

Personal Statements and References

Laurice Wilson
Widening Participation
Co-ordinator

Simon Jones
Admissions and
Recruitment Manager



What do Admissions Tutors look for?

- ▶ Academic Potential (Predicted Grades)
- ▶ Academic Record (GCSE, AS)
- ▶ Reference from School/College
- ▶ *Relevant, well written Personal Statement*

Evidence of:

- ▶ Motivation and Commitment
- ▶ Evidence of research into subject
- ▶ Evidence that applicant has skills required
- ▶ Enthusiasm....

Personal Statement - content

Why HE and why this course?

- ▶ What are the reasons for these choices, any career aspirations/ideas?
- ▶ Related academic or work experience
- ▶ Demonstrate knowledge of what the course will involve mentioning any special subjects of interest.

What the applicant can offer to the course

- ▶ How do academic interests and strengths match up with chosen course?
- ▶ Anything which highlights skills /knowledge /initiative
- ▶ Relevant experience e.g. paid/voluntary work, overseas travel

Personal Statement - content

Applicant as a person

- ▶ Any positions of responsibility/trust in and out of school
- ▶ Member of any teams or societies
- ▶ Interests, hobbies, leisure activities
- ▶ Additional information can be sent direct to the university(if they are happy to accept this) but always include UCAS id in correspondence

Personal Statements – Practical Ideas

- ▶ *Divide up into paragraphs*
- ▶ *Spelling and grammar are important*
- ▶ *Don't list endless sports/hobbies*
- ▶ *Humour rarely works – care needed!*

Personal Statements - Style

- ▶ Positive words - achieved, developed, learned, discovered, enthusiasm, commitment, energy, fascination...
- ▶ Short, simple sentences in plain English - not contrived, verbose or grandiose
- ▶ Personal touch if possible- but be careful with vernacular/'chatty' approaches
- ▶ Use evidence where possible to support claims/statements

Please don't write this type of stuff.....!

- ▶ *"I enjoy the Theatre and used to go a couple of times a year."*
- ▶ *"A source of pride is my Citroen Saxo which I fitted with a 15" woofer and Janspeed exhaust system"*
- ▶ *"I spend a lot of time caring for Toby, my vivacious miniature schnauser, and he has inspired me to overcome obstacles"*



UCAS Reference Writing: Making the most of your students

Laurice Wilson
Widening Participation Co-ordinator
Aston University



Predicted Grades

- ▶ Do the predictions meet our requirements?
- ▶ If not is there anything in the reference to make us think they might be pessimistic?
- ▶ Are there any reasons why the student might be predicted grades below their 'real' ability?
- ▶ Did we drop our entry points at confirmation last year? Are we likely to this year?

The UCAS Reference - Essentials

- ▶ Positive, honest, accurate
- ▶ Realistic predicted grades and clearly shown
- ▶ Comment on very successful units
- ▶ Academic skills
- ▶ Concise, relevant and not duplicating

6. SPECIAL NEEDS or SUPPORT required because you have a disability or medical condition stated in Section 2.								
7. DETAILS OF PAID EMPLOYMENT TO DATE Names and addresses of recent employers		Nature of work and job title		From Month Year		To Month Year		PT/ FT
[REDACTED]		Crew Member - Customer Service		06 08				PT
8. PERSONAL STATEMENT								
<p>Throughout my time in school, I have had an enthusiasm for Mathematics and it is this predilection which has prompted me to pursue a degree in Mathematics. However while studying Economics I have realised that my single focus has changed as a consequence of enjoying the study of macroeconomics and the way that economic issues affect everyone. Furthermore I believe that by combining both of these disciplines I will make myself more marketable and would be in a good position to explore a multitude of challenging and exciting fields.</p> <p>Having studied Mathematics and AS Computing, both programmes have facilitated my development as a mathematician and a problem solver through the constant emphasis on processes and problem solving techniques. So far I am enjoying the Core 3 module, particularly exponential and logarithmic functions which have given me a huge insight as to how the exponential curve can be used to model real world situations. Though initially trigonometric functions and identities seemed testing due to the endless methods of manipulation, my persistence has led to a greater understanding of the subject.</p> <p>Due to the current state of the global economy I have found the material covered in my economics classes to be of immediate relevance. After learning about fiscal and supply side policies I have witnessed their implementation which has allowed me to see how pivotal they are to the stabilization of both our economy, and that of the developed world. The development and eventual resolution of these problems has only enhanced my enthusiasm and curiosity in this subject. In addition, as Economics and Mathematics complement each other naturally I have been able to apply certain elements of mathematical theory to different economical situations. I have taken advantage of this and have found the transfer of skills extremely valuable.</p> <p>Doing A level Physical Education has allowed me to develop sporting skills but has also sparked an interest in physiology and the use of data and statistics to evaluate performance. Here I can see how the application of Mathematics can be used to improve the performance of athletes. I found this to be intriguing as while I was at secondary school I was heavily involved in numerous sporting activities; among them were athletics and football. I used to be a keen 200m runner but due to my passion for football I eventually concentrated my efforts on my school and local football teams. My sporting proficiency led me to become deputy head boy for sports and leisure which gave me an opportunity to develop my leadership abilities while highlighting my sporting prowess.</p> <p>Being in full time education and part time employment I have had to quickly develop sound organisational skills. Though it was not always easy I have found the experience to be invaluable as I had to work at speed, under pressure and deal with customers politely within difficult situations. Even though this has little to do with my academic development it has allowed me to become a well-rounded individual with excellent team working, communication and time management skills.</p> <p>On completion of my degree, I would like to work in the financial sector, perhaps in the area of investment banking where Mathematical methods are applied to financial situations. I appreciate that studying for a degree will be demanding; but I am inspired and committed to succeed.</p>								
9. CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS: If you have a relevant criminal conviction, enter X in the box. See How to Apply for a definition of relevant criminal convictions. <input type="checkbox"/>								

		Type of school, college or training centre	Sixth Form C
Name of referee		School Number	[REDACTED]
Post/Occupation/Relationship		Dates when the applicant is unavailable for interview due to examinations, etc.	
Name and address of school/college/organisation		Total number in post-16 education	1255
Tel: [REDACTED]		Fax: [REDACTED]	Number normally proceeding to higher education each year
email: [REDACTED]			
Name of applicant (block capitals or type)			
Predicted grades A:Economics:A A:Mathematics:B A:Physical Education:B			
Reference [REDACTED] joined the college in September 2008 from [REDACTED] High School, an 11-16 comprehensive in the inner London borough of Croydon. His GCSE results were excellent in a school where only 52% achieve the modest benchmark of 5 A*-Cs including English and Maths. It is college policy that students enter for AS at the end of year 1. Traditionally the majority of students improve very significantly in the 3 mo prior to their A2 examinations.			
In A- Level PE [REDACTED] has done exceptionally well in both sections. He was able to discuss and present on diff topics and did so in a clear and concise way, engaging the group in purposeful discussions. His homeworks are always to an extremely high standard.			
[REDACTED] is also a talented and committed sports performer and was able to achieve well in the practical sports performance, and he particularly demonstrated good team skills. As part of his coursework he was required to oral examinations, analysing his strengths and areas for further improvement; he was able to do this in a confident and analytical way clearly understanding the various methods required to improve performance.			
AS Mathematics requires students to build on the techniques acquired at GCSE so that they become second nature to them. [REDACTED] has performed consistently excellently throughout the year. His exam results were good justifying his dedication throughout the year. His maths tutor describes him as a strong, independent learner with determination and desire to do well. He has been learning how to present a reasonable argument using sound mathematical theory and correct notation. [REDACTED] has developed a very mature approach to his work and taken upon himself to try to read ahead of the class.			
In his A level Economics [REDACTED] is a very conscientious and hard-working student who has made excellent progress. He always plans his time effectively to meet deadlines, and prepares for examinations in a very thorough and systematic manner. He is an intelligent student with an enthusiasm for the subject and has produced much of a very high quality. He is highly competent in using economic data, both in written and numerical forms, and able to analyse and evaluate such materials effectively. [REDACTED] has a concise, accurate written style and can construct a coherent argument and draw logical conclusions based on evidence. He makes many excellent contributions to class discussions, often applying theory learnt in previous lessons to a new context. He is capable of explaining complex economic concepts to other students very effectively.			
[REDACTED] is an intelligent student with an excellent attitude to his studies. It is also clear that he enjoys learning an intellectual pursuit. He is inquisitive and through frequent questioning he ensures that he understands the concepts studied. He has made good progress at SFX. He always participates positively in tutorial and is a valuable asset to his tutor. [REDACTED] has a range of interests outside of College and has held down a part time job. He is always cheerful and helpful and has an excellent attendance and punctuality record and is always willing to help when necessary.			
[REDACTED] has participated fully in the college's Religious Studies programme where students discuss various ethical and moral and social issues in groups. [REDACTED] has shown himself to be a person of intelligence and creativity, and tutors comment on his team working skills. He is very popular amongst his peers and relates well to members of staff and is often described as a pleasure to teach.			

The UCAS Reference - Essentials (continued)

- ▶ Note/explain deviations from standard programme
 - explain qualifications taken if not clear from general statement
 - explain any gaps in education and/or poor performance – we assume the worst if information is missing!
- ▶ Note other individual circumstances that may merit special consideration
 - widening participation group
 - participation in special programmes ie. Compact Schemes

Structure of Reference

▶ 3 sections:

▶ Introduction

- Brief resume of school/college context, summary profile of student, special points

▶ Subject paragraph(s)

- details from subject teachers; best first!

▶ Concluding paragraph

- other activities/achievements, personal qualities;
- strength of support for application;
- further information as appropriate about any special circumstances, e.g. how the student is supported, what effect the issue has on the student's performance

Subject Paragraphs

- ▶ 75 words average per A/AS (could be more if related to degree choice, less if subject completed)
- ▶ 250 – 300 words for double vocational/applied courses
- ▶ Comment on:
 - analytical skills
 - initiative
 - aptitude
 - practical skills
 - application/determination
 - ability to present argument
 - independence of thought
 - communication skills
 - creativity/imagination

Subject Paragraphs (continued)

▶ **DO**

- ▶ Keep it brief about the school/college – focus on the student
- ▶ Give context about former school if they are new to college/sixth form
- ▶ Use subject-specific guidelines as applicable
- ▶ Add comment where predicted grades are not a true reflection of potential/inconsistent with achievement so far
- ▶ Refer to good AS marks even if not certificated (A/B equivalent)
- ▶ Focus on academic skills, enthusiasm, ICT skills

▶ **DON'T**

- ▶ Use stock phrases
- ▶ Write as a report (e.g. 'J--- should concentrate on this or that')
- ▶ Refer to resits, unless it seems positive in the circumstances
- ▶ Raise weaknesses unless documented, evidenced and communicated to/discussed with student/parents

What do our Admissions Staff look for?

- ▶ This is what Aston's Admissions Staff look for in a School Reference –
 - ▶ Knows the student and has taken into account all aspects of 6th form – balanced account
 - ▶ Student engagement with the subject
 - ▶ Class contribution
 - ▶ Student engagement with the school
 - ▶ Do the results and predicted grades match the reference and personal statement?
 - ▶ Are they an improving student – what evidence is provided?
 - ▶ An understanding about what the student wants to study at University. Communication with the student about where and what they are applying for.

What do our Admissions Staff look for?

- ▶ Any extenuating circumstances please declare them!
(Even if it is a written letter post application)
- ▶ The School Reference is used to fill in the gaps between the results and information provided on the personal statement
- ▶ Aston Admissions Staff do revisit School References and personal statements if a student is borderline at confirmation – they are important and a decision can be swayed by the school reference!

The Process

- ▶ Students invited to provide information about themselves ('Student Reference Form' and /or discussion) and to compile grade predictions
- ▶ Subject teachers provide specific comments and predicted grades
- ▶ Personal Tutor provides statement on personal qualities and assembles 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

Issues

- ▶ Not underselling your best students
- ▶ Confidentiality - to share or not to share
- ▶ Quality control in large institutions- getting everyone 'signed up'
- ▶ Training and support

EXAMPLES

Compare the example applications using the criteria outlined in this presentation

Assess whether you would offer a place and what conditions you would apply

Students here typically study four AS-levels in Year 12 (leading to three A-levels in Year 13) or a VCE or BTEC course. Some combine a vocational course with one or more AS or A-level subjects. There is a small IB group and the new Diploma enters the offer from 2008. All have the opportunity to take part in Enrichment activities. AS Certification takes place at the end of Year 13. Over 30% of students qualify for EMA payments and approximately 25% have Widening Participation postcodes.

There are few individuals who have achieved the level of success enjoyed by ----- in a single academic year. Teachers are unanimous in praise of his academic acumen and exceptional zeal for learning. They describe his progress in the following paragraphs.

----- is an able and mature student of Physics. He contributes well to class discussions and shows interest in developing ideas beyond the requirements of A-level, for example in attending optional evening lectures at Birmingham University. His AS-level written work was consistently at grade A standard and he scored full marks on his practical coursework. He gained an impressive total UMS of 287 in the AS examination and we confidentially predict him to achieve a grade A in the A level.

----- has an exceptionally clear understanding of Chemistry. He has a good analytical mind and is prepared to read around the subject in order to enhance his knowledge. He has a genuine enthusiasm for all science-related issues and has enjoyed great benefit from a part-time job in an analytical laboratory. His performance on internally set examinations has been outstanding, averaging 92%. In practical work ----- is well organised, thorough and always keen to see a task to completion. We are confident he will achieve a Grade A in the summer.

In AQA Further Mathematics, ----- is an outstanding and highly-motivated student. He listens most carefully in class, quickly absorbing new ideas, and applying himself quietly, diligently and highly successfully to problem-solving. He tends to work best on his own, but he can also work well with others, and he contributes very effectively to class discussion. His homework record is excellent as he will persevere to find solutions to difficult problems. His first six module results were all extremely pleasing, particularly in Pure Mathematics and Mechanics, where he obtained full marks in Core2, giving him a high A grade. He is comfortably on target to achieve A grades in both Single and Further Mathematics.

----- was an able, intelligent and determined AS Biology student who learned quickly and enjoyed challenges. He worked best by himself, but gathered confidence in contributing to lessons. He showed a strong grasp of the physical and chemical concepts underpinning the subject and created a thorough self-learning computer programme on the subject of cell structure, illustrated with electron micrographs. ----- has the potential for a grade A in Biology and currently holds marks sufficient to achieve a B at AS level.

As a high achiever ----- was selected to attend a summer school for "Gifted and Talented" individuals here in July 2005. He will be the first to admit that he is a quiet individual, and a 'bit of a loner' but a one-to-one conversation will reveal the inner drive and scientific interests. ----- has been a stalwart participant in the College's musical ensembles. He will be a major asset to any physics department fortunate enough to attract him and his application enjoys our wholehearted support.

A personable, confident and able young man, ----- has made good progress in all his A-level subjects since joining the College. It would be fair to say that he has found the non-scientific subjects easier than the science-based courses but he has persevered with the latter and as, his teachers describe below, should gain good grades next year.

In Geography, ----- is an extremely committed student who always works to the best of his ability. He is a quiet, thoughtful individual who possesses well-developed skills of coursework planning, implementation and completion. He has needed very little external guidance for either his coursework or revision programme. Has the perfect aptitude to develop into a very talented geographer and we are delighted to predict him a grade B at the end of this course.

----- has the potential to secure a high grade in Sociology. He is a very able student and so has developed a sound understanding of sociological theory and key terminology. ----- has clearly demonstrated his ability to select and organise relevant material in order to produce coherent, well balanced, written arguments. He is a confident speaker and has made some valuable contributions to class discussion. By placing further emphasis on private study. Will secure a B grade at A-level.

In Chemistry, ----- clearly has ability and the potential to do very well. He did not, however, adequately prioritise work in the subject for a significant part of the first year and, consequently, found himself well behind in a number of areas.

Nevertheless, at a late stage, his attitude changed and he started to take his progress more seriously. He put in an admirable amount of work outside of college and managed to secure marks equivalent to a grade D at AS level. We are convinced that with the appropriate level of commitment and effort, he will build on this in the second year of the course and anticipate a grade C in his final examinations.

In AS Biology, ----- was an amiable classroom presence and although not a natural scientist he worked in a measured way to master difficult concepts. Written work was of a reasonable standard but had a tendency to veer towards the superficial. He gained in confidence as the year progressed and displayed a greater awareness of the skills required for practical assessment. To his great credit he achieved a grade A in the summer examinations.

----- has chosen his degree courses at university carefully, looking at what areas interest him and which will provide an appropriate vocational opportunity. We feel he has a natural aptitude for geographically-based courses and has developed his study skills over the last eighteen months so that he will be able to make a success of higher education. He has a wide range of outside interests to bring to university and should be able to play a full part in wider university life. It is clear that he works best when he is interested, has an incentive and sees a challenge and it is on this basis that we recommend him.

-----is a sociable and affable young man who has found the transition from GCSE to AS-level difficult. He has consistently underachieved since joining the college as a result of varied application to his studies and it will require a sustained concentrated effort to gain the level of success he seeks. His teachers have written the following paragraphs about his progress and achievement.

----- has made limited progress in Chemistry. On the face of it, he is a likeable young man, who presents himself well but does not have the initiative to come forward and request help. He lacks overall commitment. He has difficulty in sustaining concentration and often misses out on key aspects of the course. Consequently, his overall knowledge of the material is relatively weak and his requests for help are either too late or there to satisfy his own conscience, rather than stemming from a genuine drive to better himself. This is very frustrating as ----- has potential and is not without ability. He could achieve so much more if only he could make his college work more of a priority. In a practical situation, he is well-organised and works competently with others. With careful preparation and a little more maturity in the rest of year, he could achieve a grade D next summer.

After a disappointing first year in Mathematics, ----- studied for Pure and Mechanics M1 modules again and was able to improve his standard. This year, he is studying for Pure Mathematics and Statistics S1 modules. ----- finds difficulty with this subject and performs better in a group situation. If he applies maximum effort he will achieve a pass grade, E in the A-level examinations.

In Physics, ----- will usually contribute well to class discussions and can show a good grasp of some topics. His level of submission of work is satisfactory. He works well with other members of the group and can display good laboratory skills, especially within assessed practicals. Given continued development in Physics he should gain a D grade at A-level,.

In AS-level Biology, ----- was a sociable young man who often allowed himself to be distracted from the task in hand. He was clearly intelligent, but often under-utilised his brainpower, and had sound practical skills when he applied himself. We predict he will certificate with an E or U grade.

We applaud ----- for his endurance in tackling AS and A2 programmes of study and for his high ambitions. We have also counselled him extensively on his aptitude for and prospects of success in higher education. There is yet time for to exhibit latent ability and to demonstrate the powers of motivation, self-discipline and independent learning which will serve him well in higher education and if he finds a course which stimulates him and which will provide support for his study skills he may well flourish.

----- is a friendly, pleasant and courteous student who maintains a positive and enthusiastic approach to his work. He has a willingness to learn and, throughout his time here, he has maintained a conscientious and hard working approach towards all aspects of his life as a student.

The coursework that ----- has produced in all subject areas of his BTEC National Certificate in Sport course is always well-presented and of a very good standard, with all coursework deadlines being met. This is evidenced in the number of merit grades that-----has achieved so far. Not only have his overall grades been commendable, but he has also shown a genuine willingness to learn and an interest in both the theory aspects as well as the practical elements of the course.

Although ----- has completed almost all the units independently and has shown that he is capable of investigation and research, he is equally an enthusiastic and conscientious when he is required to work as part of a group or team.

----- has shown considerable potential and make impressive progress during his time here. On the basis of the grades he has achieved so far in the course we are confident of predicting him a DM grade on its completion.

In addition to the BTEC Sport course, ----- is currently working towards improving his GCSE English result which he is doing as part of the Enrichment Programme. Outside of College ----- enjoys playing football, following cricket and enjoys reading around issues in sport.

Other qualities that make ----- a suitable candidate for higher education include good communication skills, his ability to relate well to others and deal with problems effectively as they arise. He is also reliable, diligent and well-organised. His attendance has been exemplary.

----- has demonstrated a long-standing interest in all aspects of sport and it is his intention to remain within this field for this future employment. It is our pleasure to recommend and support him in his application. We are confident he will be successful in whatever he sets out to do.

Thanks for listening

Any questions?