
PERSONAL STATEMENTS & APPLYING TO UNI

The smart way to choosing your first and in

By Andy Gardner (Careers Adviser) - 22 April 2013



Making sensible first and insurance choices on your UCAS form will strengthen your odds of getting a place at university and reduce your stress levels on results day. Here's our step-by-step guide.

When you're applying for university courses, there are two main decision points. First, you'll need to decide on up to five courses to apply for, then you'll need to make a final decision on which two (from the offers you've receive) will be your first (firm) and back-up (insurance) choices.

1. Making your five UCAS course choices – top tips

Always refer to the entry requirements

Are your choices all achievable? It's a good idea to have a mix of ambitious, on target and safe course choices based on your predicted grades.

If you're predicted to achieve a BBC at A-level, for instance, try and pick five UCAS choices with entry requirements ranging from around BBB through to CCC. That will mean you'll be able to use your insurance choice wisely later on and have a 'best case scenario' option available if you feel over the course of your A2s that you could achieve better grades than you've been predicted.

If all your five choices are asking for the same entry requirements, it normally means you won't have any insurance choice if you don't get the grades later on. It also means you're increasing your chances of not receiving any offers, if the entry requirements are the same - or higher - than your predictions. However, check the 'most popular subjects students studied before attending' section for the courses you're considering on Which? University. It could be that one of your choices has a history of accepting significantly lower grades than what it asks for and could still act as an insurance choice.

Keep your options open

Think it's a waste of time to choose courses with lower entry requirements? Ok – but it's a risky tactic, and could mean you're left high and dry later down the line if things don't work out.

For more inspiration when picking alternative courses, try looking at related or joint honours courses at a university you're keen on, or take a fresh look into a uni you've not considered (or perhaps not even heard of) before – there are more than 300 unis and colleges to choose from!

Research, research, research

You can read about courses in detail on the university and UCAS websites, and compare different courses right here on Which? University. Things to compare include:

- course modules.
- student satisfaction scores.
- graduate employment stats.
- the location and type of university.

See our guide on top ways to compare courses for more ideas on what to look for.

Choose carefully

Pick five course choices based on places you'd actually, realistically, be happy to go to – not two or three you like and a couple of 'filler' courses you've not properly researched.

You don't know which universities will go on to make you an offer, and can't guarantee that your favourites will come back with the positive news you want.

2. Finalising your firm and insurance places – top tips

Once you've applied (and potentially been along an interview or taken an entry test), your chosen universities will come back to you with a decision, usually by the end of March:

Unconditional offer – about 15% of offers made by universities are unconditional. These are usually made when you're applying with actual (rather than estimated) grades.

Conditional offer – good news. Assuming your exams go well and you meet the grade conditions that have been set, you've got a place.

Rejection – a knock back. Disappointing, but there's still your other four options...

Your insurance choice normally needs to have lower entry requirements

According to UCAS, 42% of applicants hold an insurance choice with conditions which are harder or equal to the conditions for their first choice. This means that if you miss your grades, you won't have an offer to fall back on. It's not an 'insurance' choice if it doesn't offer you a back-up. If your firm and insurance choices are equal at least try to choose an insurance choice which has a history of accepting lower grades as shown in the 'most popular subjects students studied before attending' section of your courses on Which? University.

However, do bear in mind that your insurance choice has to be somewhere you'd be happy to go to if you don't get your firm choice. If you don't get the grades for your firm choice but do meet the conditions for your insurance, you'll be committed to your insurance choice.

If there's only one course offer you'd be happy accepting, then don't feel you have to put an insurance choice down - it's optional. Come Results Day, if you miss out on your firm choice you'll be able to go straight into Clearing.

There's always Extra, Adjustment or Clearing

These can offer more opportunities to have another go within the UCAS cycle if your initial choices don't work out:

- If you don't get any offers: try again with Extra
- If you don't meet the criteria of your firm or insurance choices: go through Clearing (or try again next year)
- If you do better than expected and want to look at different options: consider Adjustment

Next:

- Explore universities and colleges - find out what students are saying about accommodation, facilities and cost of living
- Find the course that's right for you - try our personalised course search (we feature 30,000+ undergrad courses listed on Ucas).

SHARE THIS PAGE

0

BROWSE CATEGORIES

GCSES & EARLY CHOICES

A-LEVELS, BTECS & HIGHERS

FINDING THE RIGHT COURSE