

The Ultimate Open Day Playbook

A free guide for Year 11 & 12 students by Dr Jo Winchester

University Open Days can feel a bit like wandering through a festival. There is free snacks, shiny brochures, and friendly people asking, “So, what do you want to study?” (Cue internal panic.)

But if you play it right, an Open Day can be a game-changer: it can help you figure out where you might thrive, what inspires you, and what you definitely don’t want.

This guide will help you go in prepared and walk out with real insights that will shape your future with confidence.

You’re not just choosing a university. You’re starting to imagine the life you want to build.

1. Go in with a Game Plan

Before you go, spend 10 minutes answering these questions:

- What are three subjects or topics you genuinely enjoy learning about?
- What kinds of things make you feel useful or proud?
- Do you want to study close to home or move away?
- Are you more of a “hands-on” learner or a “read and discuss” type?
- What does your ideal week look like? Do you prefer early morning or late nights, quiet spaces or buzzy environments?

These questions will help you target which faculties, courses, and people you want to speak to. Write your answers in your phone notes so you can come back to them later.

2. Ask the Right Questions

Forget memorising ATAR cut-offs, they change every year. What matters is fit and experience.

Here are questions that tell you something useful:

- What does a typical week look like in this degree? How many contact hours, and what kind of assessments? *This question matters if you have a part time job*
- Are there work placements, internships or overseas study options?
- What support do students get if they struggle or change direction?
- How do graduates from this course find jobs? What kinds of jobs do they do?
- Are classes mostly lectures, tutorials, labs, or studios?
- Can I combine this degree with something else (double degree, minor, or diploma)?

And one of my favourites:

“If I like [insert your favourite subject], but I’m not sure what job I want yet, what would you recommend I look at?”

FUTURE OF WORK

3. Talk to Students, Not Just Staff

University staff will always put their best foot forward. That’s their job. But current students will tell you what the vibe really is.

Ask them:

- What surprised you about studying here?
- What’s the hardest part of your course?
- What do you wish you’d known before starting?

If they light up when they talk about their studies, that’s a good sign. If they sigh and mention “parking”, take note of that too.

4. Notice How You Feel

Pay attention to your gut.

- Do you feel like you could belong here?
- Can you imagine walking these paths every day?
- Do you see people you can relate to — people who look like you in the best sense of that word?

University isn't just about what you learn — it's about who you become while learning it. Culture and community matter just as much as course content.

Universities with big reputations mean they most likely have big class sizes. The upside is you will go to classes with a diverse range of people and university events will be well attended. The downside is you will have less contact with the lecturer who is in charge of your classes.

Think about what you value more and choose the university environment that will cater best to your needs.

5. Capture and Reflect

After the event, take a few minutes to jot down:

- The three courses or universities that stood out — and why.
- Anything that confused you or made you curious.
- One action you'll take this week (for example: book a campus tour, talk to a careers adviser, or research scholarships).

You don't need to have it all figured out. Open Days are about exploring possibilities and not locking in your life plan.

Final Thoughts

The future of work is changing faster than any generation before you. The best preparation isn't choosing the "right" degree. It's choosing curiosity, courage, and flexibility. Ask questions. Try new things. Back yourself.

Dr Jo Winchester

Future-Ready Educator

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