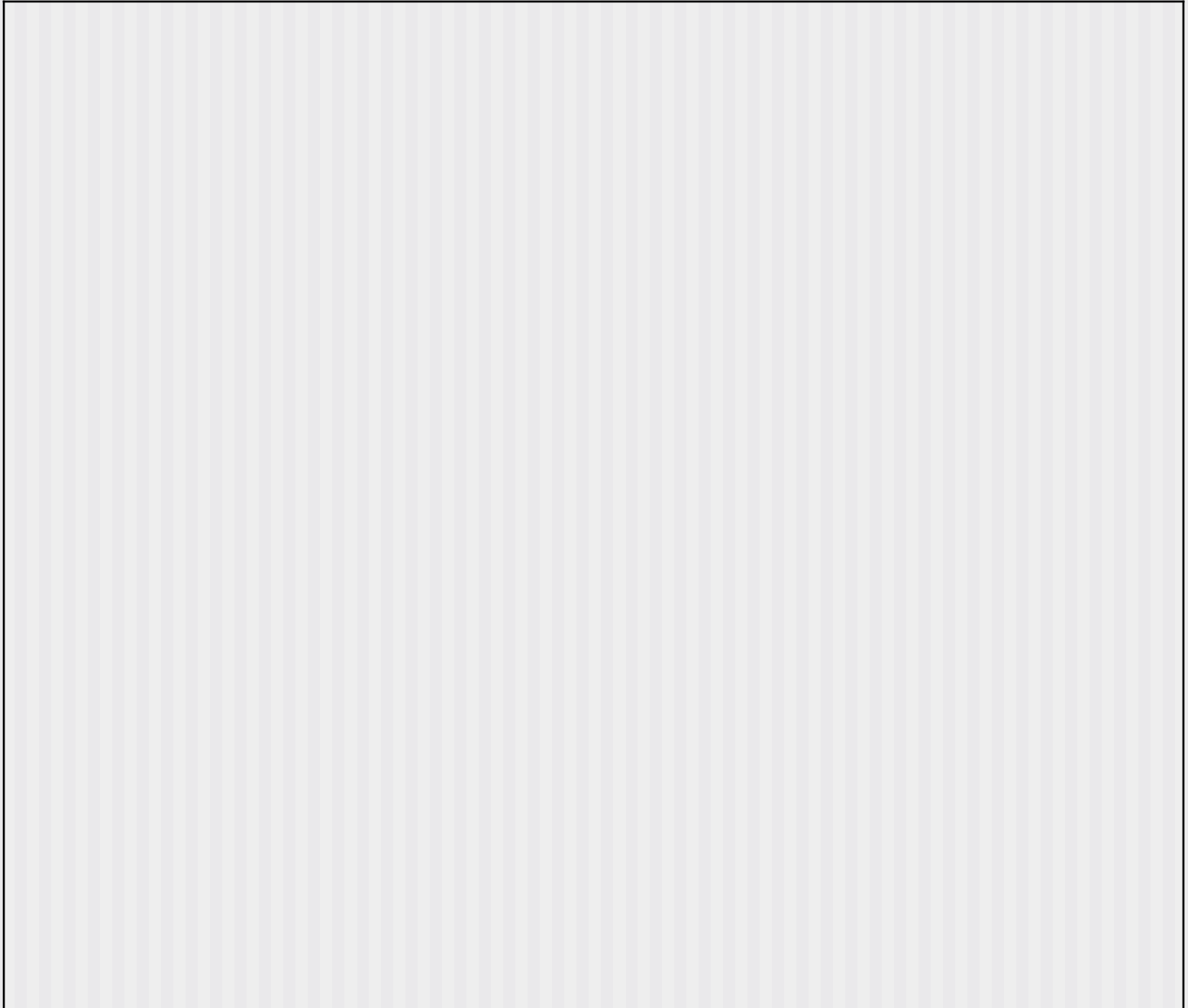


# Writing your UCAS Personal Statement



Please complete the following box explaining why you feel you are the right person for the position

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above. The box is currently blank.

1

# THE ADMISSIONS TUTOR

# WHAT IS AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR?

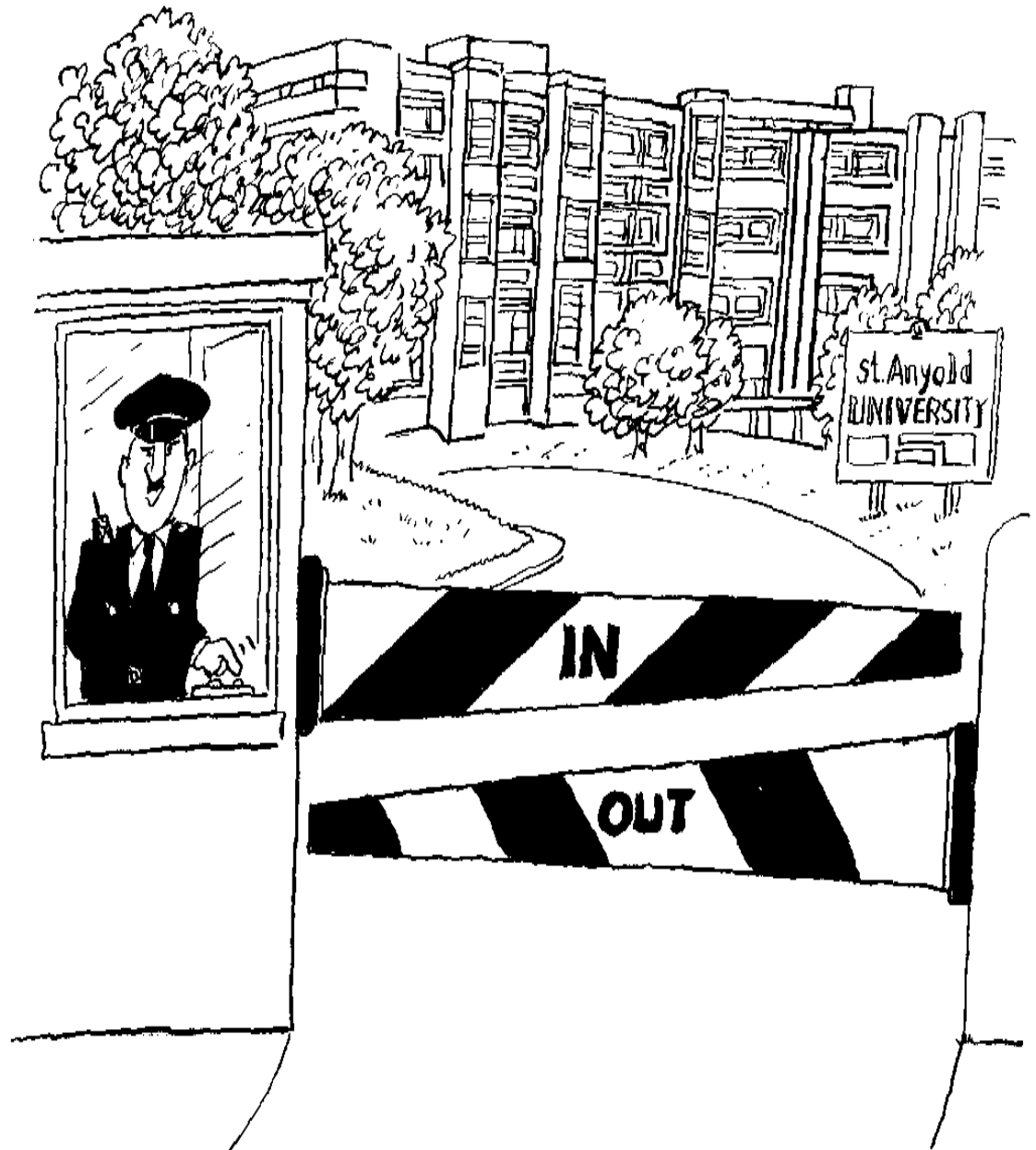
When you submit your UCAS application for your chosen course at university, it will usually be read by an admissions tutor.

## THE ADMISSIONS TUTOR:

- is a lecturer in the subject
- has been promoted to the position of choosing students for their degree course
- recruits the target number of students to ensure the course is financially viable

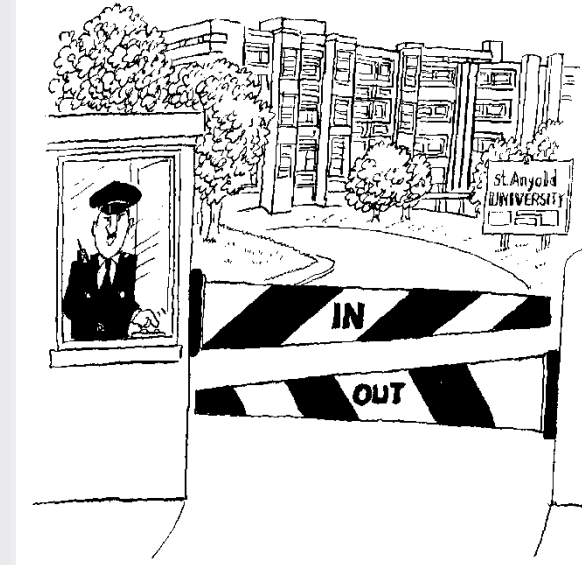
# WHAT IS AN ADMISSIONS TUTOR?

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



## THE ADMISSIONS TUTOR...

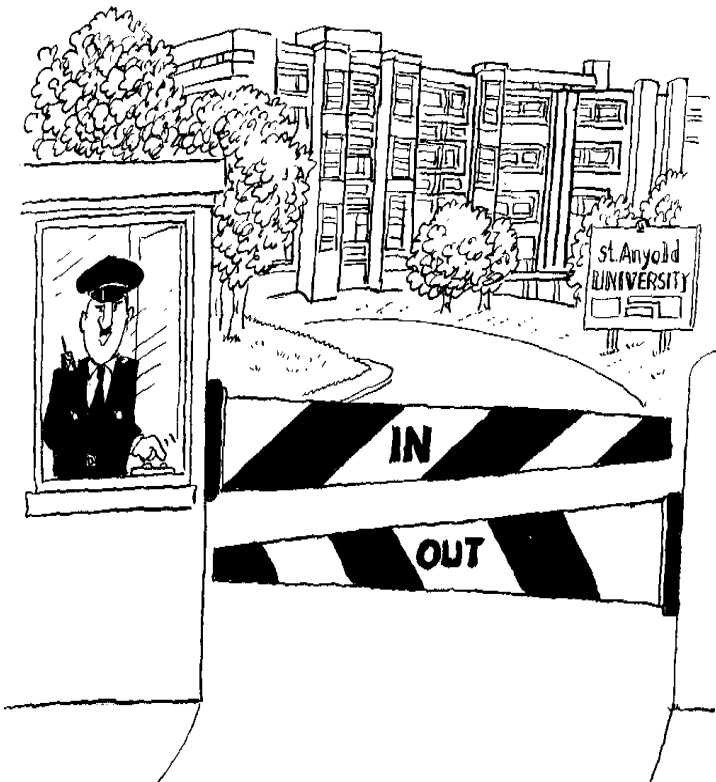
- can let you pass by giving you an offer (e.g. AAB, BBC, CDD, 300 UCAS points)
- can close the gate by declining to give you an offer
- often starts providing offers as soon as applications are received



# 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 As 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



2

# EVALUATING PERSONAL STATEMENTS

## WHAT DOES A REASONABLE STATEMENT LOOK LIKE?

- Read Personal statement I which begins “Although I enjoy...”
- What are its strengths and weaknesses?

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 a 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 – in fact if this student tried to paste it in it would be cut off half way.
- 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 is 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?

## Better examples:

I am intrigued by diverse attitudes and ideas, both past and present, and those of the major world faiths. I enjoy studying Judaism as part of my RS A level and I have been one of two students selected to visit Auschwitz concentration camp and the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. This is a trip I am eagerly awaiting as it will be a rewarding visit which will enhance my interest in the Holocaust. In preparation for my degree, I recently spent a day at the local mosque as I felt that Islam was the world faith I knew least about and is often misunderstood. It was an enjoyable day and I know feel I have achieved an understanding of basic Islamic beliefs.

I have long aspired to a career in journalism and feel that a religious studies degree will help me to achieve this. The skills of research, structured discussion, writing and analysis that I will gain from this degree are exactly those I need to develop for journalism. I have supported my career interest by completing work experience at two newspapers, where I had articles published. I enjoyed these experiences and learned to appreciate a professional working environment. I have taken part in a broadcast journalism exercise organised by the local radio station. To develop my skills in journalism further, I hope to become involved with the university newspaper and radio station.

## Better examples:

I respect the medical profession and have always aspired to be a member of it. It incorporates many subjects that I enjoy - especially Biology and Chemistry - and offers the chance to improve the lives of others.

Areas of science that I find particularly motivating are physiology and cell biology. Learning about how life works, either at the cellular level or that of the functioning organ systems, I find fascinating. My enthusiasm for and dedication to my academic studies I feel are reflected in my high A AS grades.

I was fortunate enough to do work experience at Maidstone hospital, where I observed several days of surgery. This not only confirmed my career plans, but also focused my interest in oncology. My work experience in the toxicology unit at St. George's hospital was fascinating and improved my practical skills in the laboratory. This benefited me when I was chosen for a biology master class at Brasenose College, Oxford, which was informative and most enjoyable.

I have continued my links with Maidstone hospital through community service working within the hospital for its charity to raise funds. As a Millennium Volunteer, I help to run an after school club at a local primary school, providing support as well as fun activities for disadvantaged children. I am looking forward to attending a sign language course in October which is run by Millennium Volunteers. I am a member of the charity Romania Connect and earlier this year I went with other sixth form students to the Romanian mountains to take a group of mentally and physically disabled adults, children and their families on holiday. We had raised all the money to pay for them and all our costs through various means including a challenging radio interview for two others and me on the local radio station, Kent FM. I am keeping in touch with the people I met in the country and hope to be able to raise more money in the future for them.



**3**

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

**Turn yourself into an  
Admissions Tutor**

# WHAT ARE ADMISSIONS TUTORS LOOKING FOR IN A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Having tried to put yourself in their shoes, read through the following information which is based on the findings from a survey of:

- over 70 Admissions Tutors
- from over 20 subject areas
- from a wide range of universities

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)
- Future career if relevant and known
- Any interesting hobby (especially if relevant)



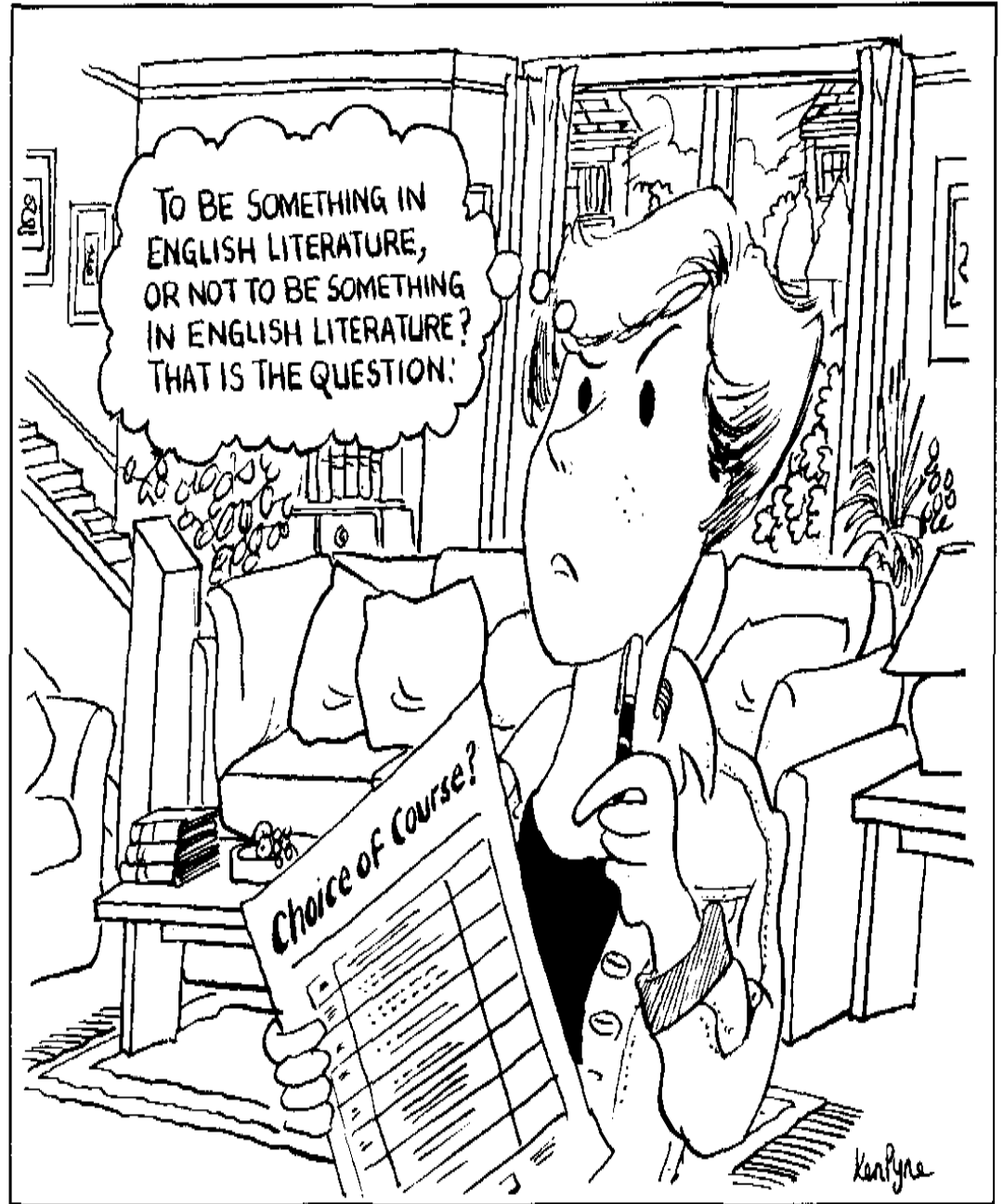
# ADMISSIONS TUTORS WERE ASKED

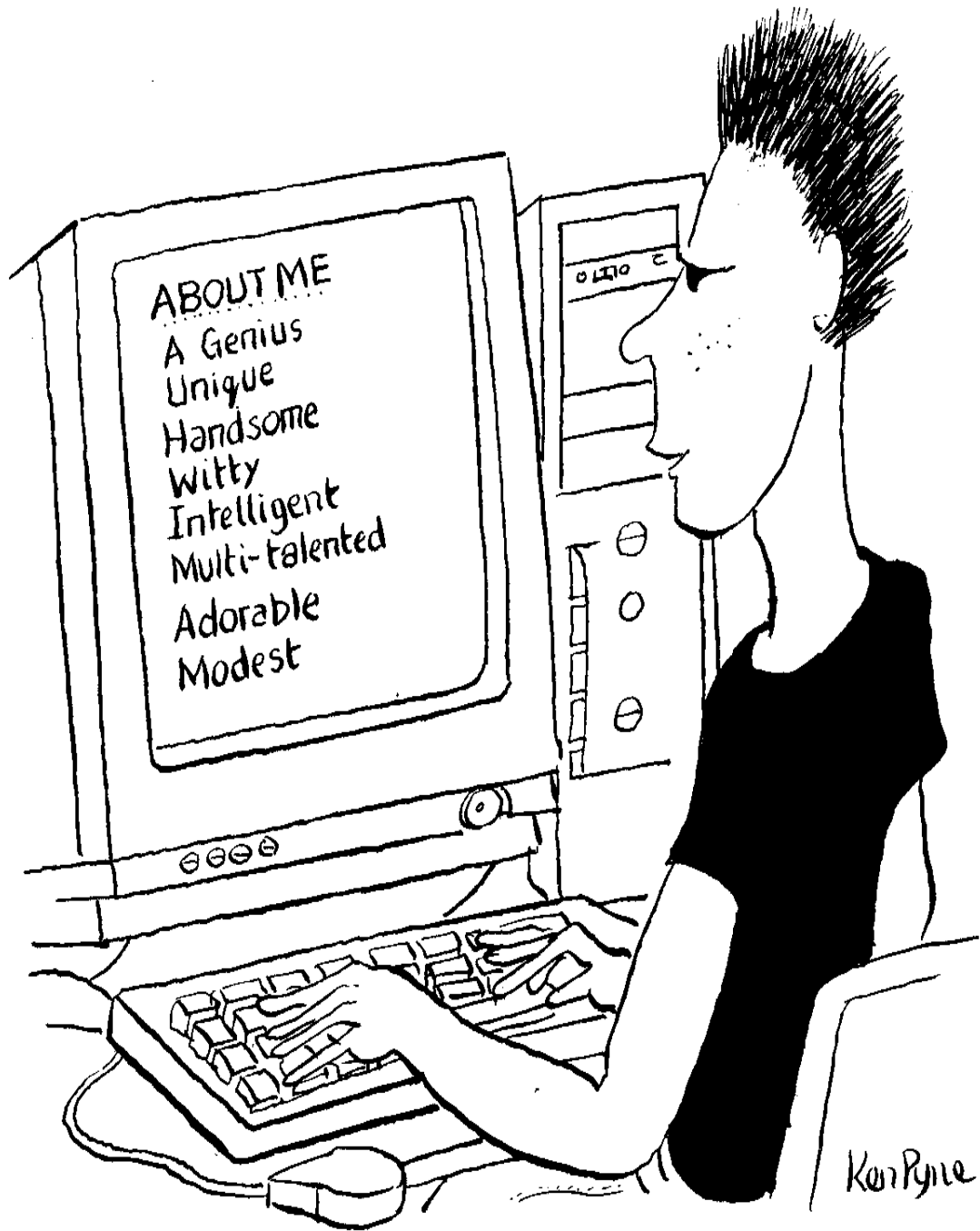
## 4. 'WHAT SHOULD APPLICANTS AVOID?'

- Waffle
- “Swallowing a dictionary”
- Statements with no examples or evidence
- Very ordinary interests e.g. going down the pub
- Lying (remember the interview! Cake decorating and surgery)
- 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



**5**

**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. One university loathes the word “passionate”.

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.

## QUOTATIONS...

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)*

## EXAMPLE...Personal Statement to study Psychology

- “I have particularly enjoyed reading about Freudian theory in psychology. I found an interesting article in the New Scientist ‘Freud: who seduced whom’ as it claimed that Freud misrepresented his research to suit his theories of human behaviour. This article sheds a great deal of doubt on Freud’s work yet some of his theories of personality development are fascinating and I am reading a book by Kline which is more supportive of Freudian theory.”
- *Comment - Both references to the article and the book go beyond the standard textbook so they both represent wider reading. Wider reading can show motivation and interest in the course. In interview, you would be asked to expand on the references in the statement.*



# 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. Extended Projects are ideal here)*

## EXAMPLE...Personal Statement to study Sociology

- “I have particularly enjoyed studying the sociology of health and illness as part of A2 Sociology in which I researched patient responses to becoming ill e.g. asking ‘why me, why now?’ Using the work of Michael Bury, I wrote an essay about how people cope with the effects of chronic illness e.g. on their intimate relationships and work. I wish to apply this area about ‘coping’ with illness to my A2 coursework in which I am going to interview people that suffer from Repetition Strain Injury (RSI) using a sample through a family contact.
- *Comment - whether you study Sociology or not, you are left with the impression that the applicant has enjoyed the course at Advanced level and is motivated by the subject -there is a detailed example and evidence of interest in the subject through the coursework topic.*

# 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.*

# Who says mathematicians can't write?

With simple elegances such as mathematical induction, and intriguing principles like the infinitesimal, it's no wonder that Maths can inspire such enthusiasm and affection amongst its students. Many mathematicians truly consider Euler's identity to be of magnificent beauty. To one who hasn't studied Maths, this would seem strange, but I fully understand the feeling. This identity represents the intertwining of very different areas of Maths, almost like a piece of a puzzle falling into place. Although Maths is highly applicable to almost every aspect of life, I believe it also transcends them; and from this stems its beauty.

I have read a range of books on the subject, from historical benchmarks like 'Cardano's Ars Magna', through general knowledge and history-based books like '50 Mathematical Ideas You Really Need To Know', to the heavy-duty textbook 'Mathematical Methods for Physics and Engineering', which has been my favourite by far.

# 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



- Don't spend too long producing your UCAS Personal Statement...

remember to focus on getting  
the grades

- Good luck

# And finally...

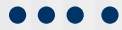
Application for Philosophy: the alternative statement

Personal statement

I am a dynamic figure often seen scaling walls and crushing ice. I have been known to remodel train stations on my lunch breaks, making them more efficient in the area of heat retention. I translate ethnic slurs for Kenyan refugees, I write award winning operas and I manage time efficiently. Occasionally, I tread water for three days in a row. I woo women with my sensuous and godlike trombone playing. I can pilot bicycles up severe inclines with unflagging speed, and I cook 30-minute brownies in 20 minutes. I am an expert in stucco, a veteran love, and an outlaw in Peru.

Using only a hoe and a large glass of water, I once single-handedly defended a small village in the Amazon basin from a horde of ferocious army ants. I play bluegrass cello, I had trials with Manchester United, I am the subject of numerous documentaries. When I'm bored, I build large suspension bridges in my garden. I enjoy urban hang gliding. On Wednesdays, after school, I repair electrical appliances free of charge.

I am an abstract artist, a concrete analyst, and a ruthless bookie. Critics worldwide swoon over my original line of corduroy eveningwear. I don't perspire, I am a private citizen, yet receive fan mail. I have appeared on Through the Keyhole and won the gold plaque. Last summer I toured Eastern Europe with a travelling centrifugal-force demonstration. I run the 100m in 9.65 seconds. My deft floral arrangements have earned me fame in international botany circles. Children trust me.



I can hurl tennis rackets at small moving objects with deadly accuracy. I once read *Paradise Lost*, *Moby Dick* and *David Copperfield* in one day and still had time to refurbish an entire dining room in one evening. I know the exact location of every food item in the supermarket. I have performed several covert operations for the CIA. I sleep once a week; when I do sleep, I sleep in a chair. While on vacation in Canada, I successfully negotiated with a group of terrorists who had seized a small bakery. The laws of physics do not apply to me.

I balance, I weave, I dodge, I frolic, and my bills are paid. On weekends, to let off steam, I participate in full-contact origami. Years ago I discovered the meaning of life but forgot to write it down. I have made extraordinary four-course meals using only some vegetables and a Breville toaster. I breed prize winning clams. I have won bullfights in Madrid, cliff-diving competitions in Sri Lanka, and chess competitions at the Kremlin. I have played Hamlet, performed open-heart surgery and spoken with Elvis. But I have not yet gone to university.

# Some thoughts about writing your personal statement

You should aim to show evidence that you've thought about, are excited and intellectually curious about your chosen degree

You should demonstrate that you have done something specific which relates to your chosen course of study

A good personal statement "leaps out" at the reader. It should show the drive and enthusiasm of the writer and be well put together

There should be a justification or explanation of the A Level choices

Your passion for the subject must come through; you must try to demonstrate what you've already done with the subject and what you want to do with it

Don't describe academic performance; that's covered elsewhere in the application

You need to be specific and preferably describe what's interested you on the A Level syllabus; for example, the works of a particular writer if applying to study English Literature

Your statement needs to be a genuine expression of your intellectual interests

You must demonstrate independence; you've got to make reference to what you do/have done outside of the A Level syllabus and then go on to give reasons and explanations about the relevance of those non-course achievements

You've got to be honest; candidly 'talk' to the Admissions Tutor and avoid "spin"

# Useful websites

[www.purepotential.org](http://www.purepotential.org).

[www.oxbridgeadmissions.com](http://www.oxbridgeadmissions.com)