

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



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Tips for writing references and personal statements

Yvonne Williams, Head of Undergraduate Recruitment

To cover....

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



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



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

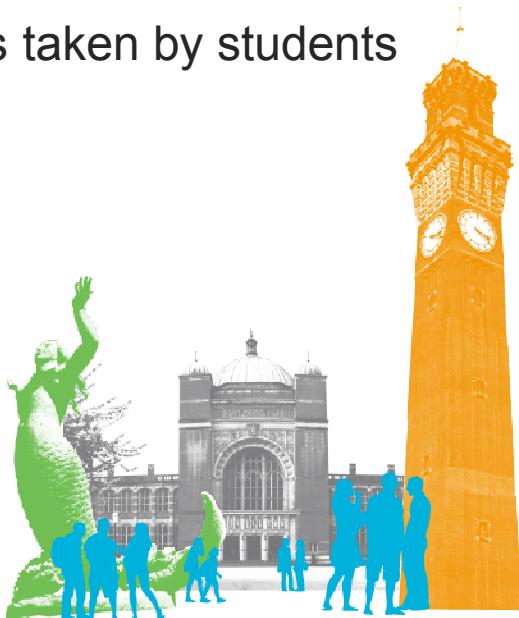
- Work with the student
- Understand what their motivations are and longer term goals
- What if they are applying for an unusual course?
- Are they being realistic in their choices?



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



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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HD TV

<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

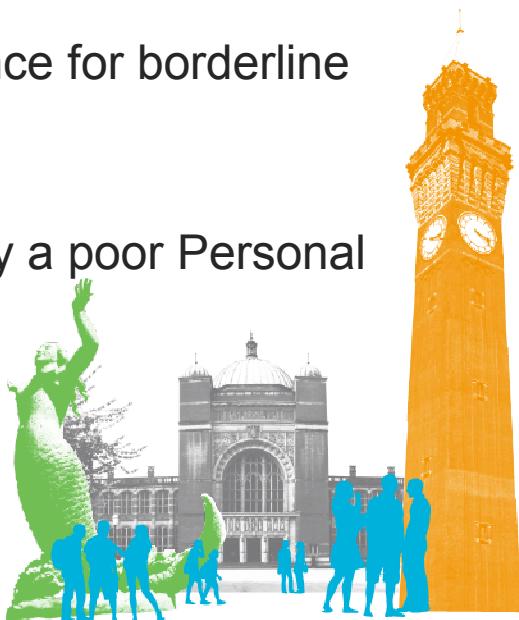


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Personal Statements ... the reality

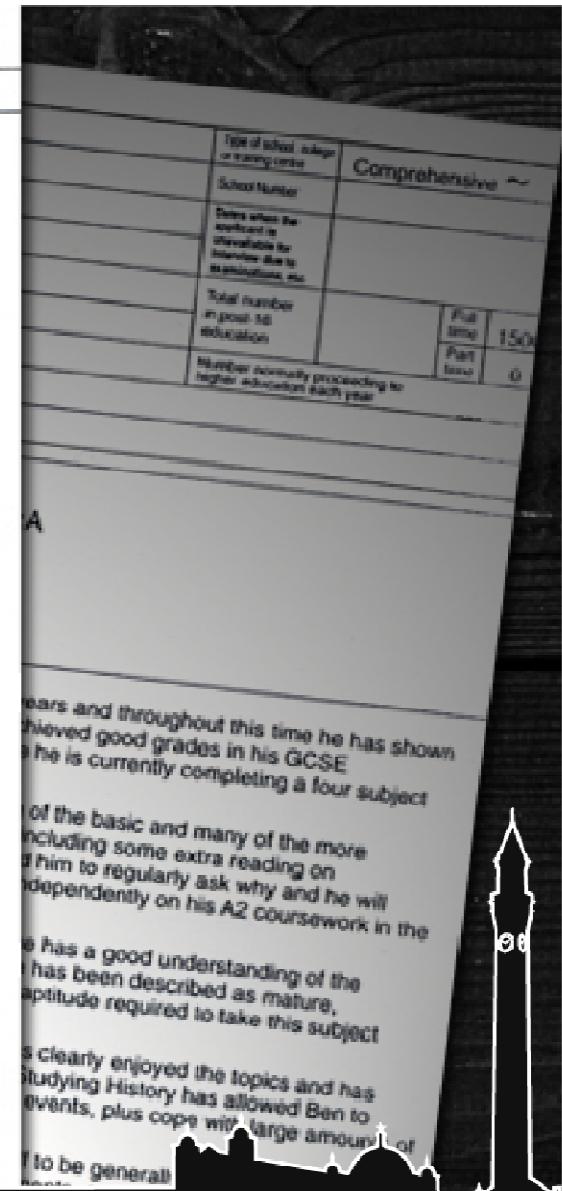
- A good Personal Statement is essential for some courses at all universities and for all courses at some universities
- High and low demand subjects
- The contents of a Personal Statement are likely to be used in an interview
- A good Personal Statement can make all the difference for borderline cases
- 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**



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



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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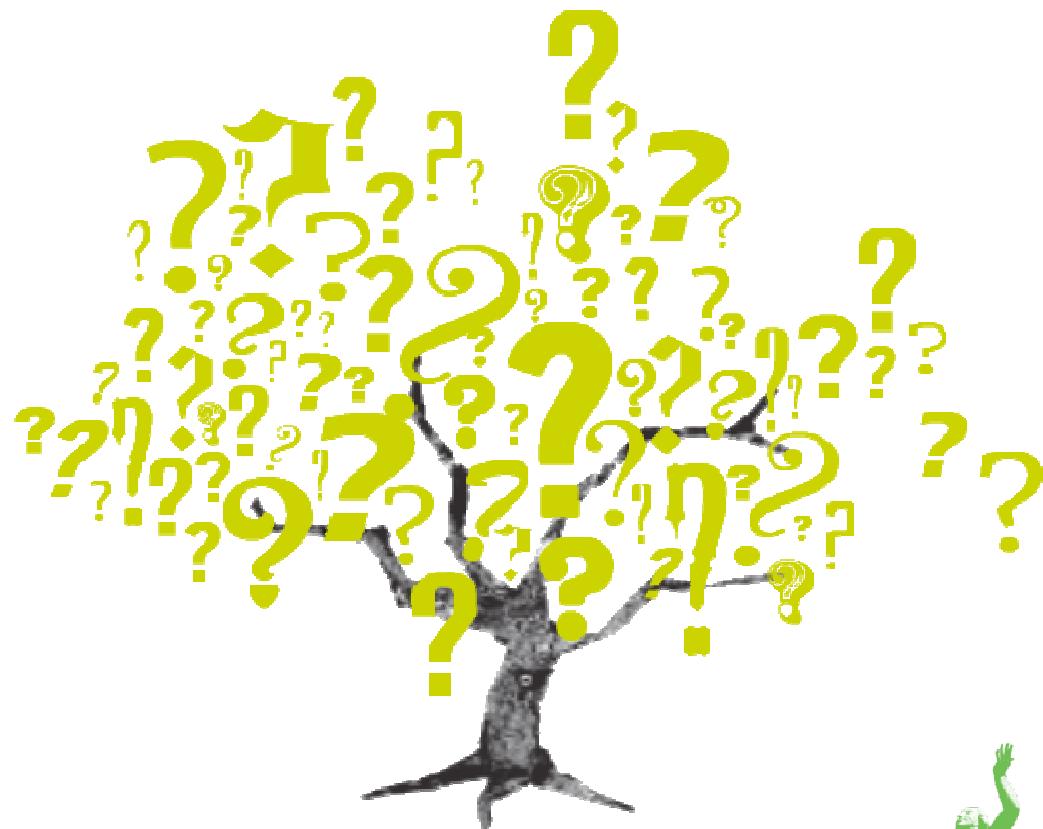
Admissions tutors' views



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Any questions?



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