

WRITING A UCAS TEACHER REFERENCE

References are read by a wide range of people, depending on the university and the course, so there is no perfect way to write. However, below is some general advice to help you.

BEFORE YOU START WRITING

Know your audience!

- Senior member of academic staff
- Highly experienced in their field
- Researcher, but also a teacher

Know your student!

- Read their personal statement thoroughly
- Understand extenuating circumstances
- Know their academic abilities, but also extracurricular activities

LAYOUT AND CONTENT

There is no perfect layout to a reference, but most begin with a short introduction to the school or college followed by a discussion of the student. The information on the student should form the vast majority of the reference.

The most common mistake on UCAS references is to simply repeat large sections of the student's personal statement. Where possible, speak about different topics than those that are already covered by the student.



DESCRIBING THE SCHOOL OR COLLEGE

Information on the school can remain consistent across multiple references, except in specific cases. Should include size, type, class sizes, as well as typical qualifications and HE progression. It is useful to describe the catchment area. Where the student has participated, describe WP, GT, or partnership programmes the school/college is involved in. This section should be 50-100 words maximum.

DESCRIBING THE STUDENT

This should focus on student's academic abilities, both in the classroom and where they engage outside. It is important to stand out, and this means using individual and specific examples; what could only you tell them? With permission, discuss difficulties students have had, either specifically (such as bereavement) or across the school (such as persistent cover). Comment on English ability if ESL.

PREDICTING GRADES

Use a reference to explain discrepancies between predicated and current grades. It is tempting to over predict grades, but be aware many universities monitor the accuracy of predications for every school.

Where you do discuss the same thing, ensure you are expanding upon what has already been said from the perspective of school/college staff.

REFERENCE EXAMPLES

Below are some examples, good and bad, of references.

DESCRIBING THE SCHOOL/COLLEGE

Our college takes students from a varied number of feeder schools around Worcestershire, and delivers a mix of A-Level and BTEC programmes for students. 35% of our students come from WP backgrounds, and a minority of our current cohort have parental HE experience. Last year, 34% of our students progressed to HE. A-Level students typically take 3 A-Levels, although in cases such as (student) we allow 4 to be taken. All students take critical thinking and participate in enrichment.

Our school sits in a leafy suburb of Birmingham, and has been providing exemplary education to the great and the good since 1732. We offer a fantastic array of qualifications, and encourage our students to fulfil their dreams, whatever these may be. We are exceedingly proud to have recently won the Regional Chamber of Commerce Education and Business Partnership Award. Our students are all of a very high calibre, and will naturally flourish at your institution.

GOOD ↑

Bad references tend to be wordy, irrelevant, and imprecise. Phrases such as 'very high calibre' or 'fantastic array' actually tell an admissions tutor nothing precise about the school. Not only is the 'Good' reference more precise (through statistics and exact descriptions), it also mentions the student specifically very early on.

BAD ↑

DESCRIBING THE STUDENT

Teaching [student] from years 10-13, I have watched them grow into a very capable historian. Unusually for students of her age, [student] shows an implicit understanding of not just historical events, but also the source work, historiography, and theoretical works that underpin our historical knowledge generally. Further to the wider reading [student] has discussed in her statement, she has frequently attended a lunchtime discussion group I run. We recently discussed 'Guns, Germs, and Steel' and [student] showed herself to have exemplary historical understanding as well as practical discussion skills key to the seminar method of learning.

[Student] has always had a flair for Chemistry. She is very engaged and has always found the subject incredibly interesting. She participates well in experiments, and where she makes mistakes she usually learns from them. [Student]'s family has fallen on some hard times recently and this may be affecting her grades. She would make an excellent Chemistry student, because she has always really enjoyed Chemistry and been very engaged.

GOOD ↑

Good references are specific in details and specific about the student. They give concrete examples about where the student stands out, from a perspective only a teacher could give. Bad references are overly generic, and do not expand on specificities. Bad references could apply to anyone; a good reference could only ever refer to the student in question.

BAD ↑