



Choosing the right uni – a cut-out and keep guide

Posted on December 20, 2010 by Rach Read



One of the comments on our amazing [exam revision guide](#) mentioned that it was a bit of a gap between that article and the other education-related guide we had about [surviving uni](#). ‘I need help choosing a uni – where are you with that, Teentoday?’ cried lalalala. Ask and ye shall receive, for here’s our foolproof guide to choosing a uni that’s epic enough to deserve you.

Firstly, choosing what university you want to study at is closely linked to the four little letters that will probably take over much of your sixth-form existence pre-exam – no, not [PROM](#), UCAS. Alas, we deem the UCAS form worthy of its own article (and who knows when we might create that, given that we received lalalala’s cry for help a whole month ago) so this one just covers the tentative steps towards working out what places to type into those all-important five slots.

1. You’ve got mail

If you’re the kind of person that likes receiving actual post through your letterbox and not just an alert on your desktop, then this step is actually quite enjoyable. Start sending off for prospectuses from all unis that take your fancy – just fill in your details on their website and within days, a glossy brochure filled with photos of smiling students will plop onto your doormat. Alternatively, if you feel guilty about all the trees being chopped down in your quest to get free post, head to your local library or sniff around the Careers department of your school for copies.

2. Do your research

Now read them. I know – it’s hardly on a par with *Twilight* for quality bedtime reading. Yes, these prospectuses will all be trying to convince you that their chosen uni is the best thing since Lady Gaga’s *Telephone* video but amongst all the PR guff, you can glean some real bits of info. Is the uni in the city or out in the sticks? Does the social life begin and end at the doors of the Student Union or is there decent nightlife elsewhere? Is it largely campus-based (the halls of residence and most teaching facilities are on one site) or are places dotted all over the city? Do you like the looks of catered accommodation, self-catered or would you actually prefer to stay at home, in which case, is said uni near enough to make this feasible? Do you actually want to leave the house at all (in which case, say hello to distance learning)? And most importantly, **do they offer your course?**

3. Choose your course

Oh my, we really didn’t know what we were in for when we decided to write this article... Deciding on a course to study could be the grounds for yet another article, but we’ll try to give you the basics now – remember when [you narrowed your subjects down for GCSE](#) and then again for A-Level? Well, now’s the time to narrow it down to a single lucky one. Try to pick a subject you think you’ll enjoy (you’re gonna be spending 3-4 years of your life on it, the omens aren’t great if you hate it before you’ve even got there) and one that has some vague connection to your A-Levels; universities will not be impressed if you apply for Maths with A-Levels in Media Studies, Art and Ancient Greek, however great your grades are!

Not all universities offer all courses – Bath University, for instance, doesn’t offer much in the way of Arts subjects – and even if places do have the course, the actual components of the degree (i.e. what you’ll learn) can be very different depending on the institution. If you’re interested in Joint Honours (i.e. two subjects for the price of one), all universities offer differing combinations, so check carefully. Similarly, vocational courses (i.e. not the traditional subjects you do at school but related to a specific occupation) are more specialised and may be harder to hunt down, especially if you are looking for ones accredited by their relevant organisation (e.g. NCTJ accredited courses for journalism).

Incidentally, I’m not really one for ranking tables but if the parents do keep wafting The Times Good University Guide under your noses, the course-specific tables and those that examine graduate employment are far more useful than the 5-page long general whopper.

4. Check the requirements

You’ve got a vague idea what course you want to do (and the UCAS form does give you five chances!) but it’s no good applying if you don’t meet the grade. Literally. If your predicted grades are BBC but the prospectus tells you that entry-requirements are AAB, then perhaps you should look elsewhere. Other unis give you the requirement in UCAS points rather than grades (e.g an A at A-Level is 120 points), so flex those mental arithmetic muscles and tot up your likely totals. Others state that you must have a certain grade in a certain subject – and if you aren’t taking that subject, you can guarantee that the UCAS form you sweated blood over will be tossed into the ‘Decline’ pile without a second glance.

If you’re unsure about any of these details, check with your school for guidance or contact the admissions department of the university directly for clarification.

5. Ask around

Given that most prospectuses succeed in making the United Kingdom look sunny, you can see that the information they impart needs to be taken with a pinch (or ladle) of salt. The best way to get your info is straight from the horse’s mouth – and not just the glowing soundbites dotted on the university’s website. Ask friends, parents, teachers, even the strange old lady who lives up the road and you may turn up some acquaintances and former students who went to these universities and may offer a more realistic take of what life was like. If all these years of conversing electronically has made you adverse to speaking with real live people, the Internet continues to be your friend – www.thestudentroom.co.uk has fantastic guides written by real students, plus forums full of helpful people who can answer your questions without any prospect of tut-tutting or patronising looks (see parents, teacher, strange old lady down the road).


6. Go forth, young grasshopper!


Enough reading about it, talking about it and writing about it – go see it! Universities hold open days with freakish regularity so take the opportunity for a road trip and see what it’s like first hand (your school might even give you a day off, yippee!). They also hold course-specific open days, which are even more useful for finding out if that’s the uni for you by discussing the ins-and-outs of your UCAS with staff and current students.

If you somehow manage to miss the open days, just head off whenever you fancy to take a gander. I actually think this is even more enlightening than open days, where unis are all glammed up with their best frocks on; approach them unawares and you’ll be surprised how different (and more like it will be in real life!) the atmosphere is. I employed this tactic many times, although I couldn’t possible disclose the shocking results ;) You’ll often find that the thought of spending three years at some places makes you want to run screaming back under your duvet, whilst others just somehow feel right.

Happy now, lalalala?!

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About Rach Read

I am the Music/Style/Everything Else Olly Can Think Of Editor. I have been doing this for far too long. My ringtone is Girls Aloud and I miss The Spice Girls.I also have my own blog [here](#).

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