

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

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Tips for writing references and personal statements

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To cover....

- ❑ How applications are assessed
- ❑ Writing a reference
- ❑ The Personal statement



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How are applications assessed?

- ❑ In general:
- ❑ Academic requirements
- ❑ School /college reference
- ❑ Personal statement



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What universities look for



- ❑ Will students be able to cope with the academic demands of the course
- ❑ Do they meet the entry requirements

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Entry requirements

- ❑ What are they?
- ❑ Are they realistic?
- ❑ Are there any specific requirements?
- ❑ e.g.: GCSE; 'AS' and 'A' Levels; IB etc
- ❑ Admissions tests
- ❑ Work experience



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Birmingham examples

- ❑ Economics, AAA,
GCSE Mathematics grade A if not offered
at A Level
- ❑ Physiotherapy, AAB, work experience
- ❑ Applied Golf Management Studies, AAB,
two out of PE or Sports Studies,
Business or Economics, Design and
Technology & a Science
Meet a Golf handicap (4.4/6.4)
Satisfactory criminal records check



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The Reference - what we want to know

- ❑ their potential for academic success in higher education
- ❑ why the course they have chosen is suited to them
- ❑ any personal qualities which will benefit them at university, such as skills, aptitude, enthusiasm
- ❑ what they can bring to the university, such as extra-curricular activities and interests

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Preparation

- ❑ Work with the student
- ❑ Understand what their motivations are and longer term goals
- ❑ What if they are applying for an unusual course?
- ❑ Are they being realistic in their choices?



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Specifics to include

- ❑ How they compare to others in their class/year group
- ❑ Any unusual circumstances - e.g. period of illness, overseas qualifications, changes in schools.
- ❑ Information on the college - but not too much!
 - ❑ size and type of school/college
 - ❑ typical number and patterns of qualifications taken by students
 - ❑ contextual information about the catchment

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Applicants suitability for chosen course

- ❑ Proposed career ambitions, attitude, motivation and commitment. If relevant, your opinion on their suitability for this career path
- ❑
- ❑ Past achievement and current activities, with particular reference to subjects relating to the courses for which they are applying
- ❑
- ❑ Any supplementary information about their qualifications and study which they have not already described in their application
- ❑
- ❑ Relevant curriculum enrichment and related skills such as work experience, voluntary work
- ❑
- ❑ Don't repeat the personal statement!

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Applicants aptitude for degree study

- ❑ Independent learning
- ❑ Ability to think critically
- ❑ Extended project qualification
- ❑ Potential – analytical, enquiring, passionate



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Predicted grades

- ❑ Arguably the most important part of the UCAS form
- ❑ A realistic optimist approach
- ❑ Consistency with the rest of the application
- ❑ - if not this needs to be explained within the reference



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Top tips

- ☐ Honesty
- ☐ Personal
- ☐ Consistency
- ☐ Avoid cut and paste
- ☐ Focus on the candidate



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<http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/advisers-and-referees>

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Personal Statements

Myth 1 – Personal statements
are vital

vs

Myth 2 – Personal statements
are worthless

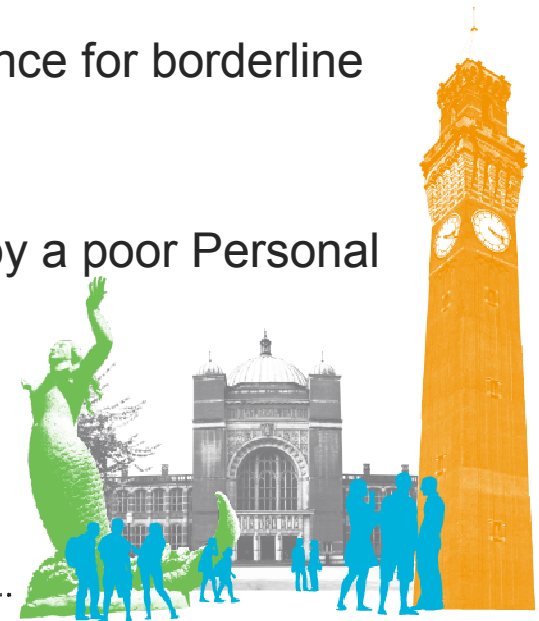


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Personal Statements ... the reality

- ❑ A good Personal Statement is essential for some courses at all universities and for all courses at some universities
- ❑ High and low demand subjects
- ❑ The contents of a Personal Statement are likely to be used in an interview
- ❑ A good Personal Statement can make all the difference for borderline cases
- ❑ An otherwise strong application may be weakened by a poor Personal Statement

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Personal Statements

- Reasons for choosing the course or subject
 - What is the background to your interest in this area?
 - An understanding of the subject at degree level
 - Interest in the subject matter beyond A Level or equivalent
- Career aspirations
- Interests and hobbies
- Positions of responsibility
- Work experience or employment
- Skills relevant to the course
- Gap year information, if applicable
- **Motivation - commitment - enthusiasm**

Type of school, college or training centre	Comprehensive		
School Number			
Date when the statement is available for interview due to examinations, etc.			
Total number in post 16 education		Full time	150
Number currently proceeding to higher education each year		Part time	0

A

years and throughout this time he has shown achieved good grades in his GCSE he is currently completing a four subject

of the basic and many of the more including some extra reading on him to regularly ask why and he will independently on his A2 coursework in the

e has a good understanding of the has been described as mature, aptitude required to take this subject

s clearly enjoyed the topics and has studying History has allowed Ben to events, plus cope with large amount of to be general

Example - Law

- ❑ Visit law court and take notes
- ❑ Follow legal arguments in the press
- ❑ Attended an expert lecture in Law
- ❑ Read Law sections in newspaper
- ❑ *Learning the Law* – Glanville Williams
- ❑ Work experience



Remember

- Less – what do you did
- More - what you got out of it



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English with Creative Writing



- ❑ Reading and writing skills
- ❑ Time Management
- ❑ Knowledge of literary texts
- ❑ Curiosity about language
- ❑ An interest in reading and literary enthusiasm
- ❑ Willingness to be challenged and engage in debate

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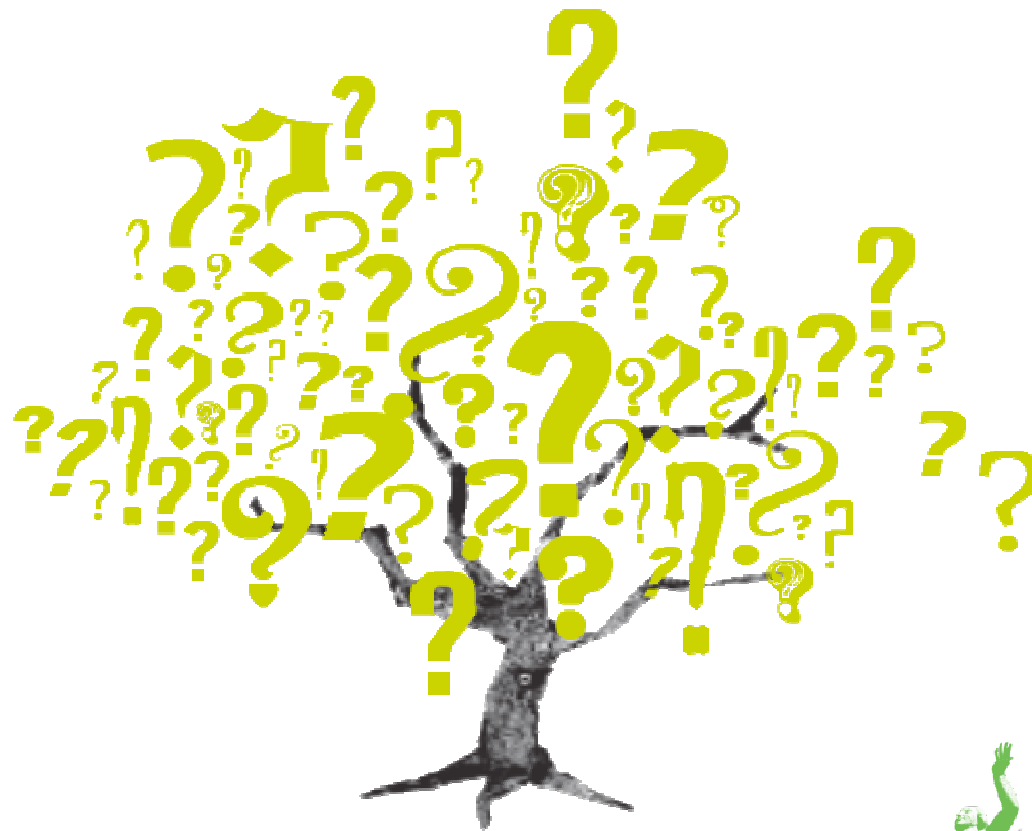
Admissions tutors' views



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Any questions?



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