

A photograph of the University of Manchester's main building, a large, ornate, light-colored stone structure with a prominent central tower and red-tiled roof. The building is set against a blue sky with scattered clouds. In the foreground, there are green trees and foliage. A purple banner in the top left corner contains the text 'MANCHESTER 1824' and 'The University of Manchester'. A blue banner across the bottom contains the title 'A University's Top Tips' and a subtitle 'Personal Statements & Reference Writing'.

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

A University's Top Tips

Personal Statements & Reference Writing

A young woman with voluminous, curly red hair is seated in a library, leaning over an open book. She is wearing a white t-shirt with a red floral pattern and grey jeans. The background is filled with tall bookshelves packed with books, creating a sense of a vast collection. The lighting is warm and focused on the woman and her book.

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Personal Statement

Question 1

***There is no
maximum length
to a personal
statement***

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

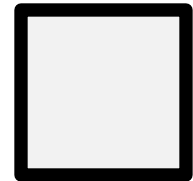
Question 2

***A personal
statement can be
written in
paragraphs***

TRUE



FALSE



Question 3

*The UCAS Apply
software has
spelling and
grammar checks*

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

Question 4

***You can write a
different Personal
Statement for each
of your choices***

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

Question 5

***You can use
bold, italics &
underlined
characters***

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

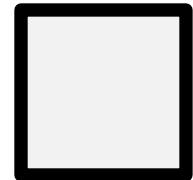
Question 6

***You should
keep a copy of
your personal
statement***

TRUE



FALSE



Question 7

***There's no
problem in using
material I've
found on the web***

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒



Research!

Start planning early in Year 12

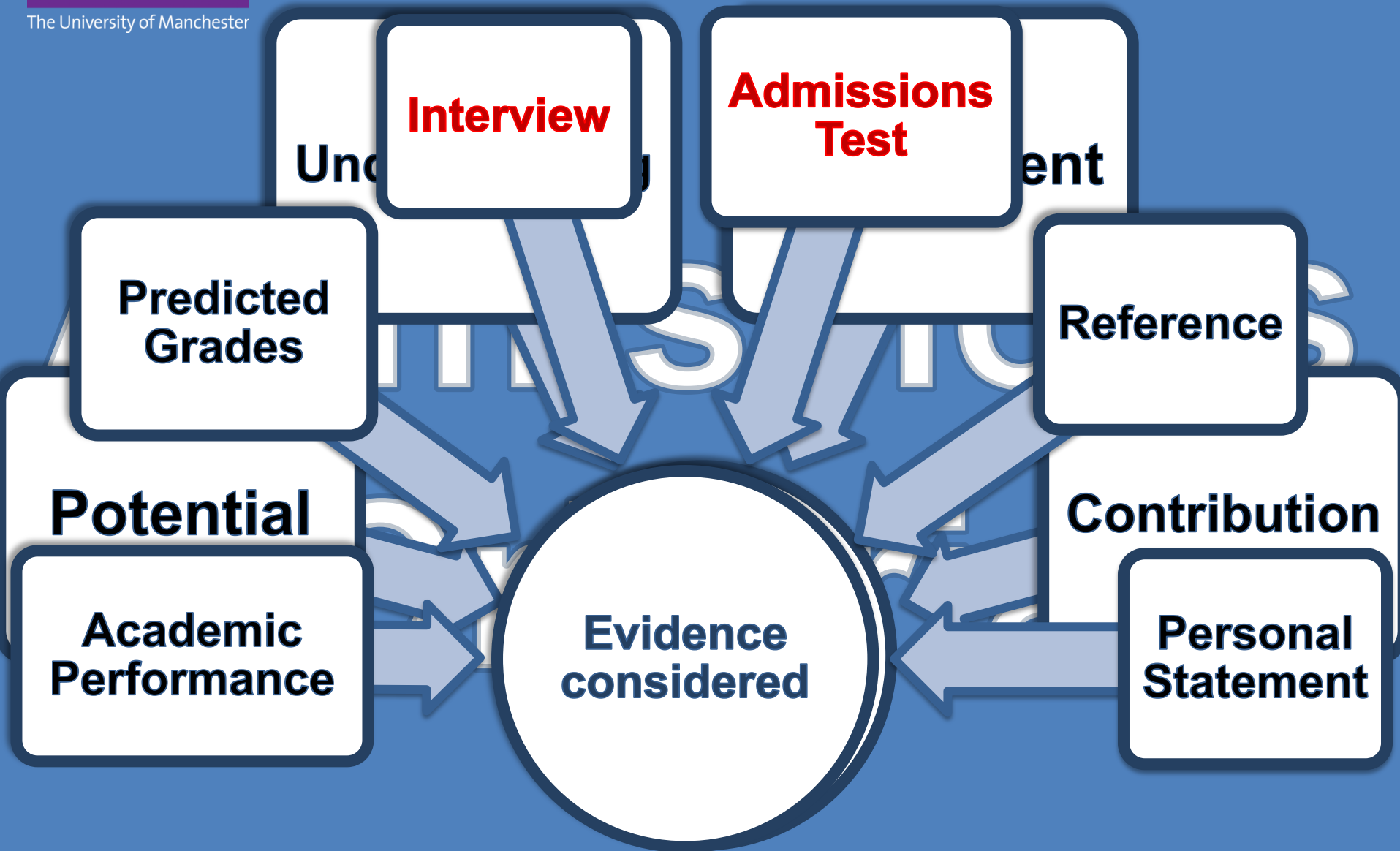
Develop an awareness early in Year 12 about the requirements of the UCAS Personal Statement

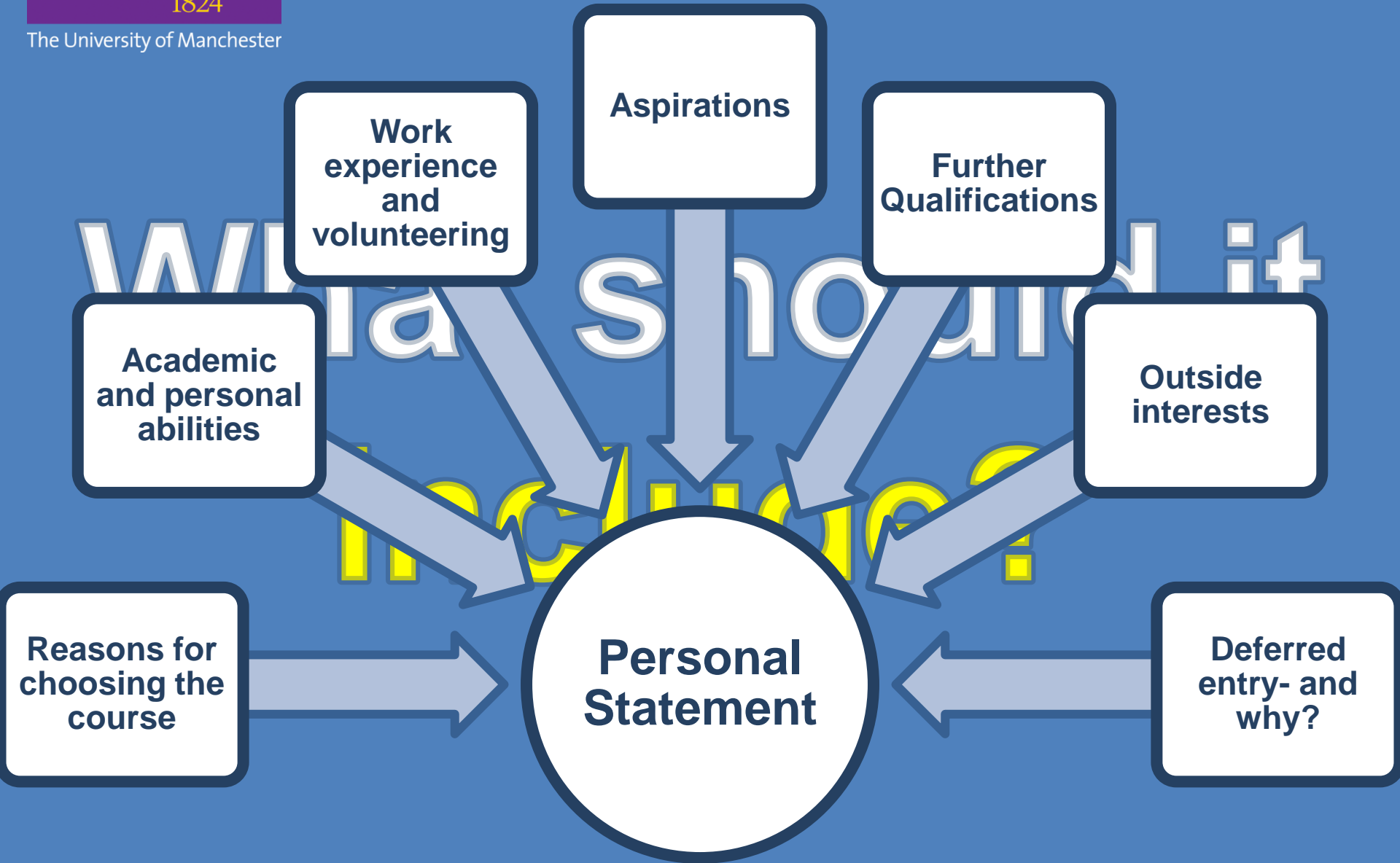
Students should think about which activities, work experience, wider reading they will need to get involved with so that they can write about them at the beginning of Year 13

Activities that demonstrate interest and commitment

- Attend summer school
- Work experience
- Public lectures
- Voluntary work
- Read Newspapers/Journals
- Read books
- Enter academic competitions

One
A chance to
Statement;
convey who
4000
the even more
characters





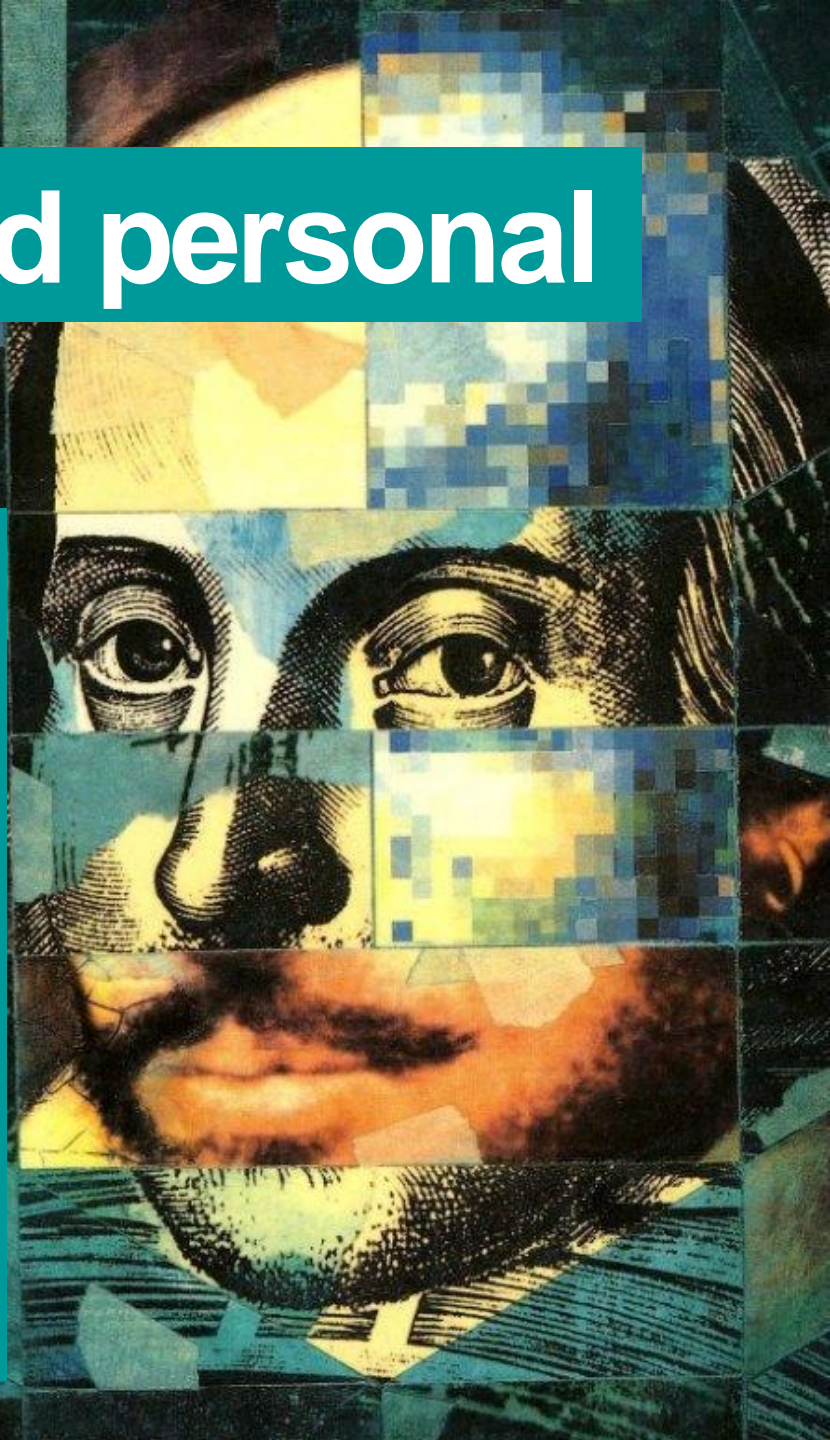
At least two thirds of the applicants personal statement should relate to the course

Could be used as the basis for an interview

This could be the only written work that the course tutor/admissions officer sees before making a decision

What makes a good personal statement?

- Original, interesting and enthusiastic.
 - Varied sentence structure
- Relevance
 - Academic courses/skills
 - Extra-curricular activities
- Apply for the course not the career
- Strong conclusion



Activity **Saying what
you do is not
enough!**

- What have they done...

Benefit

- What have they learnt from it
- What skills have they acquired

**They need
to show
evidence**

Course

- How it relates to the course
- How it will help them succeed at university

They **already** have lots of
transferable skills!

Teamwork
Organisation
Time-management
Initiative
Self-Discipline
Adaptability
Communication
Leadership
Problem-Solving

Which are relevant for your course?

Transferable Skills Activity

What skills do you need to be
successful at college and at
university?

Defining Skills

- Practical Skills
- Personal/ Transferable Skills
- Intellectual Skills

Practical Skills

- The skills and abilities to carry out practical and technical elements of a task or activity.
- This can include the different aspects of running an experiment or a design task, or proficiency at communicating in a foreign language

Personal / Transferable Skills

- Skills, capacities and abilities that transcend subject boundaries and are generally pertinent to employment
- Individual personal qualities that make you a good person to work with, or to have as part of a team

Intellectual Skills

- The intellectual abilities and capacities to carry out a task or activity that is primarily intellectual often drawing on knowledge and understanding
- Skills related to the use and development of knowledge, mainly in the context of the discipline being studied or the area of work

Which skills do you feel confident in?

- 1) Individually, choose at least 2 skills from those on the board and think about whether you feel confident in these skills
- 2) Ask yourself: do I have evidence of developing this skill? Have I practised it? If yes – how?
- 3) Feedback

Why is it important to think about the skills you have?

You need to be able to sell yourself and evidence your skills when:

- 1) Applying to university
- 2) Applying for a job

Applying to University

- What skills are stated in the Entry Profile?
- What skills will you need to be successful on the degree programmes you are interested in?
 - Exhibit academic/personal abilities needed to succeed
- *E.G: Time management Organisation Essay Writing, Debating, Critically Arguing? Analysing information? Problems Solving?*
- **Universities are looking for students to show evidence of:**
 - Potential to successfully complete the programme

Personal Statement Structure

Introduction: Why I want to study this course

Main Part: What academic skills and knowledge do I have that prepare me to succeed in this subject

Work experience / voluntary work / Part-time Job
(You may spend more time on this section for courses where work experience is a requirement e.g. health-care related courses)

Extra-curricular activities / other qualifications e.g. first aid, DoE

Conclusion

Things to think about

Relevance and Evidence

- Have a strong introduction
- Use positive phrasing
 - I learnt from...
 - This has furthered my...
 - I have acquired skills which
- Make it personal
- Have a strong summary
- Draft and re-draft
- Check spelling and grammar!

Top 10 most overused personal statement opening sentences

1. I am currently studying a BTEC National Diploma in ... (used 464 times)
2. From a young age I have always been interested in ... (309 times)
3. From an early age I have always been interested in ... (292 times)
4. Nursing is a very challenging and demanding career ... (275 times)
5. For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated with ... (196 times)
6. "Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only" ... (189 times)
7. Nursing is a profession I have always looked upon with ... (178 times)
8. For as long as I can remember I have been interested in ... (166 times)
9. I am an International Academy student and have been studying since ... (141 times)
10. Academically, I have always been a very determined and ... (138 times)

Reproduced from the 'UCAS Guide to Getting into University and College' 2010

Applying for multiple courses

They can only write one personal statement to all their choices. Do not mention a university by name, even if you they are applying to only one university – the personal statement cannot be changed if they apply to a different place later.

If they are applying for a joint degree – they will need to explain why they are interested in both aspects of the joint programme

If they are applying for different subjects or courses, they need to identify the common themes and skills that are relevant to their choices

Don't Plagiarise!

One year 234 UCAS personal statements contained the following:

"Ever since I accidentally burnt holes in my pyjamas after experimenting with a chemistry set on my eighth birthday, I have always had a passion for science".

Personal Statements checked against 1,500,000 statements past and present, those on websites and in books.

30,000 students 'caught' in 2010

10% were identical to other applicants personal statements or online examples e.g. The Student Room

Universities applied to informed, students told by email and flagged up on Adviser Track for school staff

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A woman with curly hair is sitting in a library, reading a book. She is wearing a floral shirt and jeans. The background shows bookshelves filled with books.

Reference

Writing

What is a UCAS reference & Why is it important to get the reference right?

“UCAS references are designed to provide universities and colleges with an informed and academic assessment of an applicant’s suitability for further study”

(www.ucas.com – UCAS Advisers: Guide to Writing References)

- It is one of the factors on which conditional and unconditional university place offers are based
- It is the only part of the application that the applicants do not write themselves – we rely on it to demonstrate the real potential of the student
- It will be read and may be scored to assess whether the applicants has the necessary skills and academic ability to study the stated course

What are universities looking for?

An informed and academic assessment of:

- their academic performance in their post-16 education
- 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
- 4000 Character word limit or 47 lines (which ever is shorter)

'It will give us the predicted A2 grades we require and hopefully any extenuating circumstances that have affected the applicant'.

Linda Harding, Recruitment and Admissions Manager, Manchester Medical School.

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...ould make'.

...or Lecturer in Nurse ...
...ns Tutor (Bnurs)

Dr Michael ...ers, Director of Admissions, School of Arts, ...ages and Cultures

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...missed the terms ...
...onal offer'.

...nger, School of Physics and ...
...stronomy

What do Manchester Admissions Staff say ...

The Process

This will be different at different schools, but we suggest ...

- Students could be invited to provide information about themselves (pro forma and/ or discussion) and to compile grade predictions.
- Subject teachers provide specific comments and predicted grades
- Personal Tutor may provide statement on personal qualities and assemble the reference, editing it to include introduction and conclusion, ensure consistency and that it 'reads well'
- Completed reference added to online application for final checking and submission by senior 'authorised' UCAS contact.

Predicted Grades

Each pending qualification that the applicant has entered on their application will be listed in the reference section – in order for a predicted grade to be added by the referee.

Predicted grades should be clear and unambiguous, and need to consider:

- Do they match the entrance requirements of the courses chosen?
- Are they consistent with the past academic performance of the student?
- Do they match the reference

If 'No' to any of the above, there is the need to provide an explanation in the reference

How to write and structure the reference

The structure of the UCAS reference is not set in stone and will differ from school to school and candidate to candidate, but should include:

- Background information on the applicant and the school
- Academic performance post-16

Subject by subject reports

- Details from subject teacher
- Most relevant or best first
- Extra Curricular activities/ Candidate's personality
- Suitability for the course and University

Background information on the applicant & the school

It can be useful to include brief details about the school/college, such as:

- size and type of school/college
- number of students in student's year group and/or class sizes, and the proportion typically progressing to HE
- typical number and patterns of qualifications taken by students
- information about school policy such as certification of AS levels
- contextual information about the catchment

If the students' own situation is different to the typical school policy, it is helpful to give details of this.

If you choose to enter details about the school/college, please ensure that they are succinct, as the reference should focus mainly on the applicant rather than the school/college.

Background information on the applicant & the school

Things to mention ...

- Additional Support Needs
- English as a Second Language
- 16-19 bursary fund
- First generation to Higher Education
- Living in Local Authority Care
- Complex family situation
- Carer or affected by the disability/death of a close family member
- Asylum-seeker / residency issues
- Bullying

SHOULD NOT BE MENTIONED IN PERSONAL STATEMENT BY STUDENT

Question – What should be included in the introduction?

Answer – ‘... a very brief note about the schools policy for numbers of AS and A2s subjects’.

Prof F K Loebinger, School of Physics and Astronomy

What do Manchester Admissions Staff say ...

Academic performance post-16

Subject by subject reports

- Student's academic performance in their post-16 education – current/past achievements in the subject(s)
- Potential for academic success - profile of academic and personal qualities and skills
- Suitability of chosen course/subject area
- What can they bring to the university
- Evaluation compared to other students
- Individual circumstances (if not mentioned elsewhere)
- Explanation of qualifications

Qu

Question – How would you like the teachers reference structured?

Answer – ‘Subject by subject – ideally by the subject teachers with an overview from someone like the form tutor’.

Prof F K Loebinger, School of Physics and Astronomy

of Arts

What do Manchester Admissions Staff say ...

A summary about the candidate

Extra Curricular activities/ Candidates personality Suitability for the course and University

- Discussion of student's personal qualities
 - Maturity, commitment, enthusiasm
 - Transferable skills where not mentioned above such as time management, organisation
- Extra curricular activities and roles of responsibility
- Suitability for the course and university
 - Emphasise particular experiences or skills relevant to the course

Common attributes & skills required for higher level study

Ability to synthesise information & make connections



UCAS Reference Examples

	Feedback
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reference does not do enough to convince Admissions Tutor of capability• No real mention of academic skills• Should have paragraph for each subject
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well structured and supportive• Mentions practical abilities in relation to subjects
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good subject references but could have mentioned more about skills/experience relevant to course
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes work experience and skills/attributes relevant to Medicine

Final thoughts ...

- Must be fair and accurate – factually correct
- Be realistic and supportive
- Opinions passed must be justifiable
- Tailored to the individual
- Take account of all the students choices
- Avoid too much overlap with the personal statement – reference should complement it
- If written early in the UCAS cycle, invite university to contact you later for more details (particularly for Access Students)
- Invisibility of choice (no reference to individual universities)
- Link reference to student's subject choice
- References are no longer confidential – be open with students and their parents



Any Questions?