

Personal statements & Reference writing

A young woman with long dark hair is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is in a computer lab, with several computer monitors visible in the foreground and background. Other students are blurred in the background.

**Here's an
Insiders Guide:**

To supporting your
students writing personal
statements & writing
effecting
references

What is UCAS?

- Do your students understand what UCAS is?
- University and College Admissions Service
- Helpful Online resources
- Responsible for managing applications to Universities and Colleges
- Helps students make informed choices about HE and the application process
- Deadlines & last minute panic

The UCAS logo, featuring the letters 'UCAS' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter 'A' is stylized with a red triangle pointing upwards, forming the letter.

What is a personal statement?

- A written statement which gives a personal overall summary of your students – all the positives!
- Why should the admissions tutor pick your students over other candidates?

Why is it so important?

- Courses can be competitive
- Students chance to demonstrate specific skills and that they are the right person for the course
- A chance for students to grab the attention of the selectors

STATEMENT 1

There is a maximum length to a personal statement

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 1

A personal statement is a maximum of 47 lines or 4000 characters – which ever comes first.

TRUE



FALSE



STATEMENT 2

A personal statement
can be written in
paragraphs

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 2

Yes, a personal statement can be written in paragraphs

TRUE



FALSE



STATEMENT 3

The UCAS apply software checks for spelling and grammar mistakes

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 3

Apply will not spell
check your work – we
recommend you
prepare it offline using
Microsoft Word then
copy and paste

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

STATEMENT 4

You write a different
personal statement
for each of your
university choices

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 4

You can only write one personal statement and it will be used for all your choices

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

STATEMENT 5

You can use bold, *italics* and underlined characters in your personal statement

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 5

You cannot use these
characters – UCAS
Apply will
automatically remove
this formatting

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

STATEMENT 6

You should keep a
copy of your personal
statement

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 6

Your personal statement could be used for the basis for an interview. Keep a copy so you are prepared to answer questions on it.

TRUE



FALSE



STATEMENT 7

I'm allowed to copy and paste information from the internet and use this in my personal statement

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 7

All personal statements are checked for similarities using the UCAS copy catch system

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☒

STATEMENT 8

There is a link to a personal statement guide on UCAS Apply

TRUE

☐

FALSE

☐

STATEMENT 8

The link on Apply will take you to a section on the UCAS website where you can find help and advice on writing an effective personal statement.

TRUE



FALSE





IT'S ALL
ABOUT
THEM!



WHERE ARE
YOUR
STUDENTS
NOW?

FOCUS
To what extent
have they
narrowed down
their options?

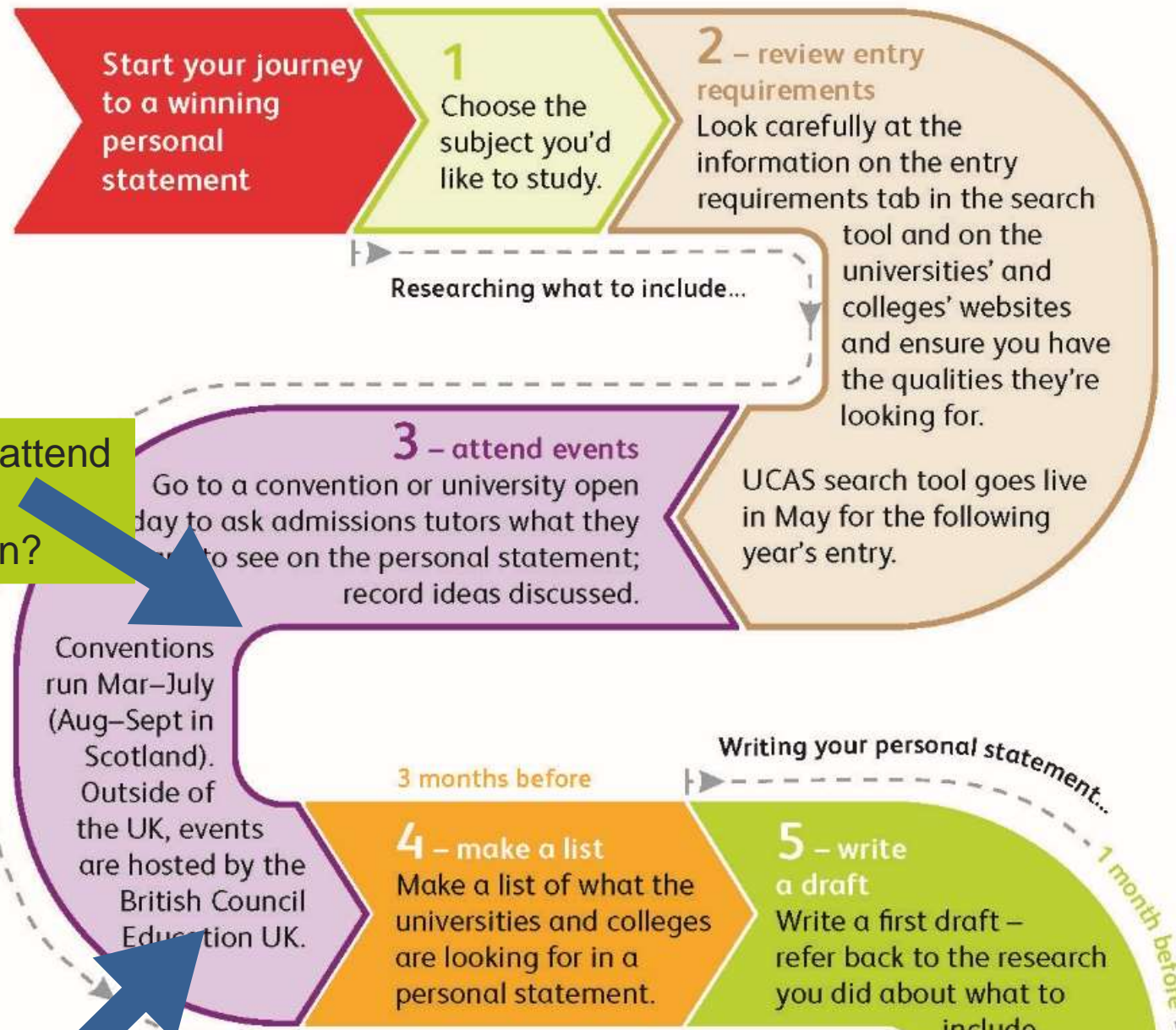
INFORMATION
How well informed
are they?

REALISM
How realistic are
they being?

SCOPE
How aware are
they of the
whole range of
options
available?

TACTICS
Do they know
how to put their
plans into
action?

My personal statement timeline



Did you attend a UCAS exhibition?

Activity

Spend 5 minutes discussing in groups what you think should be included in the personal statement.

You can make it specific to a certain subject area.

Be prepared to feedback.

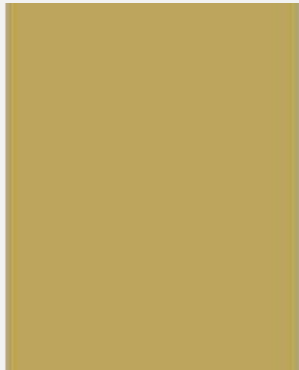




**So what
actually
needs to be
included?**

What to include

- Why the student wants to study the course
- Their skills and achievements
- Any work experience they may have
- Their hobbies and interests
- Future plans



Writing about the course

Why does the subject interest the student?

Why should they be offered a place to study?

- **Demonstrate** that their studies relate to their chosen course
- **Highlight** particular skills or experiences that link to the course
- **Reflect** don't list



What are admissions tutors looking for?

- Enthusiasm
- Suitability for the course
- Motivation for the subject
- Communication skills
- Understanding of HE
- Make sure it's about them



Writing the personal statement

Capture the readers attention with a **strong opening**

“I have always wanted to be a teacher ever since I was very young. I liked learning and thought it would be good to teach”



“Making a rocket style engine from a bottle of lemonade, working with class mates to create a human model of the solar system, explaining in written reports what we had learned: these were the classes that inspired a passion for learning in me...and later a desire to pass on that passion to others”

Writing the personal statement



A

Activity

What you've done



B

Benefit

What skills it has
given you



C

Course

How these relate
to your course



Make each sentence **evidence skills** you have that are **relevant to the course** you want to study, by discussing a **specific activity**

Activity

'I studied History'

Benefit

'I had the chance to improve my research and essay writing skills whilst completing my History A level'

Course

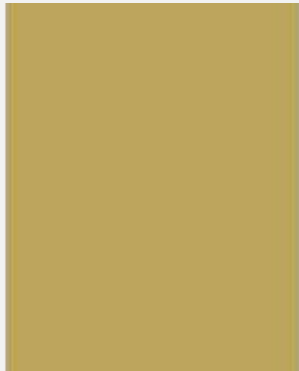
'For one of my essays I decided to focus on the history of British political thought. I really enjoyed this topic and look forward to studying it in more detail at a higher level. The experience I gained from researching this subject and completing my essay I'm sure will help me in my degree course.'

Activity

Get into pairs

Think of any hobbies or interests that you have.

Your partner needs to think of the benefits and how they link to your course of interest





Make each sentence **evidence skills** you have that are **relevant to the course** you want to study, by discussing a **specific activity**

Activity

'I studied History'

Benefit

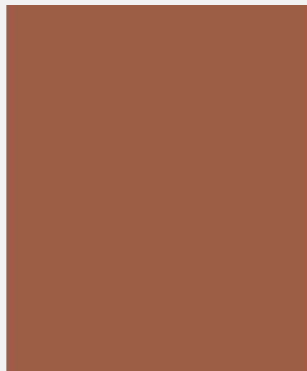
'I had the chance to improve my research and essay writing skills whilst completing my History A level'

Course

'For one of my essays I decided to focus on the history of British political thought. I really enjoyed this topic and look forward to studying it in more detail at a higher level. The experience I gained from researching this subject and completing my essay I'm sure will help me in my degree course.'

Lets get started – how to help your students

- Give them a range of recourses
- Encourage them to write notes
- They will find this much easier if they know which course they want to study and which university they want to attend



Ask them to review what they
have written and ask
themselves...



So what?



Reference Writing

Definition of a reference



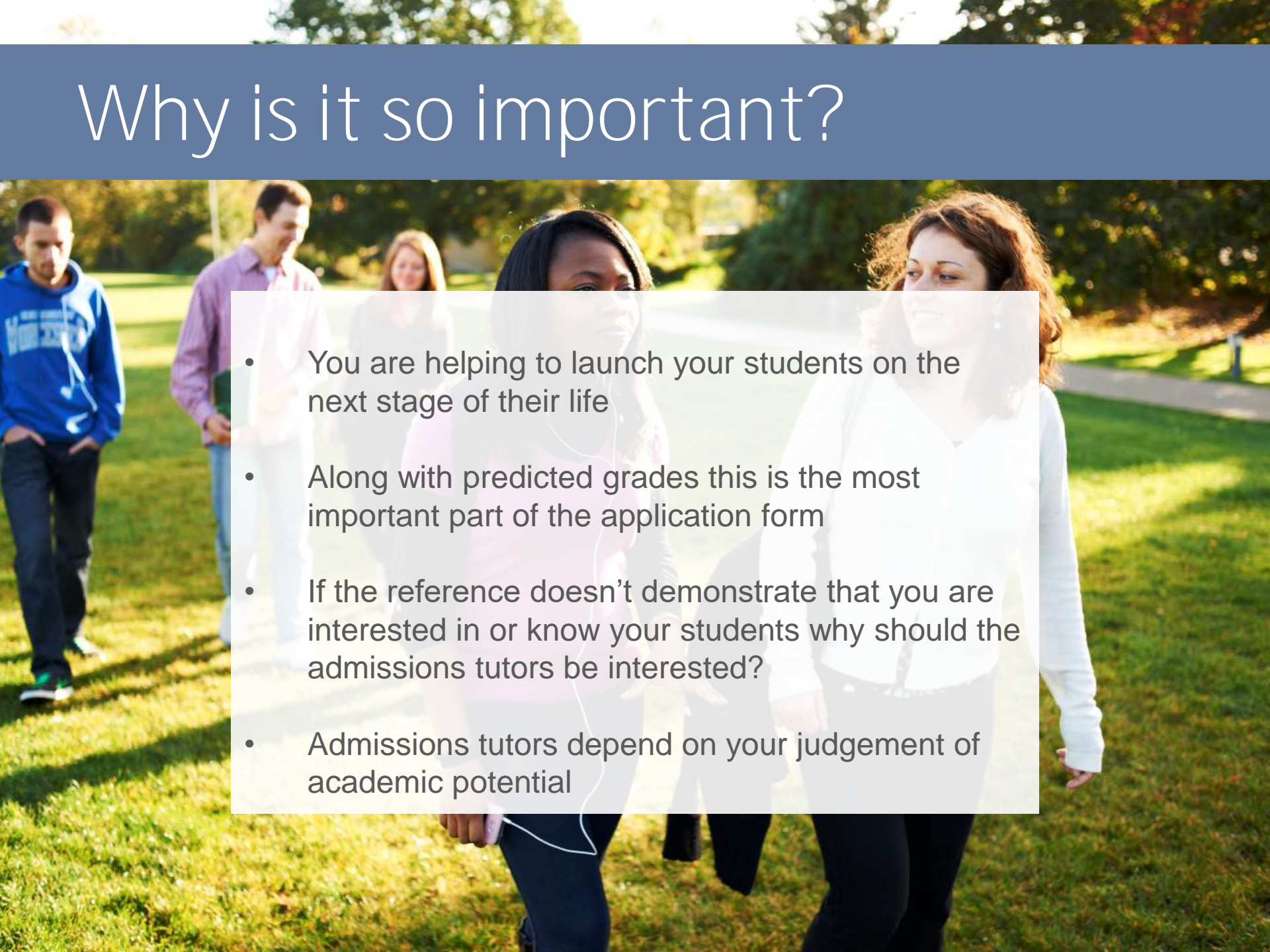
‘A person who is in a position to recommend another or to vouch for his or her fitness, as for a job’.

‘A statement about a person's qualifications, character, and dependability’.

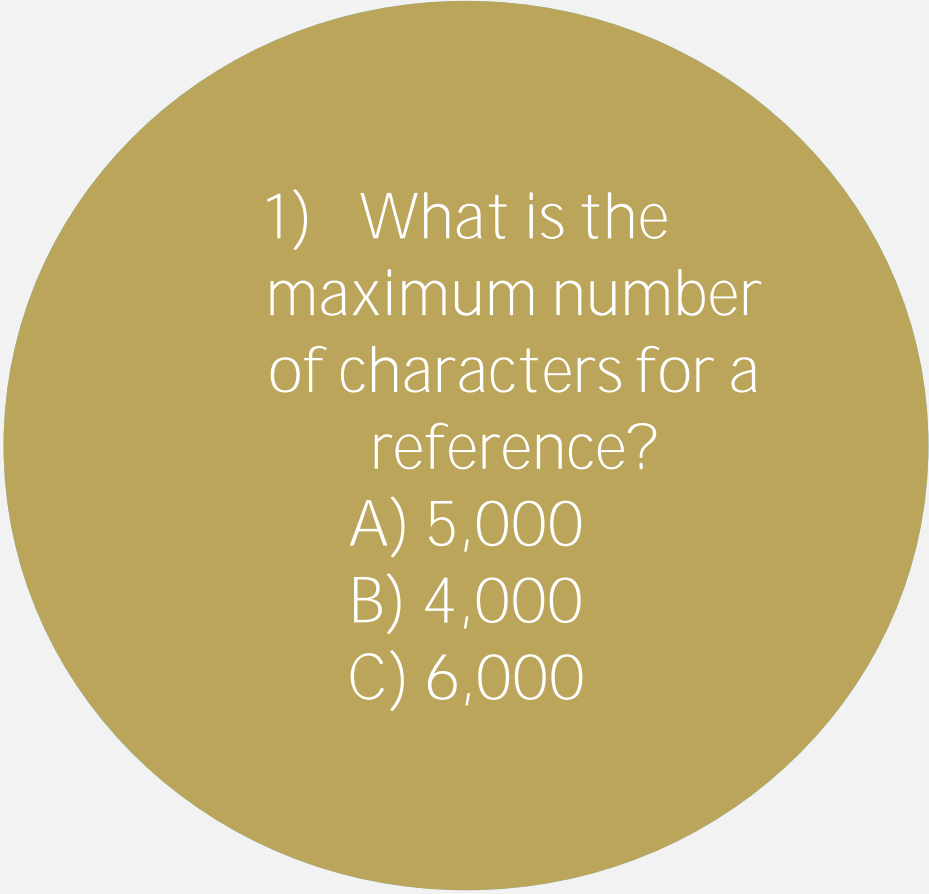
Why bother with references?

- Fact checker for applications
- Competitive process
- Admissions decisions do take into account the reference
- Supports applicant to highlight their abilities

Why is it so important?

- 
- A group of five diverse students are walking along a sunlit grassy path on a university campus. In the foreground, a young Black woman with long dark hair is walking towards the camera, wearing a pink shirt and dark pants. To her right, a young woman with long brown hair is walking away from the camera, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. In the background, a young man in a blue hoodie and a young woman in a pink shirt are also walking. The scene is bright and sunny, with trees and a clear sky in the background.
- You are helping to launch your students on the next stage of their life
 - Along with predicted grades this is the most important part of the application form
 - If the reference doesn't demonstrate that you are interested in or know your students why should the admissions tutors be interested?
 - Admissions tutors depend on your judgement of academic potential

Quiz

- 
- 1) What is the maximum number of characters for a reference?
- A) 5,000
 - B) 4,000
 - C) 6,000

Quiz

2) What is the maximum number of lines for a reference?

- A) 33
- B) 59
- C) 47

Quiz



3) Does copy catcher apply to references?

Quiz

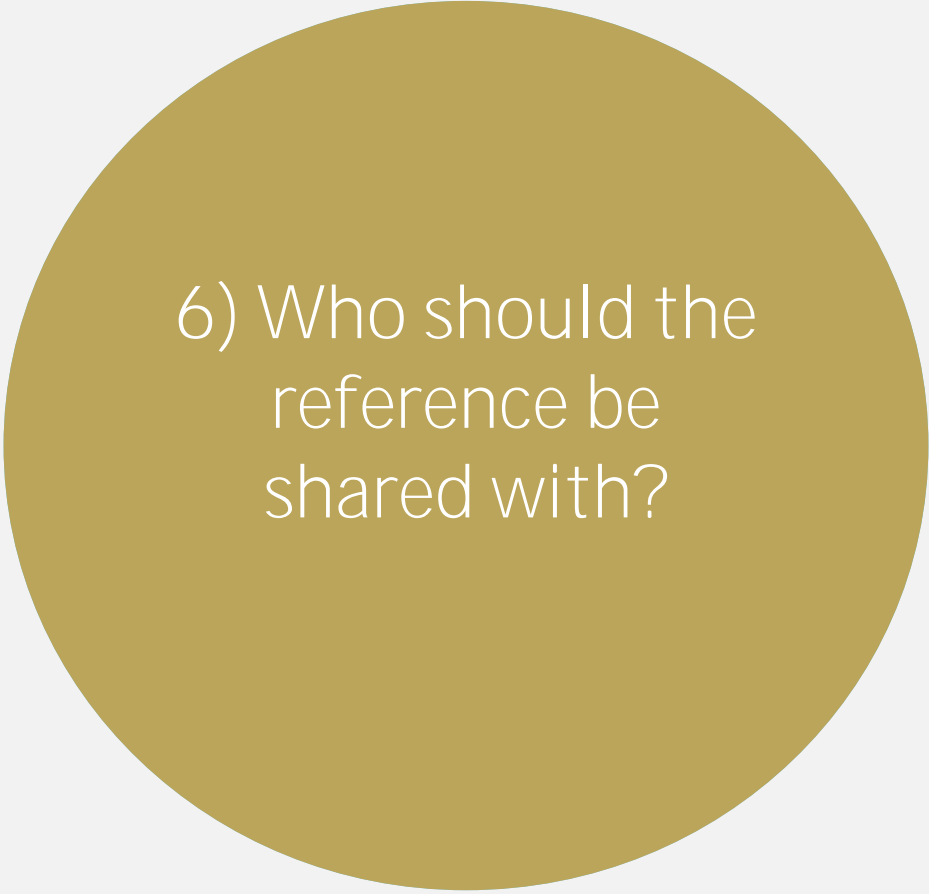
4) After how many minutes of inactivity does the reference page of UCAS timeout?

- A) 35
- B) 60
- C) 45

Quiz

5) Can you write
about a student's
mental health or
disability in their
reference?

Quiz



6) Who should the reference be shared with?

What should be included

Key facts about the applicant:

Academic
performance

Potential for
academic
success in
higher
education

Why the
course they
have chosen is
suited to them

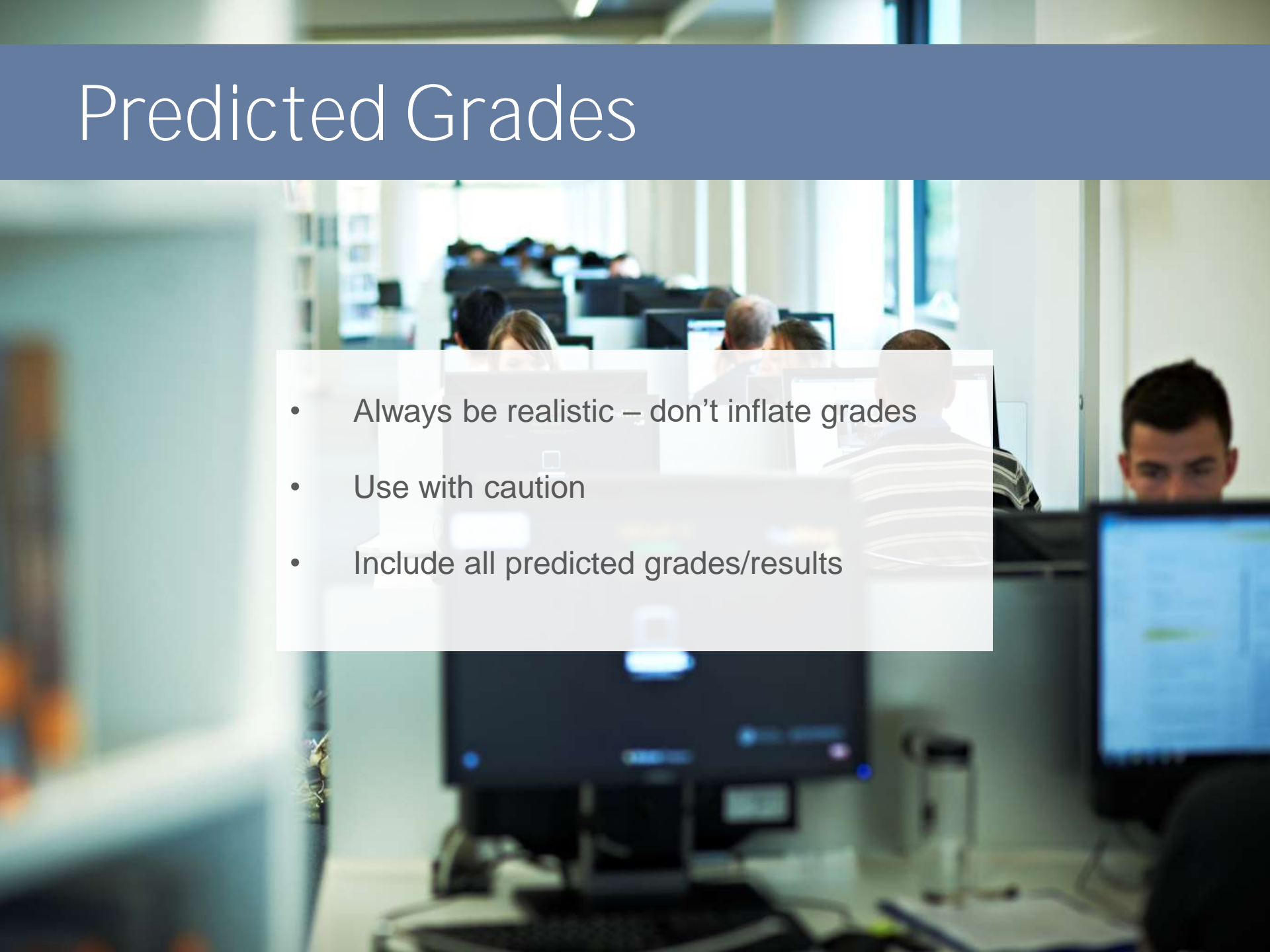
Personal
qualities that
will benefit
them at
university

What they can
bring to the
course /
university

Make life easier

- Ask other staff for contributions
 - Positive disclosure
 - Use secondary references
- Sources:
- Placement
 - Voluntary
 - Paid Work
 - Support agencies

Predicted Grades

- 
- The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of a computer lab or classroom. Several students are seated at desks, working on computers. The focus is soft, with the students in the foreground being more visible than those in the background. The lighting is bright, suggesting a well-lit indoor space.
- Always be realistic – don't inflate grades
 - Use with caution
 - Include all predicted grades/results

Reference Structure

- Provide background information
 - Curriculum policies
 - Average number of subjects studied
 - Student progression to HE
 - Policy on AS and A-levels
- Structure reference in paragraphs

Reference Structure

- Give subjects separate paragraphs where applicable
- Vocational : modules related to chosen courses
- Subjects do not need to have equal depth





ANY
UNANSWERED
QUESTIONS?

Thank
you!



University
of Worcester