Writing a Tutor reference

For many Tutors writing their own UCAS references can be a long and daunting task. Its relevance and importance is often queried, alongside the 'ideal' content and structure.

This chapter has been compiled by current Admissions Tutors and is a reflection of their personal thoughts and experiences with Tutor references. The advice that they have provided can form a basic guide to follow and has been suggested by academics from across all faculties, ensuring that it remains generic and applicable to the majority of applications.

Is the reference considered?

When reviewing a student's application, Admissions Tutors will read and reflect on all key sections – including the Tutor reference. Whilst the decision on whether or not to make an offer is unlikely to be based solely on the reference, it is certainly considered as part of the 'big picture' and in borderline cases it can sway a decision either way.

What should the reference say?

Admissions Tutors are incredibly grateful to receive references that accurately reflect a student and their abilities. Whilst they both recognise and understand that the focus will be on the applicant's positive attributes, this should remain an honest reflection – focus on the positives but don't create them!

The same advice can also be applied to the predicted grades. The need for accuracy in this section is paramount in order to prevent unachievable offers and disappointed students!

How can I support my student's application through my reference?

The key to writing a strong reference is that you know and understand the applicant well. Knowledge of both their academic abilities and their personal interests can help you to fully understand the motivation behind the application, providing an insight into areas that you can highlight to further emphasise this. If you are unsure about a student's intentions or future plans you can refer back to their personal statement, which if written well, should indicate their long-term objectives and the reasons behind their application.

You should also take this opportunity to check that the candidate's ambitions are well reflected in the courses that they are applying for.

Wherever possible favour your reference to suit the courses applied for. If an applicant wishes to apply for Drama focus their skills and experiences in areas such as creativity, verbal communication, analysis and interpretation of texts. Other key skills that should be highlighted for all applicants include time management, team work, written communication and initiative. A comment detailing attendance is also appreciated. If you are unclear as to which skills are desirable for certain subject refer to the UCAS website [ucas.com](http://ucas.com) and check the entry profile for the relevant course. This link acts as a form of 'job description' for the course, detailing the particular areas of interest to Admissions Tutors.

How can I discuss a concern about a student's ability?

As a general rule Admissions Tutors are excellent at reading between the lines and often what a reference doesn't say can have as much impact as what it does say. Be careful though, if key details regarding a students abilities are omitted an Admissions Tutor may assume that this skill is particularly weak or even absent in a candidate. To avoid this situation key achievements and skills should be highlighted and poorer areas given a 'softer sell'. As previously mentioned it is unlikely that an applicant will be rejected based solely on this, but honesty is appreciated. If an Admissions Tutor does have a concern about any aspect of an applicant's ability it can be probed further at a later stage, for example, at interview.

Teachers' information