Writing a reference transcript

A short video providing tips on how to write references for UCAS application forms, comprised of interviews with admissions staff and academics from a range of academic disciplines.

Title: **Writing a Reference (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oAM7yNCFAE)**
Duration: 4.07 mins

Speaker Names (if given):

S1 Roderick Smith – Director of Admissions

S2 Dr Julia Lodge – Admissions Tutor, Biological Sciences

S3 Dr Ian Gameson – Admissions Tutor, Chemistry

S4 Donald Spence – Admissions Tutor, Dentistry

S5 Professor Susan Hunston – Head of English

S6 Dr Michael Snape – Admissions Tutor, Medieval and Modern History

S7 Dr Craig Blunt – Admissions Tutor, Modern Languages and Joint Honours Programmes

S8 Professor Chris Late – Admissions Tutor, Medicine

S1 The best references are those which are honest. We really do need to know if the applicant is interested in the subject they've applied for, if they have worked well at school, if they will do as well as their predicted grades say and whether they're ready for university study.

S2 I think it's really important that references are honest and the teacher's reference is particularly important when there's something unusual about the student that's evident elsewhere on the application form. For instance, if you think they're going to do much better academically than their current qualifications indicate, then tell us that, but also explain why, what's your evidence for that? And it's really no good saying you think this is an excellent student when their qualifications are giving a different message.

S3 School and college references are very interesting. Some are very good; some are very bad. What's a very good reference is somewhere where it's clear that the person writing the reference knows the student; so, you know, it's a very personal description. What can be off-putting is where the chemistry teacher says they're doing well, their biology teacher says – you need it so that it's personal, the little details, the little touches, so it's good to have it personalised, it's good that it fills the whole page, you know, two thirds of a page to fill. If this is one of your best pupils you should be able to write two thirds of a page for them.

S4 The really important thing about a reference from the school and college is to ensure that they are talking about the candidate, not about the school or college themselves. I know about the colleges, I know about how they work and how they present their marks; it's the candidate I would like to hear from. We all tend to cut and paste when we're doing references but it is fairly helpful if you are talking about the right person, 'Donald is a very good chap and we hope she will do well later on' does not exactly encourage me to think that we're talking about the right person. An honest bottom line is very helpful as well. Do you want me to take this candidate or are there any issues that I need to be aware of?

S5 A good reference from a school or a college would emphasise the student's independence, their ability to work on their own and also to think critically, not just to repeat what people have told them.

S6 A good academic reference is one that makes a genuine attempt to appraise the academic ability of the individual applicant and also, if it shows a genuine engagement and knowledge of that individual's personality, their abilities, weaknesses etcetera; it's very easy to write a formulaic academic reference but those are easily spotted and they don't differentiate applicants from the crowd.

S7 School and college references are quite an important part of the application process and it's something that we scrutinise quite carefully. I think the thing that we look for most of all are the predicted grades first and foremost. That's the headline item if you like. The thing that I'm particularly looking for is what does the teacher's reference say about the applicant's potential? Are they analytical, are they enquiring, are they really passionate about their subject, is this someone that can go on to kind of think independently rather than a student who's very good at just taking a brief from the teacher or responding to a given task, fulfilling that task but without ever going beyond that. So what we really look for in a reference is the teachers that can draw attention to applicants that are very passionate and enthusiastic about the subject and can think critically.

S8 A good reference from a school or college is one that really tells us what is special about that particular applicant, what they do that marks them out from the crowd, what they've achieved in the school – not just in relation to academic work – it may be in relation to academic work but in relation to their part in the community and their non-academic activities.

END OF RECORDING

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