



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London



St Mary's Guide to Applying to University

Undergraduate Guide

Contents

This guide contains everything you need to know about applying to university through UCAS, including expert tips from our friendly schools and colleges team, as well as advice from current students on writing a standout personal statement. We also provide a detailed breakdown of the student finance system, explain contextual admissions, and outline eligibility for the Disabled Students' Allowance.

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Applying to university

To apply to study at a UK university, you need to submit an application through the Universities and Colleges Application Service (UCAS).

Step 1: Register with the UCAS hub

To register you'll need to complete a few questions, for example, what level of study you're interested in.

If this is your first degree, you'll be looking for 'Undergraduate' level of study.

Step 2: Start your application

Complete all the 'personal information' questions and make sure you enter your first, middle and last name(s) exactly as they appear on your official documents (i.e. passport, birth certificate or driving licence).

Step 3: Select your course choices

You can apply for up to five university courses. This can be at five different universities, or you can apply for multiple courses at the same university.



Step 4: Write your application

This is the most time consuming and potentially challenging part of the application because you have to sell yourself, which doesn't always come naturally!

Remember, this is your opportunity to tell the universities you're applying to why you're interested in the course and what makes you a great candidate.

What you need to know:

- **UCAS have changed the personal statement format for students applying to university for 2026 entry.** They have broken the application down into three clear sections, removing the need to write an introduction or conclusion. They've done this to level the playing field.
- You can only write **one application for all five of your university choices**, so it's important to focus on your interest in the course rather than specific universities or university locations.
- You have **three questions to answer** to demonstrate why you're a great candidate for your chosen universities:
 1. Why do you want to study this course or subject?
 2. How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
 3. What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?
- You have a **maximum of 4,000 characters** (with a minimum of 350 per question).

Our top tips for personal statement writing

To help you get off to a strong start, we've put together our top tips for writing a stand out personal statement along with common pitfalls to avoid.

Use examples to back yourself up

To make sure you sound confident. We recommend using strong examples to demonstrate:

- Your interest in the course;
- What skills you have that will make you successful on the programme;
- What experiences you've had that relate to the subject.

It's great to start by bullet pointing examples for each question, so you aren't starting with a blank piece of paper. Even if you don't think your hobbies or experience are relevant to the course you're applying for, write them down because you'll have developed transferrable skills that you can apply to your chosen degree programmes. Examples of these skills could be teamwork, time management or academic research/essay writing skills.

If you want to gain academic evidence for your UCAS application, come along to a St Mary's Masterclass Day where you'll get to experience workshops in the subject area you're interested in.

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Use a PEE structure

It's important to link each piece of evidence back to the course you're applying for and you can do this by using a 'point, evidence, explain' structure.

Get someone to proof read your application

Feedback from your teachers, friends and family can be really useful; they might think of things you've missed out and pick up on any spelling or grammatical errors you haven't noticed.



I would say that the most important thing when writing your personal statement is to give examples of when you have demonstrated the skills or interests you are talking about. For example, if you want to demonstrate your passion for a certain subject, give an example of a book you have read on that subject and say what you found interesting about it. This can really make your personal statement stand out, as you are going beyond just listing your interests/skills by providing evidence of how you have applied them.

Emily Storr Psychology BSc (Hons)



Things to avoid

Listing the subjects you're currently studying and grades you've received

This information will already be on your UCAS application, so don't waste characters by including this in your personal statement.

Using unnatural language

Universities want to hear your voice in your application, so it's important you use natural language.

Your application should be written formally but you should avoid using flowery language that sounds unnatural and takes up your character count.

Using too many examples without explaining them in full

It's important to use examples, but it's better to use one strong example and explain it properly rather than throwing in lots of examples that leave the reader with questions.

Remember not to put pressure on yourself to write something perfect on the first draft.

Step 5: Submit your application

The deadline to apply for most university courses is the end of January. Universities can make offers any time from the moment you submit your application up until the middle of May. You can keep track of your offers on the UCAS Hub.

During this time, universities will be holding events for offer holders and applicants which give you the chance to meet current students, experience subject taster sessions, explore the University campus and find out if it's the place for you.

You may be invited for an interview or audition for some courses. For information on how to ace your St Mary's interview or audition, check out our interview guide.

St Mary's online personal statement creator

Use our personal statement creator to get started and receive valuable feedback from one of our friendly schools and colleges officers at www.stmarys.ac.uk/application-process/undergraduate/guides/personal-statement-creator.aspx.

Student finance

How much does university in England cost?

£9,535 for full-time students
£7,145 for part-time students
£11,100 for accelerated degrees

What student loans are available in England?

In England students have access to two main types of loans to support their studies:

- **Tuition Fee Loan**
- **Maintenance Loan**

The **Tuition Fee Loan** covers the cost of your course and your place at university. Whereas the **Maintenance Loan** provides financial support for your living expenses, helping with costs such as accommodation, food, and travel.

How do I apply?

Step 1: Set up an online account with Student Finance England

Step 2: Log in and complete the online application.

Step 3: Include your household income if needed. Your parent, carer or partner will be asked to confirm these details.

Step 4: Send in proof of identity if needed.

Top Tip: Apply as soon as applications open as they take at least six weeks to be processed.

Important information:

- If you apply and are eligible for a Tuition Fee Loan, this will be paid directly to your university by the Student Loans Company.
- Your Maintenance Loan will be based on where you're studying and your household income.
- This is paid into your bank account by the government in three instalments during the academic year.

Use the student finance calculator to estimate how much student loan and extra funding you could get – www.gov.uk/student-finance-calculator





Repayments

- You only start repaying your loans after you've left university.
- Then you only repay if you earn over £25,000 a year.
- The amount you repay is based on how much you earn not how much you borrowed.
- The loan is wiped after 40 years.

Dependents' allowance

If you're a parent or have adult or child dependants you're financially responsible for, there are a number of grants and allowances available:

- Parents' Learning Allowance (PLA)
- Childcare Grant (CCG)
- Adult Dependants' Grant (ADG)

How to apply

You can apply for a Dependents' Grant as part of your main student finance application.



University offers

What are the different types of offers?

Conditional offer: This guarantees you a place at that university if you meet the conditions of your offer. This usually involves achieving certain grades or UCAS points, i.e. 96-112 points.

Unconditional offer: This means you've successfully secured your place at that university. This would usually be for students who already have their results. However, some universities may offer unconditional places to students who have not yet received their final grades.

Contextual admissions

St Mary's University actively encourages applications from a wide range of backgrounds and, to support this, we take several factors into account when we are deciding whether to offer students a place on one of our courses.

As well as looking at your application, we also take into account:

- Educational information
- Socio-economic background data
- Personal circumstances

This information supports us in recognising a student's achievements, allowing us to identify their potential to succeed in the context of their background and experience, rather than simply by their exam results.

Individualised offers may then be made on the basis of this process.

Accepting your offers

Once you've heard back from all of the universities you applied to, you'll need to decide on:

- **Your firm choice:** your first-choice university
- **Your insurance choice:** your second-choice university

UCAS will give you a deadline for when this needs to be completed by.

Results Day

Results day can be nerve wracking but there are lots of things you can do to prepare which will hopefully put your mind at ease.

What can I do to prepare?

- If you're worried you might not meet the conditions of your offers or are looking to change course/university, you can research alternative options through Clearing. We recommend making a list of alternative degree and university choices with their contact details, so you can easily give them a call on Results Day.
- You can even register to hear from some universities on Results Day, meaning you don't need to call them because they'll call you. This is something St Mary's offers.
- Make sure you have your qualifications to hand as well as your UCAS and Clearing numbers, as universities will ask you for these.



What is Clearing?

Universities advertise all the remaining spaces on their courses during Clearing, giving you the opportunity to explore alternative options.

When does Clearing start and finish?

People often think Clearing starts on Results Day, but it typically **starts in early July and finishes in October**. This means you can start your research over a month before, and even speak to universities before you receive your grades.

You can apply to university through Clearing if:

- You haven't applied to university through UCAS that year.
- You're not already holding an offer from a university.
- You didn't meet the conditions of your offers.

- You decline your firm choice because you've changed your mind about the university or course you originally applied to.

Our top tips for Clearing

Be prepared and make sure you're available on Results Day to speak to universities.

Try not to panic. You don't have to accept your Clearing offers straight away, so take the time to consider whether the university and course is right for you. Universities will also run Open Days on or around Clearing, meaning you can tour the campus, meet academics who teach on the course, and speak to current students.

Make sure you seek support from your current school or college, friends and family.

Disabled students' allowance

The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is a financial grant that works to break down barriers to higher education.



Many students don't realise they qualify for the DSA. In this section we've outlined eligibility criteria, the type of support available, and how to apply.

What is DSA?

- It's a grant you don't need to repay
- It funds support that will help you succeed at university
- It is based solely on your needs and not your household income

Who's eligible?

Anyone who has a disability, impairment or condition that has an impact on their ability to study. This may include:

- A visual impairment
- A hearing impairment
- Physical or mobility difficulties
- A long-term health condition such as diabetes, asthma or chronic fatigue
- A mental health condition
- A specific learning difference such as dyslexia or dyspraxia
- An autistic spectrum condition

- A neurological condition such as epilepsy or Tourette syndrome
- A neurodevelopmental condition such as ADHD

Support can come in a variety of forms, for example:

- Computers, printers and scanners.
- Specialist software, e.g. voice recognition, mind mapping or screen reading software
- Specialist furniture
- Non-medical support e.g. sighted guides, specialist mentors, mobility trainers, communication support workers or British Sign Language interpreters
- Specialist tuition e.g. study skills support for dyslexic students
- Travel

How to apply

- You can disclose your support needs and any impairments or conditions you may have when you apply via UCAS. Alternatively, you can contact your chosen universities directly if you wish to discuss your needs in more detail. This will ensure that your university can support you at every stage of the application process.
- You can submit your DSA as part of your student finance application.
- Then you'll need to arrange a 'needs assessment'. This is completely free and can be conducted online, over the phone, near your home, or near your university.
- The assessment is confidential and is conducted in a relaxed, informal and supportive environment, giving you the space to openly discuss your needs.

- Your assessor will then provide a report outlining what support they recommend you receive, and Student Finance England will let you know what support you have been awarded.



When I told the assessor what I struggled with, she told me I could have dyslexia. One month later, I had a diagnosis from St Mary's University and support in place. There were also many things I was given in terms of support for the conditions I was already diagnosed with that helped me, that I didn't know were available to me. It helps to ease into the conversation, talk about how you're doing, what course you are going to study, what you are currently studying, then start to talk about how you study, and what you struggle with, what are the barriers between you and doing the best you can.

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Creative and Professional Writing BA (Hons)



Any questions?

If you have any questions about applying for DSA, please don't hesitate to reach out to the Wellbeing team at wellbeing@stmarys.ac.uk.

Good luck!

If you have any questions, please reach out to us at
schools.colleges@stmarys.ac.uk

You can also visit our website at
www.stmarys.ac.uk

where you can chat to current students on our live
chat from Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm.



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