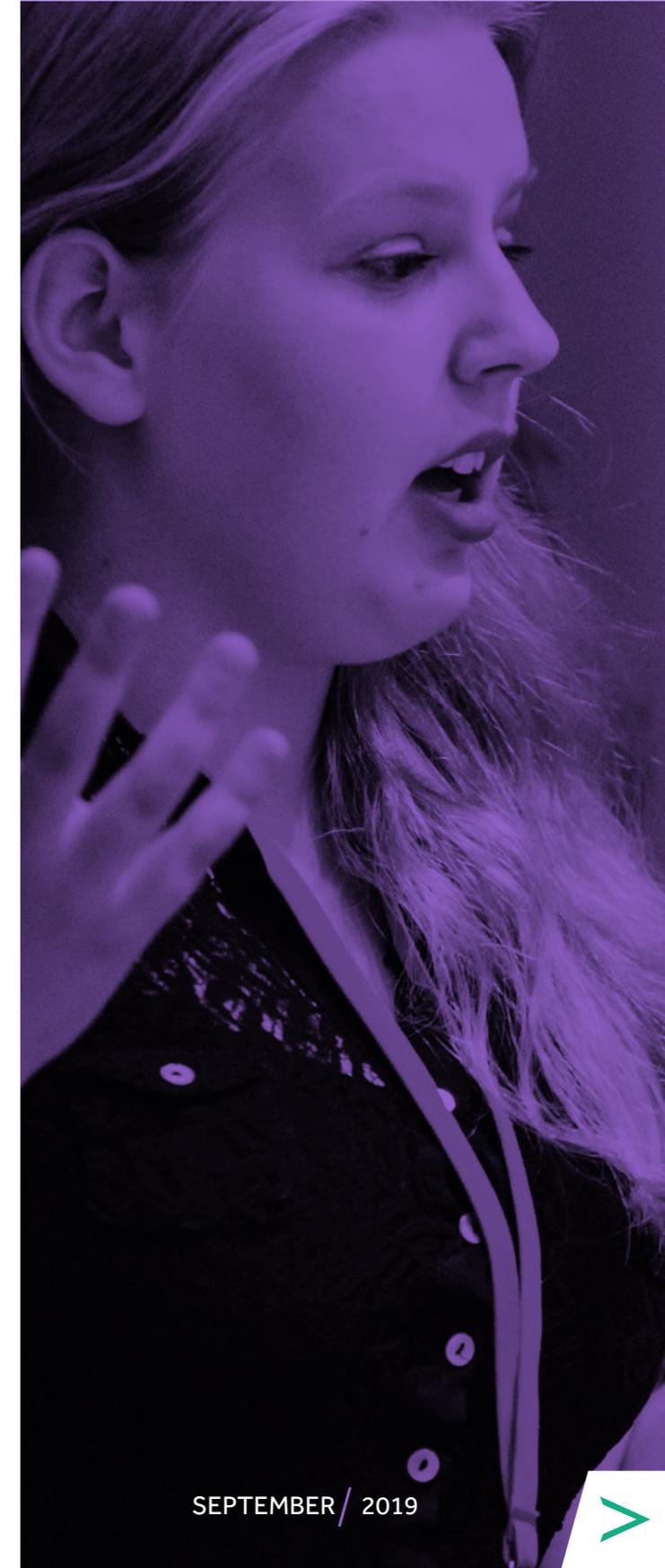
Preparing for interview

There are some things that your students can do before an interview that will make them feel more confident.

The most important thing is that the student is as relaxed as possible so they can be themselves. This can be difficult, and we link to some useful resources in the right-hand margin to help your students reduce their anxiety.

Many universities running interviews have interview tips and advice on their websites; some even have films showing what the interview may be like. Encourage your students to look at these so they know what to expect.

STAR technique

The STAR (**Situation**, **Task**, **Action**, **Result**) technique can help students provide well-focused answers to questions in an interview.

- **Situation**: In answer to the question, students should begin by very briefly presenting a recent challenge or situation in which they found themselves.
- **Task**: Students should briefly explain the task and what they set out to achieve.
- **Action**: What did the student do? The interviewer will be looking to find out what action the student took, why and what the alternatives were.
- **Results**: What was the outcome of the student's actions? What was achieved through the actions taken and did they meet the objectives? What was learned from this experience and has this learning been used since?

For more information on STAR, visit **a how-to guide on the Guardian website** ⓘ.

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Useful resources to help banish interview nerves:

- Ted talk on body language and power poses ⓘ
- Guardian article on boosting confidence for an interview ⓘ
- Tips from the NHS website on breathing techniques ⓘ

For helpful preparation support visit:

- The University of Oxford's website ⓘ
- The University of Cambridge's website ⓘ
- Which? University ⓘ

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Preparing for interview

Possible questions

Your students are likely to be asked questions that:

- are related to the course they have applied for
- ask them to expand on information in their application form.

Encourage your students to think about questions that might be asked and how they would answer them. The questions could include:

- Why do you want to study at this university?
- Why have you chosen this subject/course?
- What are your areas of interest in this subject?

Practise the interview

Encourage your students to practise answering questions about their subject and wider interests with their friends, family and teachers. You may wish to ask your colleagues to give your students a practice interview so they can gain experience of expressing their ideas and opinions to someone who does not know them so well.

However, interviewers will not want to hear prepared answers. Over-rehearsed answers can be counterproductive if the student is preoccupied with recalling set speeches on general topics rather than listening to the interviewers' questions and responding accordingly.

The subject

In some interviews, your students will be asked to talk about the subject they have applied to study. Encourage your students to reread their personal statement, any academic projects it mentions, and any written work they have submitted.

Encourage them to think about topics relevant to the subject that particularly interest them. Where possible, they should try to reference the author and/or title of publications they have read.

Encourage your students to read around the subject. Section two of this guidebook, **Helping your students prepare** ⓘ provides some useful tips.

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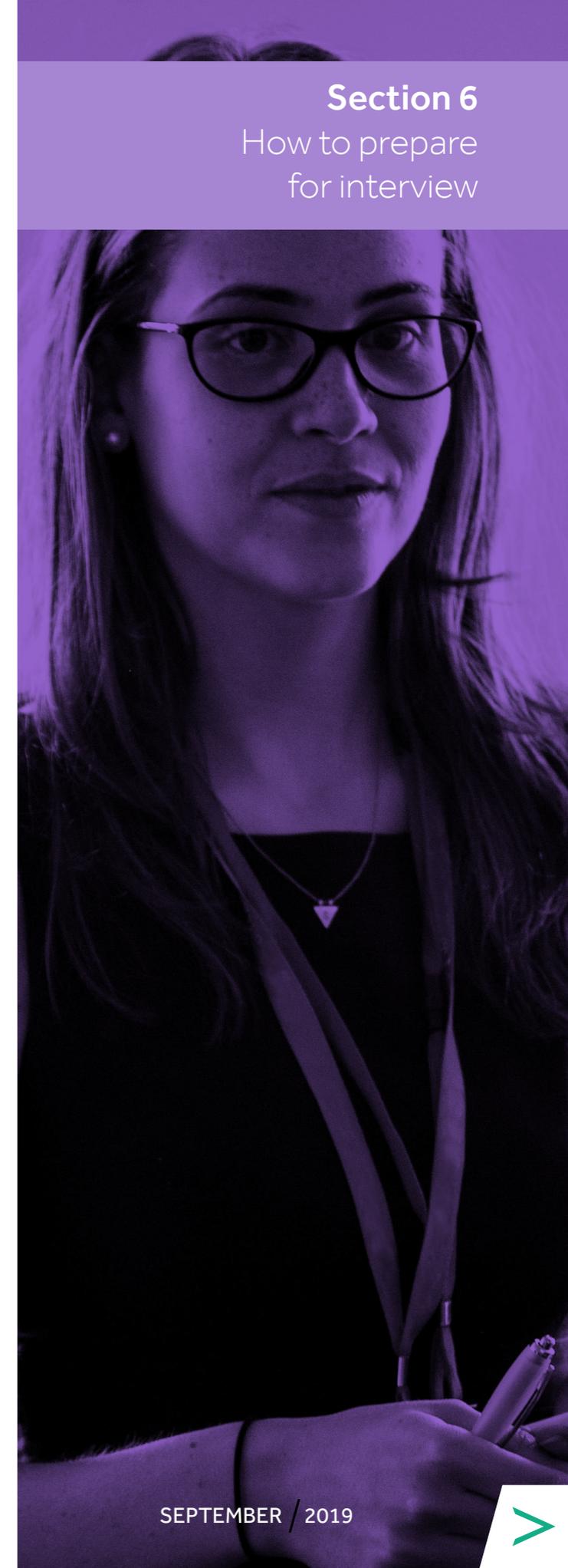
Top tips on preparing for interview

1. Ask your students to reread their personal statement. Interviewers may use this as a basis for questions and ask them to expand on their statements.

2. Ask students to research the course. Encourage them to read up on the modules offered, teaching and assessment methods, and placement opportunities.

3. Ask your students to remind themselves why they chose that university and location. Encourage them to look at the university's facilities, the research it is known for, and what the town or city is like.

4. Make sure students continue to read around the subject. In particular, ask your students to be aware of recent developments and news.

5. Work with students to prepare and practise their responses to standard questions, such as 'Why do you want to study this subject?', 'What topics particularly interest you?', 'Why did you apply to do this subject here?'

6. Ask your students to speak to others who have had interviews for that course. Their interview may be different but it may give them some useful insights and reassurance.

7. Set up mock interviews at your school or college. It is not necessary to pay for this service; instead, encourage friends and family to be involved. It is important to encourage students to become comfortable with expressing their views and talking about themselves.

8. Make sure students know where the interview is and how to get there. Encourage them to arrive in plenty of time, wear clean, tidy and comfortable clothes and have a drink of water before they go in. This can make a big difference on the day and help interviewees stay relaxed. Encourage your students to read up on breathing techniques and methods for relaxation. The **NHS website** ⬆ has tips on breathing techniques.

9. Students may be asked if they have any questions. This is nothing to worry about. Encourage them to think of some questions before the interview. These do not have to be based on the subject but could be more about the course content or teaching style.

10. Encourage your students to be confident in their knowledge and abilities. They have got this far – they should be proud of themselves.

It is very important for you to get feedback from your students when they return from interviews. This will help you support your students in any areas they may need to practise before the next interview. It will also help you develop your own bank of interview questions and to be aware of any issues or concerns.

Ask your students to rehearse the standard questions:

- Why do you want to study this subject?

- What topics particularly interest you?

- Why did you apply to do this subject here?

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Further information ⓘ

Admissions testing service
www.admissionstestingservice.org

Advancing Access
www.advancingaccess.ac.uk

BMAT (Biomedical Admissions Test)
www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/bmat

Bright Knowledge
www.brightknowledge.org

ELAT (English Literature Admissions Test)
www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/elat/about-elat

Future Learn
www.futurelearn.com

Government's website for volunteer placements
www.gov.uk/volunteering/find-volunteer-placements

Guardian article on boosting confidence for an interview
www.theguardian.com/careers/2015/aug/19/seven-ways-to-boost-confidence-at-a-job-interview

LNAT (Law National Aptitude Test)
www.lnat.ac.uk

MAT (Mathematics Admissions Test)
www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/mat/about-mat

STEP (Sixth Term Examination Paper)
www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/step/about-step

TED talk on body language and power poses
www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are

Thinking Skills Assessment
www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/thinking-skills-assessment

UCAS key dates
www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/apply-and-track/key-dates

UCAT (University Clinical Aptitude Test)
www.ucat.ac.uk

Which? University interview preparation tips
university.which.co.uk/advice/ucas-application/university-interviews-how-to-prepare

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University interview websites

Interview tips provided by some of our Advancing Access university partners are listed below.
Please note this is not an exhaustive list and you should check individual university websites for
further information.

University of Bristol
www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/resourcing/
practicalguidance/selection/interviewtechnique.
html

University of Cambridge
www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/
interviews

King's College London
www.kcl.ac.uk/campuslife/services/careers/
Resources/Application-Process/
Interviews.aspx

University of Leeds
https://medhealth.leeds.ac.uk/info/202/
applying_for_the_mbchb/84/
the_selection_process

University of Nottingham
blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/
medschoollife/2016/01/07/medicineinterviews

University of Oxford
www.ox.ac.uk/news/2015-10-12-oxford-
interview-questions-explained

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University admissions policies 🔝

University of Birmingham
www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/colleges/
professional/external/admissions/admissions-
services.aspx

University of Bristol
www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/
policies/admissions

University of Cambridge
www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/
decisions/admissions-policy

Cardiff University
www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/students-
applicants/admissions-policies

Durham University
www.dur.ac.uk/undergraduate/study/apply/policy

University of Edinburgh
www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/admissions-
advice/admissions-policy/policies

University of Exeter
www.exeter.ac.uk/undergraduate/applications/
policy

University of Glasgow
www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/
entryrequirements

Imperial College London
www.imperial.ac.uk/about/governance/
academic-governance/academic-policy/
admissions

King's College London
www.kcl.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/
policies-and-guidance/index.aspx

University of Leeds
www.leeds.ac.uk/info/128005/applying/30/
how_to_apply

University of Liverpool
www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/
applying/admissions-policy

**London School of Economics and Political
Science**
www.lse.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/
howtoapply/ugadmissionpolicydataprotection.
aspx

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University admissions policies ⬆

University of Manchester
www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/
applications/after-you-apply/assessing-
application

Newcastle University
www.ncl.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/
admissions_policies

University of Nottingham
www.nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/applying/
ourpolicies.aspx

University of Oxford
www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/
applying-to-oxford/decisions/common-
framework

Queen Mary University of London
www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/entry

Queen's University Belfast
www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/mrci/
admissions/undergraduateadmissions/
undergraduateadmissionspolicy

University of Sheffield
www.sheffield.ac.uk/undergraduate/policies/
admissions

University of Southampton
www.southampton.ac.uk/studentadmin/
admissions/admissions-policies/index.page

University College London
www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/academic-manual/c1/taught-
admissions/application

University of Warwick
www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/
apply/admissionsstatement

University of York
www.york.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying/
entry/policies

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