

# Helping your child through UCAS 2027 — without writing it for them

A plain-English guide for parents and carers. Free to use, free to share, and free for your school to send home under its own name.

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## Why this guide exists

If your child is applying to university for 2027 entry, the next few months will involve course choices, a personal statement, a school reference, and a set of deadlines that arrive faster than most families expect.

You do not need to become a UCAS expert. But the students who do best tend to have a parent or carer who understands the rhythm of the year, asks the right questions at the right time, and knows where the line is between helping and taking over.

That is all this guide is for. It takes about ten minutes to read. Keep it somewhere you can find it again around September and January.

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## The five things worth knowing first

- The personal statement is now three questions, not one essay. Since the 2026 cycle, UCAS replaced the single open-ended statement with three structured questions. Your child answers each one separately, within a combined limit of 4,000 characters — around 600 words in total, with a minimum of 350 characters per answer. The questions are about why this subject, how their studies have prepared them, and what else they have done that is relevant.
- The deadline that matters depends on the course. Medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, and almost all Oxford and Cambridge courses have an early deadline in mid-October 2026. Most other courses have a main deadline in mid-to-late January 2027. Your school will confirm the exact dates — and will almost always set its own internal deadline several weeks earlier so references and checks can be done properly. Treat the school's date as the real one.
- The reference is the school's job, not yours. Teachers write a reference based on evidence they have gathered over two years. You cannot write it, and you should not try to influence its content. What you can do is make sure your child has given their teachers the material they need (more on this below).
- AI is allowed in some ways and banned in others. Your child can use AI to help them think, plan, and understand feedback. They must not use it to write the statement for them. Universities can detect generic, AI-written statements, and a statement that does not sound like your child is worse than a rougher one that does.
- University is one route, not the only good one. Degree apprenticeships, higher apprenticeships, and employment with training are strong, competitive options — and several have earlier deadlines than UCAS. If your child is unsure, that is normal, and worth a conversation with the school's careers team early rather than late.

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## What actually happens, and when

The exact dates vary by school, but the shape of the year is always the same. Your school will give you its own internal deadlines — those are the ones to put on the fridge.

Roughly when	What is happening	What helps at home
Summer before Year 13	Research, reading, open days, draft course list	Visit one or two campuses together. Encourage wider reading in the subject.
September	First drafts of the personal statement; finalising five choices	Ask to hear about their course choices, not to approve them. Protect some quiet time for drafting.
Early–mid October	Early deadline for medicine, dentistry, veterinary, Oxford and Cambridge	If this is your child, the pressure is real and early. Diarise the school's internal date, not just UCAS's.
October–December	Feedback rounds, redrafting, reference finalised, predicted grades	Read their feedback calmly with them. Help them turn it into a next step, not a rewrite.
January	Main UCAS deadline for most courses	Submit before the school deadline. Final-week submissions are where mistakes happen.
February–May	Offers arrive; firm and insurance choices	Talk through offers without steering. The choice has to be theirs to own.
Summer 2027	Results day, Clearing if needed	Have a calm plan for results day agreed in advance. Clearing is normal, not a failure.

*The single most useful thing you can do: find out your school's internal deadlines and work to those. Schools build in time before the UCAS date to write references and do final checks. A student who hits the school deadline has a relaxed January. A student who aims for the UCAS date is often late for the school's.*

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## The three questions, explained for parents

Your child may have done GCSEs with a single personal statement in mind. The format has changed. Here is what each question is really asking, so you can be a useful sounding board.

Question 1 — Why do they want to study this course or subject? The honest version of "why this subject", backed by evidence. The trap is enthusiasm with nothing behind it ("I have always loved history"). The fix is specifics: a book, a topic, a question that genuinely interests them. Good question to ask: "What's something in this subject you find genuinely interesting that most people your age wouldn't know about?"

Question 2 — How have their studies prepared them? This is about academic readiness — what they have learned in and beyond their A-levels (or equivalent) that connects to the course. Good question to

ask: "Which part of your current studies do you most want to go deeper on at university?"

Question 3 — What else have they done that is relevant? Wider experience: work experience, super-curricular reading, projects, an EPQ, responsibilities, volunteering. The trap is listing activities. The fix is reflection — what they learned or how it changed their thinking. Good question to ask: "What did you actually take away from that — what would you do differently or explore further?"

In all three, the gold is specific evidence, reflected on, in your child's own voice. If you read a draft and it could have been written by any applicant, that is the thing to gently flag — not the grammar.

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## How to help without taking over

The research and the experience of admissions teams point the same way: over-involved parents tend to make statements worse, because they sand away the student's own voice. Here is the line.

Helpful — do this:

- Ask questions that prompt reflection (the examples above). You are a mirror, not a ghostwriter.
- Help with logistics: open day travel, diary dates, printing, a quiet space, a working laptop.
- Read a draft and react honestly to whether it sounds like them — without rewriting a single sentence.
- Help them meet the school's deadline, not the UCAS one.
- Encourage them to use the feedback their school gives them.
- Stay calm about results and Clearing. Your steadiness is the contribution.

Unhelpful — avoid this:

- Writing or heavily editing any part of the statement. Admissions readers and universities can tell, and it can be flagged as not the applicant's own work.
  - Adding achievements, reading, or work experience your child cannot talk about confidently in an interview.
  - Pushing a course or university because it has a name you recognise.
  - Using AI to "tidy up" or generate the statement. (See below.)
  - Leaving questions about deadlines, references, or special circumstances until the final week.
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## AI: what's fine and what isn't

Every student now has access to tools like ChatGPT. Schools are not trying to ban them — they are trying to keep your child's application honestly theirs. A simple rule of thumb:

Fine: using AI to explain a piece of feedback, to suggest what a question is really asking, to check whether a sentence is clear, or to brainstorm what experiences might be relevant.

Not fine: asking AI to write the statement, to invent or embellish experiences, or to produce "a personal statement for someone applying to study X". The result is generic, every other applicant is generating the same thing, and it does not sound like your child.

The test is simple: the final words must be your child's own, about things your child has genuinely done, that your child could talk about in an interview. If AI use crosses that line, it has gone too far.

If your child's school uses a supervised tool for feedback, that is different from a student pasting their statement into a public chatbot — supervised tools keep the work the student's own and keep teachers in control. Ask your school what it recommends.

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## Helping with the reference (the right way)

You cannot write or see the reference — that is correct and normal. But references are stronger when teachers have good material to draw on, and that is where your child (with a nudge from you) can help.

Encourage your child to make sure their teachers know about:

- Wider reading, online courses, lectures, or projects relevant to the subject.
- Work experience, volunteering, or part-time work — especially anything course-relevant.
- Responsibilities, leadership, mentoring, or contributions to school life.
- Any circumstances that have affected their studies (illness, caring responsibilities, disruption) — these can be noted sensitively in a reference or flagged to the school, and they can matter.

The earlier teachers have this, the better the reference. Leaving it to October is the most common avoidable mistake.

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## If university isn't the plan — or isn't the only plan

University is not the only competitive route, and a large minority of school leavers choose something else. Many strong students now choose degree apprenticeships (a paid job plus a fully-funded degree), higher apprenticeships, or employment with training.

Two things parents often don't realise:

- Several apprenticeship and employer deadlines fall earlier than UCAS — sometimes from the autumn, and they don't all share one calendar. If this is a serious option, your child should be watching for windows from early in Year 13.
- A student can do both — apply through UCAS and pursue apprenticeships — to keep options open.

If your child is undecided, that is genuinely fine, but it is worth booking time with the school's careers lead early. Undecided students are the ones most likely to drift past a deadline that mattered.

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## Money and practicalities (the questions parents actually have)

- Tuition fees are paid by a government Tuition Fee Loan — you do not pay upfront, and repayment only begins once your child is earning above a threshold after graduating.
- Maintenance loans (for living costs) are means-tested and partly based on household income, which is why your child may ask you for financial details when applying for student finance. Apply for student finance early — it opens well before results day and is separate from the UCAS application.
- Open days are worth the travel where you can manage it; a campus visit changes a lot of decisions.
- The UCAS application has a fee (modest, paid when submitting). Some students may be eligible for support — the school can advise.

You do not need to have it all worked out now. You do need to know these exist so nothing is a surprise.

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## A short script for the conversations that get tense

- Instead of "Have you done your personal statement yet?" ! "What's the plan when are you planning to do it?"
  - Instead of "Let me read it and fix it" ! "Want to read it to me out loud so I can hear what's working."
  - Instead of "Why aren't you applying to [prestigious university]?" ! "What are you looking for where you go — the course, the place, the people?"
  - Instead of "What if you don't get in?" ! "Whatever happens, there's a plan. Let's make sure we know what the options are."
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## Where to go for the truth

- Your child's school is the first and best source. They set the internal deadlines and write the reference.
  - [ucas.com](https://ucas.com) is the authoritative source for national deadlines, course search, and student finance signposting. Confirm exact 2027 dates there.
  - The course's own university web page is the place to check specific entry requirements and any admissions tests or extra deadlines.
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## About this guide

This guide was written by Outleap, which builds software that helps sixth forms run UCAS, references, feedback, and progression for every student. It is deliberately free of jargon and free of sales pitch — schools are welcome to send it to families under their own name.

This is general guidance for parents and carers, not formal admissions advice. Always confirm exact dates and requirements with your child's school and [ucas.com](https://ucas.com).