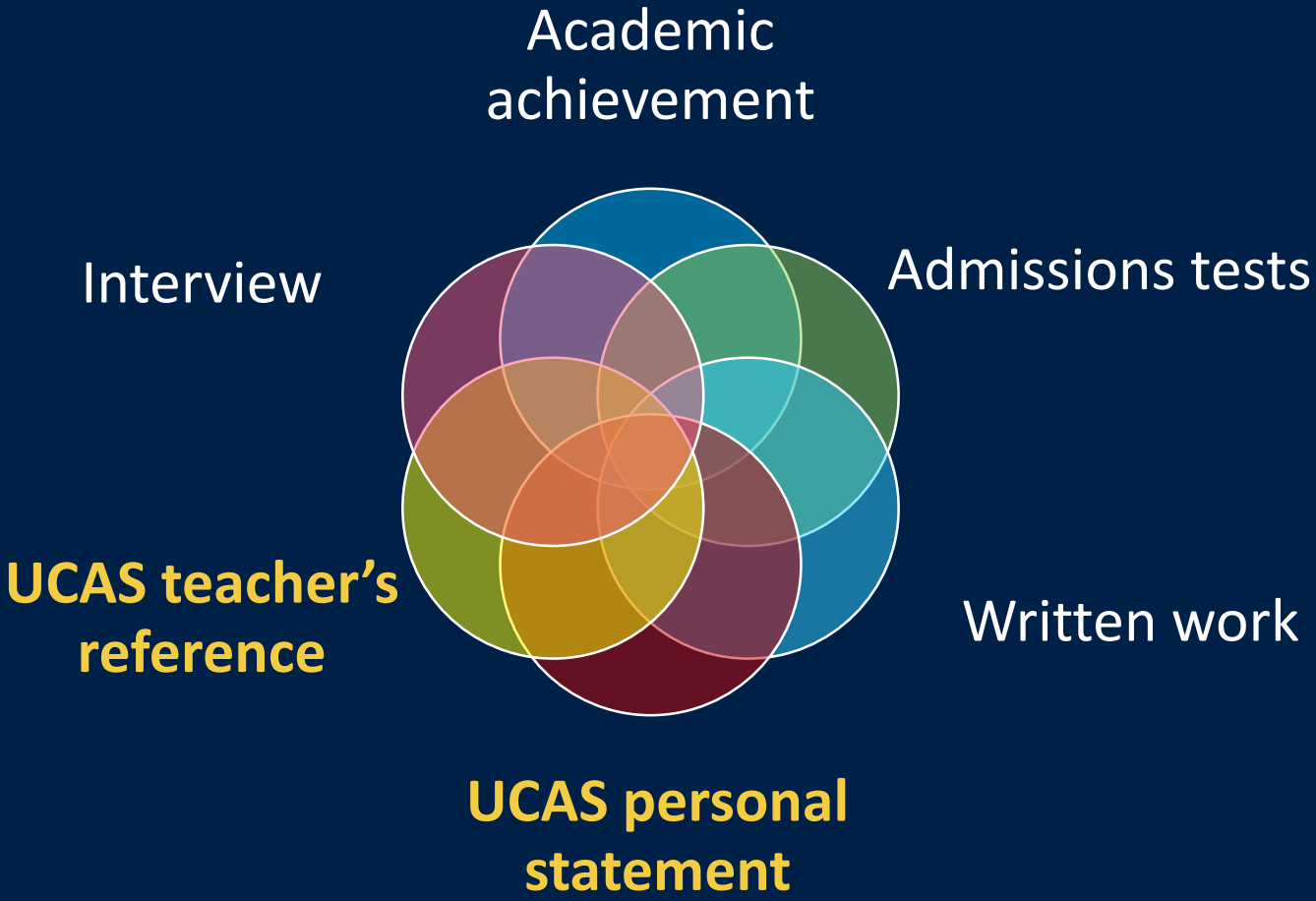
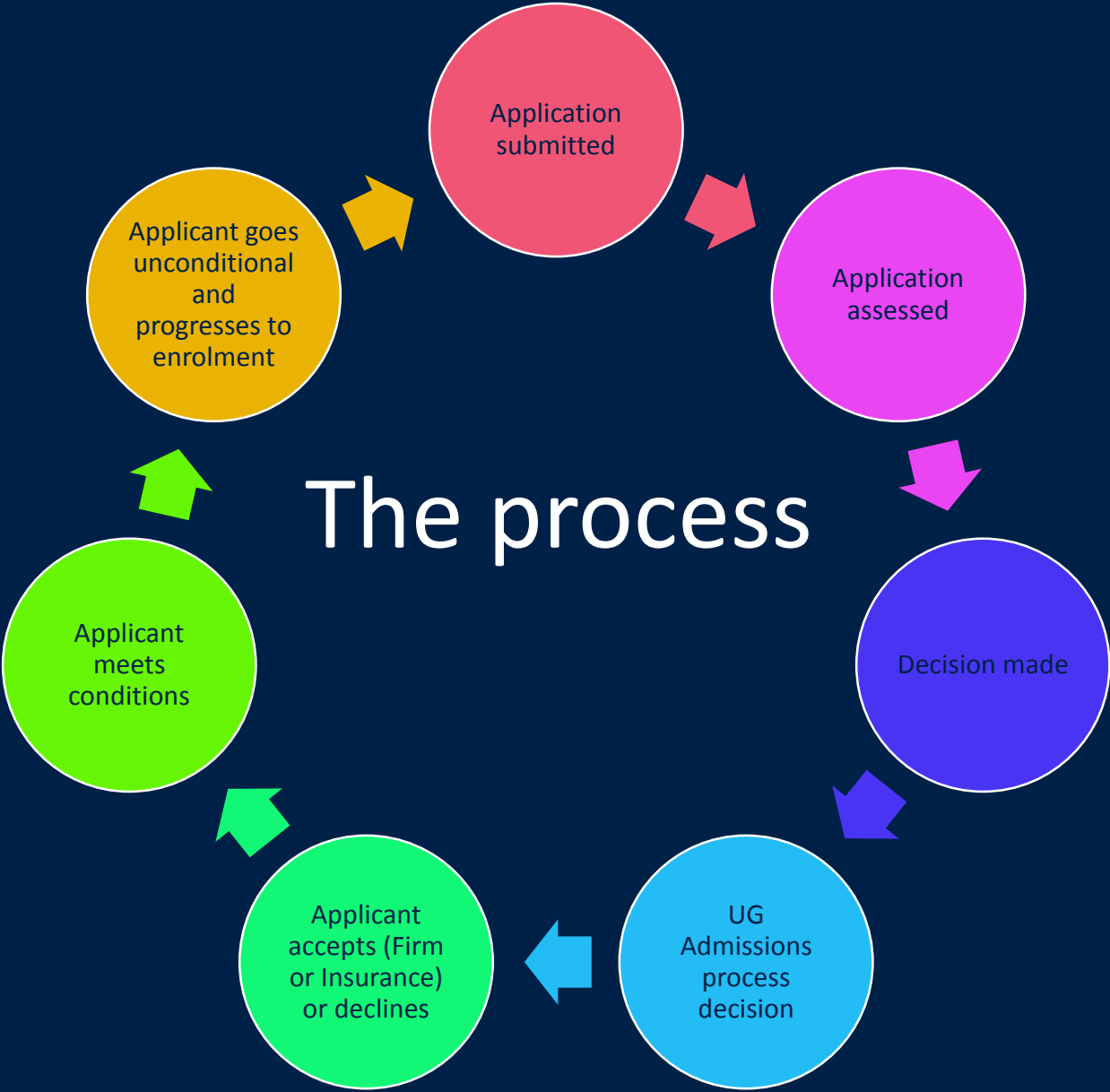


Teachers' References

Maxine Charlton, Undergraduate Admissions Manager, University of York
Dr Alex Pryce, Head of Student Recruitment, University of Oxford

Teacher References in Context





Teachers' Reference

Value

- Suitability to higher education
- Provided by a trusted educational professional who has known the candidate
- Right course for the applicant

Academic

- Academic profile of the student
- Students academic performance post-16, transition from GCSE
- Predicted grades or levels of achievement

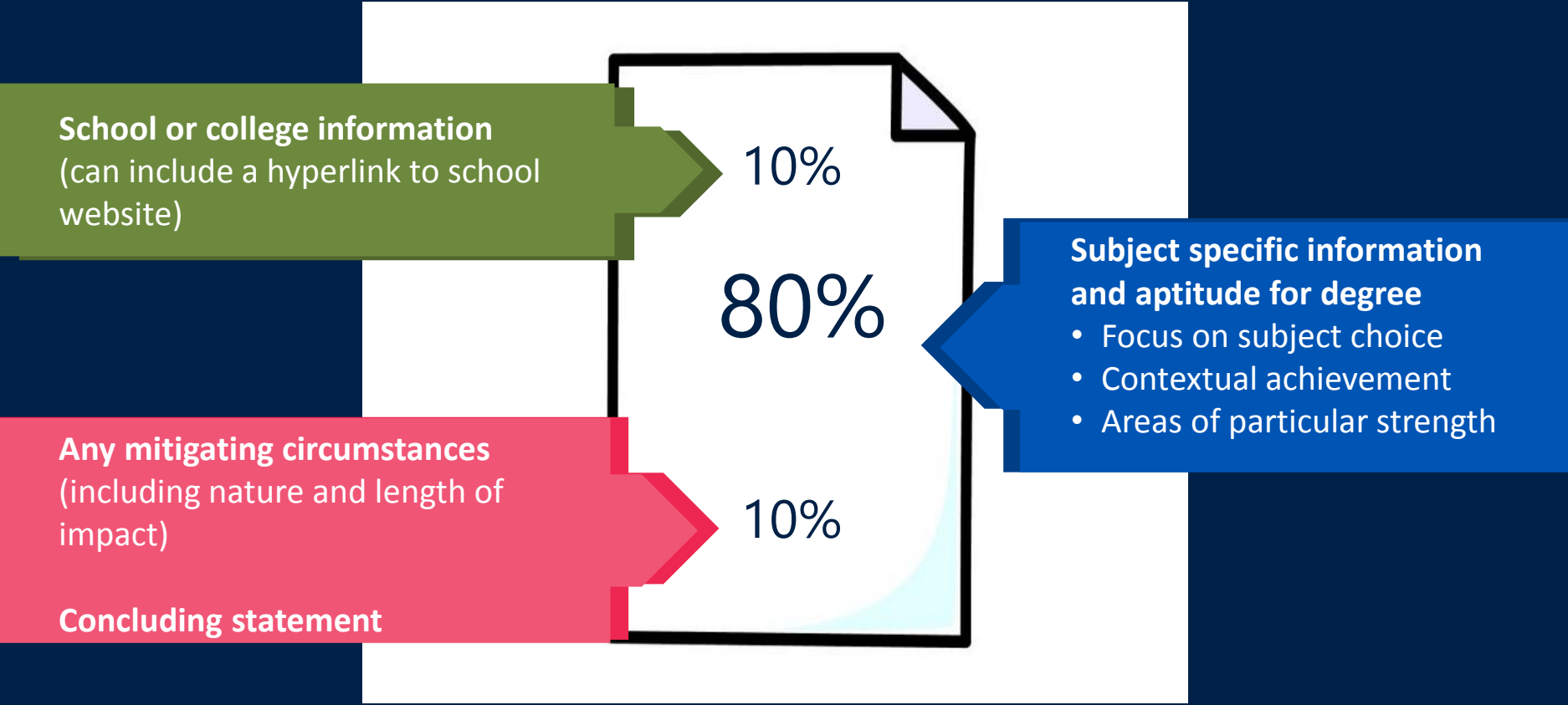
Context

- School context
- Independent learner
- Engagement inside and outside of the school
- Individual circumstances – impact on performance

York use

- Reflection on student performance to date
- Personal Statement
- Upward trend
- Enjoyment and enthusiasm, motivation for the subject

Structure



Examples of teachers' references

What makes a good reference?

Discusses strength and skills

Evaluates academic potential and provides examples

Contextualises performance and is honest

Is consistent or justifies discrepancies

Evaluates motivation

Is detailed

What makes a weak reference?

Is neutral or bland

Is not based on academic or applied experiences

Discusses weaknesses without justification

Contains typos and grammatical errors

Shows referee has had little contact with student

Does not describe context of achievement

Summary

- The personal statement provides additional information about why they have **chosen the subject** and why they think they are **suitable for the course**.
- The reference provides tutors with additional information on the **academic suitability of a candidate** to study their chosen subject.
- **While both are important documents within the application; students will be neither successful nor unsuccessful in gaining a place at Oxford or York on the basis of their personal statement or teacher's reference alone.**



Examples

Student with potential:

X is an able student and is **developing** his ability to tackle demanding problems. He is enthusiastic about the subject and interested in its big questions. **His practical work is good** and he **can clearly organise the presentation of results**, analysis and evaluation. His understanding of fundamental concepts is **improving** and he is keen to apply this to practical situations. He **participates keenly** in all aspects of the work and likes the satisfaction of solving problems. He has natural flair in the application of his basic understanding.

Improving student:

Y is a capable student who **has found the course quite challenging but has made reasonable progress** with his mathematics. He **picks up new concepts with an effort**, has a satisfactory understanding and **applies them with a little support**. He is well organized and always presents his work in a clear way; he will contribute to discussions and ask relevant questions for clarification. Y is **capable of achieving a grade A**; he is **suitable for degree-level work**.

Examples

Student re-taking a year:

Z achieved disappointing A level results in Year 13 and has opted to spend an additional year in our sixth form working to rectify this. He is certainly very able and has a much more developed, sophisticated and well informed understanding of economics than most of our other students. We are expecting grades of AAB next summer and believe that Z is unlikely to slip in terms of academic performance at university.

Student with mitigating circumstance:

Student A is without doubt one of the most dedicated and enthusiastic students I have ever encountered. Last year Sixth Form was in a Partnership with two other educational institutions: Student A had six different staff from the local college teaching her Law, was taught the wrong social context for her English module and had to change institution and syllabus from OCR to Edexcel in Maths. Consequently, she was not entered for her AS Mathematics qualification. It is all credit to Student A that she demonstrated an amazing perseverance to succeed despite these adversities and has returned to continue all four of her advanced level courses. It also explains why her module results are lower than her predicted grades. I am sure that this year, with more settled and consistent teaching, Student A will improve her AS grades through re-sits and thus give her the opportunity to achieve her full potential at university.

Examples of teachers' references

Question 1

How does this reference sell the student's skills and attributes to admissions tutors?

Question 2

What are three strengths of this reference?

Question 3

How does this reference provide information on contextual achievement?

Question 4

What subject specific information is available for tutors?

Question 5

How could this teacher's reference be strengthened?

Questions?

