

Writing your UCAS Personal Statement



1

THE ADMISSIONS TUTOR

WHAT IS AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR?

When you submit your UCAS application for your chosen course at university, it will usually be read by an admissions tutor.

WHAT IS AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR?

An
Admissions
Tutor is a
gatekeeper
between
you and
your chosen
course



THE ADMISSIONS TUTOR...

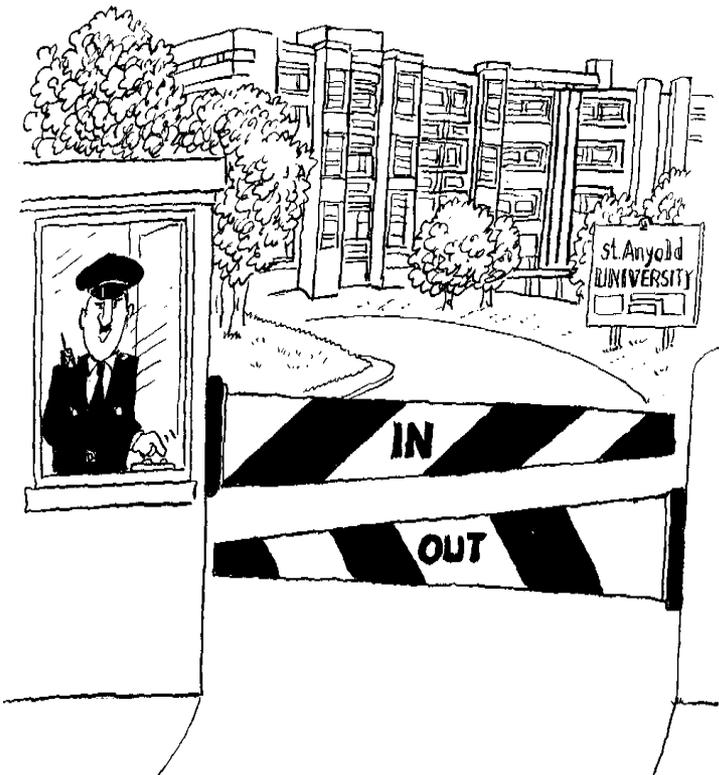
- can let you pass by giving you an offer (e.g. AAB, BBC, CDD)
- can close the gate by declining to give you an offer
- often starts providing offers as soon as applications are received



THE ADMISSIONS TUTOR...

Lots of students apply with the predicted grades, so why offer a place to **you**?

WHAT IS AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR?



Did you know that, on average, around one in every twenty students in England and Wales achieves 3 grade A's at A Level?

WHY OFFER YOU A PLACE?

- Because you have the required grades
- Because of the positive comments in your reference
- Because of your Personal Statement



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EVALUATING PERSONAL STATEMENTS

WHAT DOES A REASONABLE STATEMENT LOOK LIKE?

- Read the personal statement which begins “Although I enjoy...” & underline each experience or key point that appears.
- Count how many experiences or key points have been included in the statement.
- How might the statement be improved?

Although I enjoy studying Mathematics and Geography, it is Business Studies that I wish to pursue in more depth. I believe a degree in Business will build on my understanding of marketing and financial management. Businesses have to operate within a legal framework and I was lucky enough to shadow a barrister for a day to gain an insight into the legal profession. I hope to study aspects of law as part of my degree.

A range of school opportunities have broadened my experiences. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme has been challenging and fulfilling: allowing me to work with a diverse range of people. My voluntary work at Help the Aged proved to be rewarding and gave me a more caring perspective on life. I have also taken part in the 'Year 7 Friends Scheme' in which I supported young students during their first term at school. Taking part in the school drama club as a technician has been fun and has taught me the importance of working to deadlines. I have further pursued my interest in drama and have so far been fortunate to see 'Twelfth Night' and 'Les Miserables'. My role as Deputy Operations Director in the Young Enterprise Scheme has given me an insight into business life. I am interested in the internet and have helped staff redesign the school website. I hope to learn more about web site design at university. Although no-one could call me a sportsman, I am a keen football player and I regularly visit Maine Road to watch Manchester City.

Outside school I belong to the Venture Scouts which has offered opportunities such as gliding and weekend camps to the Peak District. I have managed to balance the demands of my 'A' levels with a varied and enjoyable school and social life. I look forward to the opportunities offered at university.

WHAT DOES A *REASONABLE* STATEMENT LOOK LIKE? FEEDBACK

How many experiences or key points have been included in the statement?

- Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
- Voluntary work at Help the Aged
- Year 7 Friends
- Drama club technician
- Seen 'Twelfth Night' and 'Les Miserables'.
- Deputy Operations Director in the Young Enterprise Scheme
- Helped staff redesign the school website.
- Keen football player
- Visits Maine Road to watch Manchester City
- Venture Scouts

HOW MIGHT THE STATEMENT BE IMPROVED?

- Far more about why the applicant wishes to read business studies at university
- More detail about relevant experiences such as the Young Enterprise scheme e.g. what was the product being marketed? why did the person enjoy the opportunity?
- Write less of a list of points and provide more depth to selected range of issues
- The applicant could have been more personal about the areas mentioned e.g. explaining what they enjoyed

Anything else?

BUT THERE ARE SOME POSITIVE FEATURES ABOUT THE STATEMENT...

- Clearly written
- Dealt with choice of course (though not enough)
- Used short sentences helping it to remain grammatically correct
- No spelling errors

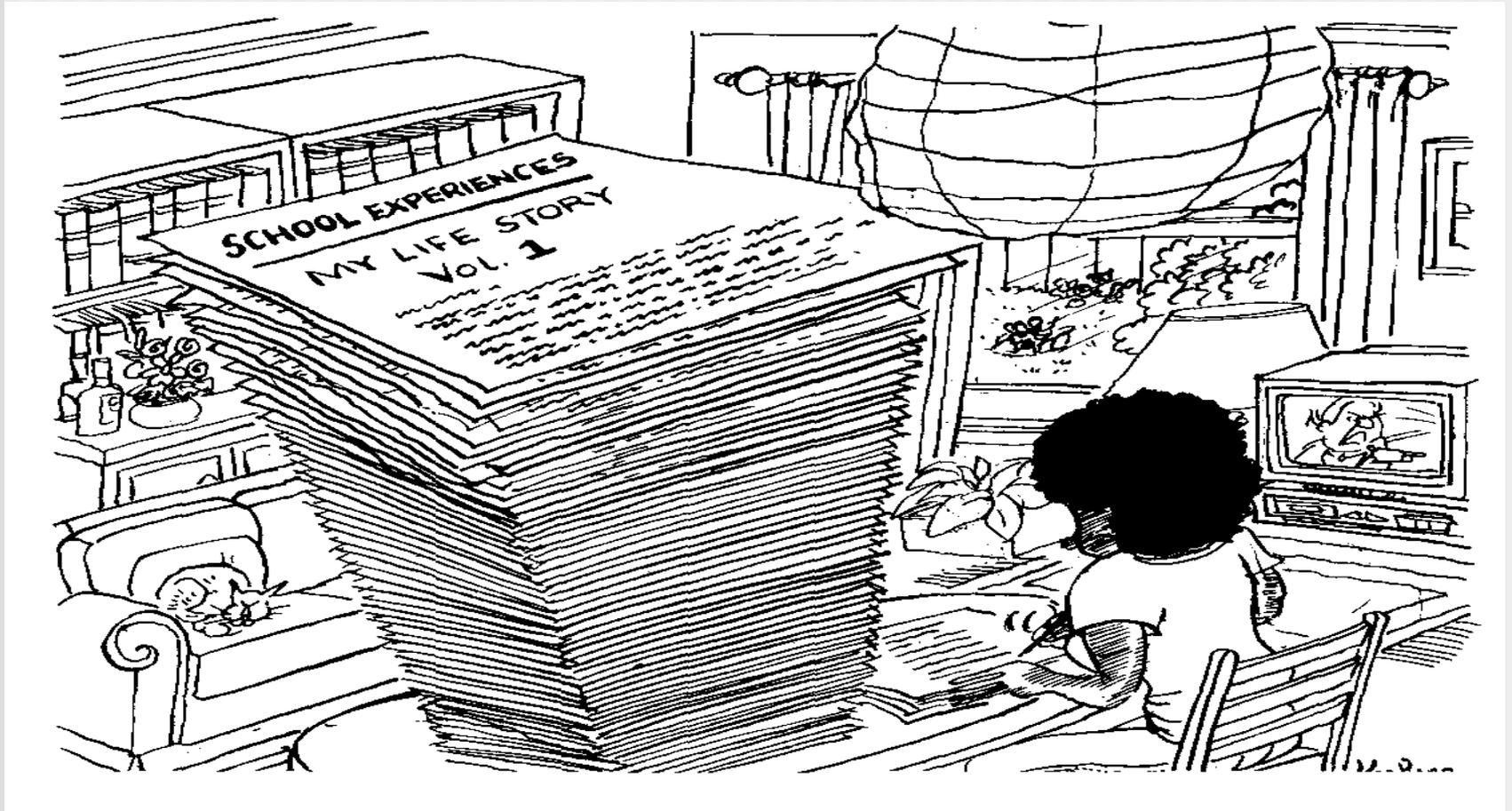
Anything else?

WHAT CAN GO WRONG WITH A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

1. Read the following personal statement. *You will need a copy to read.*
2. Put a line through anything that you think should not be included i.e. that does not sell the student.
3. Reduce the statement to **half** the original length.
4. Decide why the personal statement does not sell the student.

Having systematically going through each stage of choosing a suitable degree, I started by choosing a 'science' subject rather than an 'art' one. Moving on through the field of Physics, relating heavily with Mathematics, I researched the different topics possible in Engineering. With every prospectus I read, I became even more devoted to the course: Mechanical Engineering. Studying in these fields (Mathematics and Physics A-levels) will help me kick-start my degree campaign with enthusiasm and challenge, increasing chances of fitting in well with the course. Aiming to use this study to progress into the world of work with the manner of a fully equipped Engineer, I know that this degree will present myself to the employer as a person of qualities efficient enough to produce upright results from a degree which requires intellectuality, initiative and common sense (in scientific terms). Working for a multinational company I have had a taste of the responsibilities of these personal qualities; *listening* to management, *working independently* to complete the tasks, working to *deadlines*, using *initiative* towards *problem solving* for customer service ... etc. Studying these aspects in the management segment of Business Studies A-level helps me to understand this more clearly, with ways of innovation and motivation for work. Throughout my last 5 school years, using the computer and the Internet has been momentous. From designing programmes (for I.T. coursework) in Microsoft Access to using the internet to inquire about flight arrangements, and with 40 words-per-minute I have gained sufficient computer skills to use it as a surplus for my future. As a sociable person, I have shown that I can fit into a community new to me (my sixth form). This overlaps the personal qualities' aforementioned. I have also worked with children in a nursery, helping teachers. Furthermore, mentoring high school student in preparation for the end of their GCSE's has given me a differing sensation of tutoring. An important point for a student thinking of entering university is willing to be part of that community. This point will make a difference in the productivity of the student towards the community of the university. For five consecutive years now, I have joined the school football team, playing in most cup and league matches. Having represented my school in domestic competitions, I have enjoyed the essence of teamwork, winning and losing. More recently, being trained to be a Junior's coach by the Football Association has strengthened my management skills. The encouraging factor of sport for me is the social aspect, which I enjoy extensively. An exclusive ubiquity of mine is that I am contented with mixing my social with my educational life at length making the two important factors in my life none the less unabridged.

WHAT WERE THE PROBLEMS?



Firstly, it begins like a life story

MORE PROBLEMS...

- Very long – this problem is unlikely to happen to you with the switch to electronic applications
- Uses language the author clearly doesn't understand –
e.g. in the last sentence “exclusive ubiquity of mine”.

Quick question - What does 'ubiquity' mean and does the word make sense in the sentence?

Quick question - What does 'ubiquity' mean and does the word make sense in the sentence?

Answer

- Ubiquity means 'everywhere' or 'very common' like air is all around us.
- An 'exclusive' ubiquity appears like a contradiction.
- The point is that the sentence looks impressive but does not make any sense.

MORE PROBLEMS....

- Many sentences are too long – making grammatical errors
- Sets out to impress but comes across as arrogant
- Has not been proof read otherwise many of the problems would have been identified e.g. sentences that do not make sense.

STRENGTHS

- Does address course choice
- Does have some relevant reasons to support the choice of Mechanical Engineering
- Others?

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**CAN YOU PUT YOURSELF IN
THEIR SHOES?**

**Turn yourself into an
Admissions Tutor**

CAN YOU PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES?

- With the person next to you, decide what you think admissions tutors are looking for when they read a UCAS Personal Statement.

NB. Past grades and your current Advanced courses are outlined in other sections of the application form. Predicted grades are provided in the reference section not in your statement.

- Once you have a short list, underline what you believe to be the most important information in your personal statement.

Admissions Tutors were asked

1. 'HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PERSONAL STATEMENT?'

Depends on:

* Individual Admissions Tutor

(some admissions tutors see it as vital, others look at grades alone)

* *The nature of the course*

THE NATURE OF THE COURSE (CONTINUED)

- Some courses require particular skills or qualities which can only be assessed in the Personal Statement for example:
 - social skills
 - work experience
 - team work
 - wider involvement with people
 - sporting ability

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

The point is....

- *you do not know*
- *so therefore treat it seriously*
- *it can count against you if it is not clearly written*

Admissions Tutors were asked

2. 'WHEN DO YOU USE THE PERSONAL STATEMENT?'

- 1. Selection for an offer / rejection UCAS
- 2. Selection for an interview (if required)
- 3. Asking questions at interview
- 4. *Occasional* consideration of borderline cases (e.g. course requires grades 'BBB', you are predicted grades 'BBC')
- 5. Miss the required grade in August - tutors might look at your statement, if they have spare places

Admissions Tutors were asked

3. 'WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR WHEN YOU READ A PERSONAL STATEMENT?'

- Interest in the course (*most important*) - *most of the statement could deal with this, in some cases*
- *Motivated student*
- *No spelling or grammatical mistakes*
- *Clearly written*
- *Balance studies with 'life'*
- *Interesting person*

WHAT ARE ADMISSIONS TUTORS LOOKING FOR?...

- *Work experience (if relevant)*
- Wider key skills (e.g. teamwork, if relevant)
- Numeracy or Communication (if the applicant is yet to pass GCSE Maths or English)
- Future career if relevant and known
- Any interesting hobby (especially if relevant)

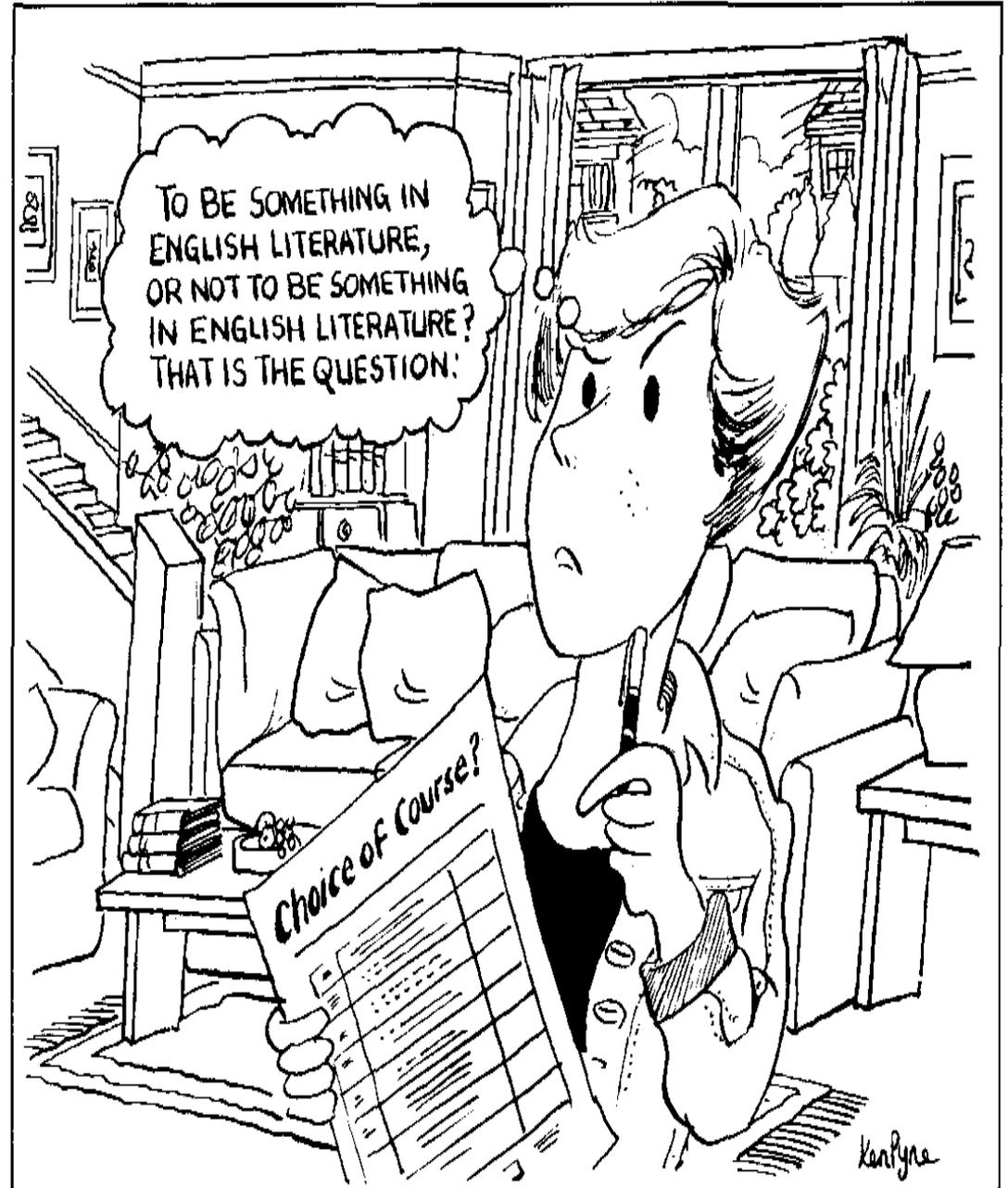
ADMISSIONS TUTORS WERE ASKED

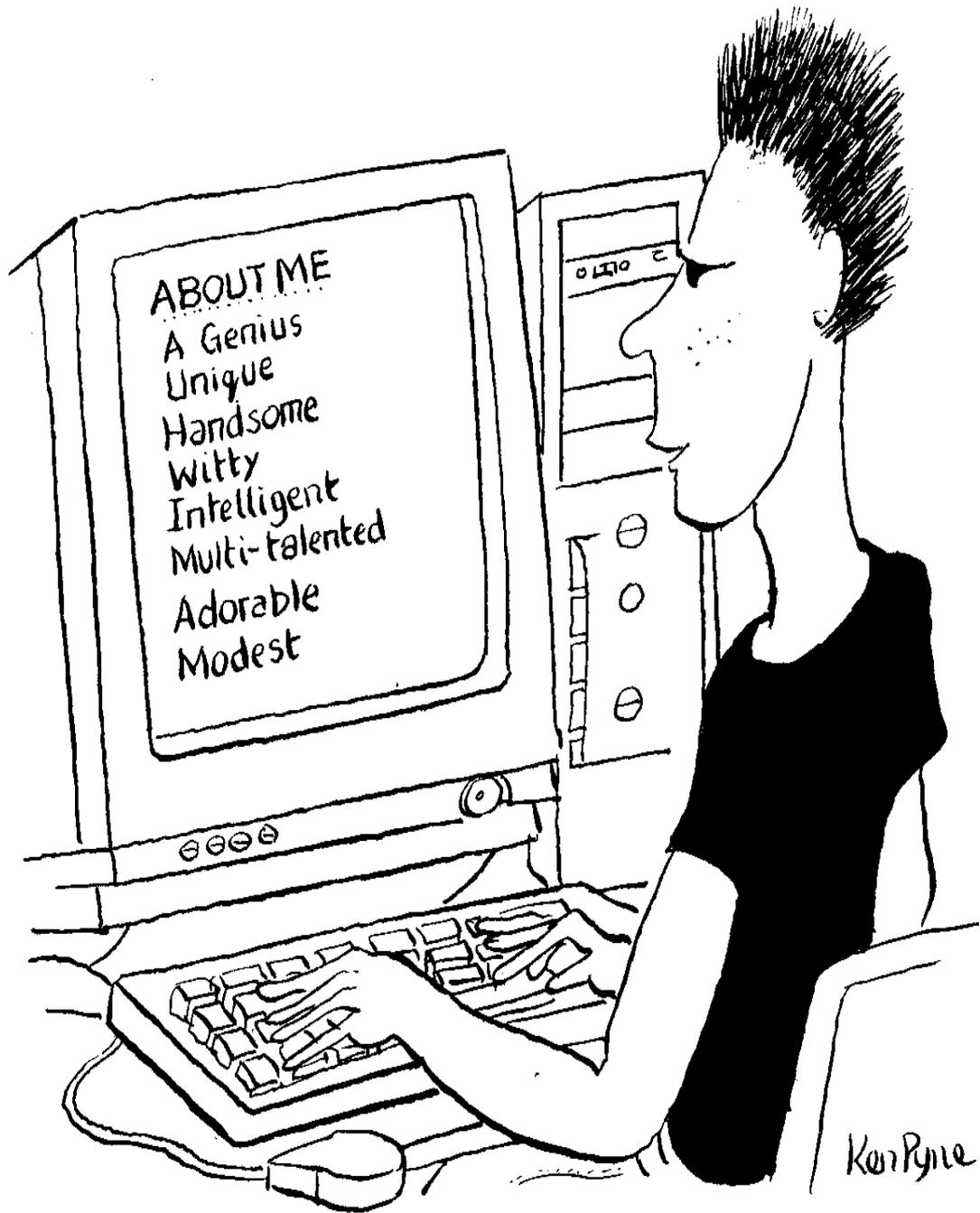
4. 'WHAT SHOULD APPLICANTS AVOID?'

- Waffle
- Swallowing a dictionary
- Statements with no examples or evidence
- Very ordinary interests e.g. going down the pub
- Lying (remember the interview!)
- Becoming somebody you are not
- Rushing - producing a poorly written statement
- Reducing all experiences to skills - stacking shelves in a supermarket provides an honest income - don't sell it for anything else

IN BRIEF...

Write a
section
about
your
choice of
COURSE





and
write a
section
about
YOU

But...remember to be selective



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**HOW DO YOU WRITE A
UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT?**

HOW DO YOU WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Many admissions tutors complain of reading statements that appear the same.

A response to this problem has been to try to capture the reader's attention e.g.

GIMMICKS...

For a Law degree a student wrote:

“Guilty, I confess I want to study Law!”

Warning 1

Now this has been used (and published!) you cannot copy it and expect to be original.

Warning 2

Gimmicks can make it appear that you are not treating the application seriously.

QUOTES...

For a Politics degree a student wrote a quote from a former minister, Dennis Healey:

“If we can keep our heads the long-awaited economic miracle is in our grasp.”

Warning 3

Many admissions tutors now complain that students are copying these ideas and so it is no longer original! Some admissions tutors reported being tired of seeing quotes.

RISKY APPROACH...

At the top of a statement
appeared:

RISKY APPROACH...

SEX

RISKY APPROACH...

SEX

I LOVE IT!

RISKY APPROACH...

SEX

I LOVE IT!

That is why is wish to study
human biology!

GIMMICKS...

This gimmick gives the appearance that the applicant is not serious.

Do not assume that your humour is the same as the humour of the admissions tutor!

HOW DO YOU WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT?

- A more impressive and less risky way to sell yourself is to convince an admissions tutor that you are really passionate about the course so....

do your course research

Need some help? Read on...

HOW DO I WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT & PERSUADE AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR THAT I AM KEEN TO STUDY THEIR COURSE?

Be * Motivated * &
* interested in the course

Write about any relevant books / articles you have read

(even writing about a short article in a chapter / journal / a few pages in a book is going to have more of an impact than simply stating you want to study the course)

HOW DO I WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT & PERSUADE AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR THAT I AM KEEN TO STUDY THEIR COURSE?

- Write about your relevant current courses

(e.g. write about AS/A2/Applied topics that interested you most & why or skills you have developed that you believe to be relevant)

HOW DO I WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT & PERSUADE AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR THAT I AM KEEN TO STUDY THEIR COURSE?

- Write about experiences that relate to the course

Conferences, residential courses, trips, people you have met, something you have read, hobbies, future plans, something you have seen - anything relevant that will convince the admissions tutor that you have given serious thought to the choice of course

EXAMPLE...Personal Statement to study Economics

- Attending an A level Economics conference was fascinating. One debate, appraising the European economic union, inspired me to read further. I took part in a school debate where we held a referendum and I argued for membership of the economic union. I had to read a number of articles to support my argument and I even contacted a lecturer who provided me with some very up-to-date information.
- *Comment -appears keen to study Economics - even prepared to follow up a debate from the conference. If a conference speaker was mentioned and details of the information from the lecturer 'contact' had been stated, the section would be more detailed and convincing.*

HOW DO I WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT & PERSUADE AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR THAT I AM KEEN TO STUDY THEIR COURSE?

- Write about what interests you about the degree courses

Make sure the degree course areas you write about appear on all your choices!

EXAMPLE...Personal Statement to study Medicine

- “Not only does the course content look fascinating but also the way the course is taught. I am very keen to be part of a course that uses ‘integrated learning’ where, for instance, one learns about the skeletal structure and, at the same time, one learns ways of talking to patients about disability and problems with movement. The interaction of the biological and social aspects of the course I find exciting.”
- *Comment - It is important to know about course content - there is always more to a course than a title. By exploring course content and how the course is taught should help the admission tutor appreciate that you have done your research. However, be mindful that you are likely to apply to more than one course but you only write one Personal Statement.*

HOW DO I WRITE A UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT & PERSUADE AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR THAT I AM KEEN TO STUDY THEIR COURSE?

By researching your choice of course carefully, you should achieve two outcomes:

- You will be more confident that you have chosen the right degree for you
- You will be able to write about the course in a more informed and persuasive way

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WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT
- MOVING FORWARD

WRITING YOUR UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT - Moving Forward

- How many drafts are expected?
- Which staff available to support you?
- What support materials are available?
- When is your 1st draft deadline?
- When is the final deadline?
- Who checks the final statement?

- Other information