

UCAS Personal Statement

A Parent's Guide

Understanding the New Three-Question Format & How You Can Help

1. Why It Matters

2. The 3 Questions

3. Model Answers

4. How You Can Help

5. Timeline & Next Steps

35-40 Minute Session | Your Presenter

Session Overview



0:00-0:05

Welcome & Why It Matters

Value, admissions context, the new 3-question format



0:15-0:25

What Great Answers Look Like

Model answers: weak vs strong, for all three questions



0:30-0:37

How You Can Help

Practical ways to support without writing it for them



0:05-0:15

The Three Questions

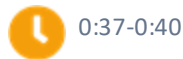
What Q1, Q2 and Q3 each ask -- and why they matter



0:25-0:30

Common Pitfalls

Mistakes to watch for when you read a draft



0:37-0:40

Timeline & Q&A

Key deadlines and your questions

Why Does It Matter?

4,000

characters max -- ALL you get to make your case

3 questions

brand new structure from 2026 entry onwards

1 statement

goes to ALL five university choices simultaneously

What admissions tutors are looking for:

- ✓ Genuine, specific academic passion -- not enthusiasm claims, but demonstrated curiosity
- ✓ Evidence you can think at university level: reflection, analysis, independent research
- ✓ Authentic voice -- they read hundreds of statements and spot templates instantly
- ✓ A coherent narrative across all three questions that makes a compelling case for YOU

The New UCAS Format (2026 Entry Onwards)

Three separate questions -- each with its own focus and character allocation

Q1



Why do you want to study this course?

- Your motivations for choosing this subject
- Key inspirations: books, talks, role models, moments
- How the course aligns with your future plans
- **FOCUS: Genuine curiosity & clear academic passion -- NOT life history**

Q2



How have your studies prepared you?

- Relevant aspects of A-levels, Highers, IB or equivalent
- Specific topics explored and why they matter
- Analytical or research skills you have developed
- **FOCUS: REFLECT -- don't list subjects; explain what you learned**

Q3



What else have you done to prepare?

- Work experience, internships, summer schools, taster sessions
- Volunteering, clubs, relevant extracurricular activities
- Transferable skills: independence, time management, subject skills
- **FOCUS: How outside-classroom experiences complement your studies**

Q1 -- Why do you want to study this course or subject?

What to include & how to answer well



Your motivations

Go beyond 'I've always loved it'. What SPECIFIC moment, text, conversation or discovery first ignited genuine intellectual curiosity about this field?



Key inspirations

Name real sources: a book that changed your thinking, a podcast, a lecture, a researcher you follow. Specificity = credibility.



Future alignment

How does this course connect to what you want to do -- or to questions you still want answered? Link passion to direction.

Watch out for:

- ✗ 'I have always been passionate about...' -- delete and replace with a specific incident or text
- ✗ Life history ('from a young age...') -- tutors want intellectual curiosity, not biography
- ✗ Career goals only ('I want to become a doctor') -- WHY this subject academically, not just professionally

Q1 -- Model Answers: Weak vs Strong



WEAK

"I have always been passionate about psychology ever since I was young. I love understanding why people behave the way they do. I have also watched many documentaries and find the human mind fascinating. I believe studying psychology will help me achieve my goal of becoming a therapist."

Problems: Vague 'always passionate' claim * No specific source named * Career goal only (therapist) * No intellectual engagement with the subject * Could apply to any applicant



STRONG

"Reading Kahneman's Thinking, Fast and Slow dismantled my assumption that human behaviour is mostly rational. His research on cognitive bias left me questioning how unreliable our intuitions really are -- and whether that unreliability is hardwired or shaped by experience. It is that tension, between the biological and the social, that draws me to psychology and to understanding how environmental stressors alter decision-making in clinical populations."

Why it works: Specific book named * Prior assumption challenged * Identifies a core intellectual tension in the field * Links passion to a specific academic question * Personal and distinctive

Q2 -- How have your qualifications and studies prepared you?

Reflection is the key -- not listing

The difference between listing and reflecting:

LISTING: "I study Biology, Chemistry and Maths at A-level." **REFLECTING:** "Studying the biochemistry of enzyme inhibition showed me how molecular-scale events can have system-wide consequences -- a principle I want to explore further at degree level."

Relevant topics from your subjects

Which specific units, topics or projects in your A-levels/IB are most relevant to your chosen degree? Discuss these -- not just the subject name.

Skills you have developed

Extended essays, lab reports, debates, research projects, coursework -- what analytical or research skills did these build, and why do they matter for your degree?

What you learned, not just what you studied

The key question: 'What did this topic teach me about the field I want to enter?' Connect your current learning to university-level thinking.

Key question to ask f: "What has my study of [topic] taught me about [field], and why does that matter?"

Q3 -- What else have you done to prepare outside of education?

Transferable skills & subject-relevant experiences

1

Work experience / internships

What did you observe, learn, or question? Not just 'I shadowed a doctor' but what that experience showed you about the field.

2

Summer schools / taster days

What specific content did you engage with? What questions did it raise? What confirmed or challenged your interest?

3

Volunteering / community roles

What skills did you develop? Link directly to the course -- e.g. communication, analysis, leadership, empathy under pressure.

4

Clubs / societies / competitions

Subject-relevant only. Maths Olympiad for Maths. Debating for Law. Creative portfolio for Art. Always explain the link.

Remember: Q3 is NOT a CV dump. Every item must connect to transferable skills OR subject-specific preparation. Quality over quantity.

Model Answers: Q2 & Q3

Q2

"Studying the sociology of crime for my A-level extended essay required me to engage with primary research for the first time -- analysing police statistics alongside ethnographic accounts forced me to question whose perspective shapes the data we trust. This methodological tension, between quantitative patterns and lived experience, is precisely what I want to explore at degree level. My coursework on labelling theory challenged me to think about how systemic structures shape individual outcomes, and I found myself going beyond the syllabus to read Becker's Outsiders."

Why it works: Names a specific project * Shows methodological thinking * Goes beyond the syllabus * Connects formal study to degree-level questions

Q3

"My weekly volunteering at a local food bank gave me something no textbook could: I saw directly how welfare policy translates -- or fails to translate -- into daily life. Conversations with clients about benefit sanctions prompted me to re-read the material I had covered on poverty and social policy, this time with a more critical eye. Managing the stock inventory also developed my ability to handle data under pressure, a skill I recognise as essential for the quantitative methods modules in my chosen course."

Why it works: Specific experience * Links back to academic content * Names a transferable skill * Connects directly to the course * No CV-dumping

Common Errors -- What to Watch For in a Draft



Using Q3 material in Q1

Q1/Q3

Q1 is ONLY about why you love the subject academically. Work experience belongs in Q3.



Listing subjects without reflection

Q2

Q2 is not a timetable. Explain what each subject taught you about your field.



The CV dump

Q3

Q3 should pick 2-3 experiences and analyse them -- not list everything you've ever done.



'I have always been passionate...'

Q1

Start with a specific text, discovery, or moment instead. Demonstrate passion; don't claim it.



Naming a specific university

All

Your statement goes to all five choices. Never name one -- it alienates the rest.



Copy-paste or AI-generated text

All

UCAS plagiarism software flags it. Your voice is irreplaceable -- and detectable.

How You Can Help at Home



Ask, don't write it for them

ASK

Prompt with open questions -- 'What's the most interesting thing you've learned this year?' -- rather than supplying lines yourself.



Read for voice, not content

READ

Judge whether it sounds like them, not whether it lists every achievement. Authenticity matters more than polish.



Push gently for specifics

PROBE

If you hear 'I've always loved...', ask 'Can you give me an example?' Vague claims are the most common weakness.



Expect multiple drafts

PATIENCE

A rough first attempt is completely normal, not a warning sign. Redrafting is how a strong statement gets built.



Protect their voice

DON'T EDIT

Resist polishing the language into your own words -- admissions tutors read hundreds of these and spot the difference.



Help them build in time

PLAN

Work backwards from the deadline together so the final week isn't a rush. See the timeline coming up next.

Next Steps

This week

Ask what excites them most about their subject -- that conversation is often the seed of a strong Q1.

Week 2

Encourage a rough first draft of all three answers. Their teacher will already be reading and reviewing drafts in school throughout this process -- your review at home is on top of that, not instead of it.

Week 3

Read the draft together. Ask the 'Q focus check': does each answer stay focused on that question, and only that question?

Week 4

Final proofread together before they submit. By now it will have been through several rounds of feedback at school as well as at home.

15 October

UCAS Deadline: Oxford, Cambridge, Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science. This is fixed -- do not miss it.

13 January

UCAS Deadline: All other UK universities. Submit well in advance -- do not leave it to the last day.

Questions?

Three questions. Their story. Your support.

- ✓ Encourage redrafting -- multiple drafts are normal, not a sign of struggling
- ✓ For individual support, your child's sixth form tutor or UCAS coordinator is the first point of contact
- ✓ Official UCAS guidance: ucas.com/applying (new format from 2026 entry)

Good luck. Their future university is waiting for their answer.