

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD REFERENCE?



**Middlesex University
Careers Advisors' Conference,
6 February 2013**

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD REFERENCE?

- A day in life of...
- Examples
- Discussion about challenging scenarios
- Tips for good practice

A day in life... of a student



- **Researching courses from June**
- **3 months to complete an application**
- **All offers received between February and March**
- **Time to research, prepare and make sure their applications stand out!**

A day in life... of a school / college tutor



- **Max 4 weeks in Nov – Dec to write all references**
- **Maximum number ... ∞**
- **Multitude of choices, options, career routes**
- **Anxious students wanting to make a good impression.**

A day in life... of a University Admissions Tutor



- **Bulk of applications coming in January**
- **Between 10 and 100 applications per place**
- **Offers need to be released between Jan – March**
- **Interviews, auditions, portfolio assessments**
- **Teaching, assessments, January Induction, research, grants...**

What do we find the most challenging?

- **Pressures.....**
 - ✓ **to shortlist and give offers as quickly as possible**
 - ✓ **to find the right candidates**
 - ✓ **to be fair and transparent**
 - ✓ **contextual admissions**
 - ✓ **to remember agreements with partner schools and colleges!**

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Examples

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- **UCAS 2013**
- **No changes have been made**
- **Let's discuss...**

Examples

Jane – Primary Education



- Student background  
- Demonstrating genuine interest in the subject 
- Highlighting academic progress 
- Paragraph about the College 
- Typos and bad syntax 

- Candidate invited for an interview for BA Primary

Examples

Alex – Computer Sciences



- Candidate with weak grades
- Non- standard referee
- Very personal 
- Very long 
- Candidate invited for an interview for Computing Sciences

Examples

Carla – Psychology

- Lack of structure ↓
- Difficult to read ↓
- Difficult to remember and absorb information ↓
- Many repetitions ↓
- Highlighting academic progress ↑
- Paragraph about the College ↑
- Candidate rejected

Examples

Donna – Nursing

- Lack of structure, difficult to read ↓
- Link to work experience and skills developed ↑
- Highlighting academic progress ↑
- Paragraph about the College ↑
- Lots of personal information, but hard to absorb →
- Candidate invited for an interview

Examples

Salma – Child Nursing

- Good structure ↑
- Clear and concise information about the college ↑
- Institutional context ↑
- Highlighting academic progress, work experience, interest ↑
- Not too long, relevant information ↑
- Candidate invited for an interview

Examples

Diana – Psychology

- Good structure ↑
- Clear and concise information about the college ↑
- Institutional context ↑
- Three referees ↑ ↑
- Candidate invited for an interview

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What makes a good reference?

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Information about the student

- Academic performance (during the course) and ability
- What **skills they possess and have developed during the course at a college** that will help them **succeed at the HE course and career of their choice?**
- Why that particular candidate is suited **for the course they have applied for**
- How a candidate is likely to progress
- Skills, attitude, character.... Personal, personal, personal!
- Individual or personalised cases whereby a candidate's performance may have been affected due to unforeseen circumstances...

What makes a good reference?

Baseline info about college and course – useful!

- **Information about the College – size and type, number of students**
- **How long have you known the student and in what capacity?**
- **Qualification undertaken by the student (modules and any specific info)**

Challenges

- **Weak students**
- **Access course students**
- **Personal circumstances affecting students' performance**
- **Attitudes, behaviors, difficult students**
- **Range of subject areas / courses applied for / lack of commitment to further and higher education...**
- **What information should be included?**

What makes a good reference?

- **Weak students – be honest but think about the student in a holistic way**
- **Rejection on reference alone is rare**
- **Include statistics on attendance**
- **Access students – supply an additional reference/information when you know them better later in the term**
- **Early applications myth – at Middlesex all applications considered equally until the Jan 15th deadline**
- **If there are mitigating circumstances let the University know BEFORE exam results**

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