

## **THE 'ALTERNATIVE GUIDE' TO THE RHODES SCHOLARSHIP**

### **APPLICATION FROM INDIAN RHODES SCHOLARS**

*This guide is not an official communication from the Rhodes Trust. It was collaboratively prepared by some Indian Rhodes Scholars to ensure that all applicants have equal access to sufficient guidance for preparing the statements supporting their application for the Rhodes Scholarships for India.*

#### **GENERAL TIPS**

1. The Rhodes Scholarships for India application requires two statements in support of the application – a personal statement and an academic statement of study
2. These statements are among the most important elements of the selection process, and often form the basis of the subsequent interviews. While it is reasonable to seek general guidance from professors and mentors during the application process, it is important to ensure that the statements are your own work and have not been reviewed or edited by anyone else prior to submission.
3. The personal statement is an opportunity to reflect your story in writing. It is paramount that you avoid generalization and ensure that the statement is presented in a professional, thoughtful and cogent manner. The statement should also adequately and succinctly answer the three prompts discussed in points 4-7 below. Through your essay, you should give the reviewers a flavour of your personality, interests, and goals – try and reflect what you would want to communicate during an interview in person. Most importantly, your personal statement should make the reviewer want to meet you and further discuss and explore your interests with you. Remember that the personal statement must represent you well enough such that if you are invited to an interview, there should be clear congruence and integrity between what you have written and who you are.
4. In your personal statement, you must respond to three prompts:

- Which Rhodes Scholar quality do you display most strongly, and how are other contexts and people helping you to develop the others?
  - What would you like to learn from the Rhodes and wider community in Oxford?
  - From your place in the world, what is humanity's greatest need?
5. The first prompt requires you to display self-awareness. It is an opportunity for you to display that you are cognisant of your abilities as well as your limits. The response that you will provide will be assessed to understand whether you meet the specified Rhodes criteria (further elaborated upon below) and your clarity of thought. Keep in mind that the Trust does not expect you to be a 'complete and finished' individual. Clearly identify your strengths and demonstrate the quality that you, in your opinion, most strongly display. In addition, your statement must show that while you do possess other qualities, there are opportunities for further development, which you have constantly made an effort to pursue. The idea is to demonstrate that you are a well-rounded individual, who also has self-knowledge, in that you are able to identify areas of your character and personality that can be further moulded and refined.
  6. The second prompt allows you to reflect on the relationship between self and community, and to explore what you want to learn from the various communities you will join and encounter at Oxford, and how you hope to grow through that experience. It is important to have a clear sense of why you want to be a part of the Rhodes community as well as the wider community at Oxford, and what you think the role of community is. It would also be relevant to explain how access to a community furthers the goals and plans that you have for yourself. You should not make general statements about the importance of community. Rather, you should be able to point to specific contributions that the communities you seek to join, will make to your journey. Candidates would be well advised to go over the information available on the Rhodes Trust as well as the University of Oxford website to get an idea of the communities that you can be a part of as well as the opportunities that you would want to pursue.

7. The third and the last prompt requires you to reflect on the needs of the world and how you best hope to give back to humanity at large. The Scholarship, in facilitating your education at Oxford, places upon you a responsibility to give back to the world. As such, it will be important for you to meditate on the causes that you hold dear and would like to espouse, and show how your training at Oxford will equip you to fight the good fight, while displaying nuance in articulating the complexities of real life problems. This is asking you to look at the world from the place you are in now, your specific context, and to reflect on what is missing in society, whilst considering the complexities of the world's challenges. The Trust is looking for individuals who aspire to make a difference and contribute in some way to resolving the problems facing humanity at large as well as smaller communities. This prompt allows you to express your thoughts on what is most needed in the world, from your vantage point. Further, it is as important to clearly explain and locate the broader relevance of your proposed work or proposed career path, keeping in mind that the Rhodes Scholarship experience is structured to enable you to create some kind of positive impact in the world.
8. Through your personal statement, you are expected to respond to the three questions above, while also conveying to the reviewers a story about the larger motivations that drive you, your work, and your aspirations. The personal statement may be structured around a theme or focus, such as the discipline in which you are interested, ideas that drive your aspirations, your work experience, your academic and non-academic projects, your extra-curricular activities, and your longer-term ambitions. These elements should be used to furnish answers to the three prompts, and your narrative should fuse them into a cohesive whole. It may be helpful to consider which aspect/experience is most relevant to which of the prompts early on, and how you would like to fit the prompts together with each other in your story, in order to have a coherent and meaningful structure to your statement. When framing a balanced personal statement, do remember the criteria the reviewers will be using to determine if you are a suitable candidate for the Rhodes Scholarship – more about those specific criteria later.

9. Ensure that various aspects of your professional and personal life are logically put together, as far as possible, between the two statements. The reviewers, on reading the statements together should be able to discern your motivations, your study plans, your career plans/future ambitions, and your reasons for choosing these, while sensing a strong commitment to your goals and a sense of clarity on how you wish to get there using the opportunity that Oxford and the Rhodes Scholarship presents. It is crucial that your statements highlight a clear link between your choices and the experiences you have had. Do remember that these are primarily professional narratives, and, on balance, you should avoid indulging in overly 'personal' flights of fancy. Having said that, there is no one method to put these things together. Do what works best for you and your story.
10. In your academic statement of study, you are requested to detail the reasons you are applying to Oxford, the subject you wish to study, your course choices, how these fit with your broader academic plans, and your ability to meet the entry and application requirements of the specific course(s) you have chosen. Here it is important to do your research on course choices at Oxford and describe why a particular subject or course is relevant to your trajectory and will further your goals, as well as your suitability for the courses you have chosen. Make sure to highlight your academic performance and related activities that show you fulfill the eligibility criteria for admission to your chosen course, which can be very competitive at the University of Oxford.
11. The academic statement, particularly the portions on your areas of interest and future study, should not be hyper-technical – such that only persons well-versed in the field would be able to completely understand its contents. At the same time, the panel has probably had years of experience in assessing statements and hence it should not be highly simplistic either. The focus should be on communicating your course choices, and the basis of your claimed eligibility and suitability with clarity. Keep in mind that this statement will be used by reviewers in assessing whether you are likely to flourish in the competitive academic environment at Oxford.
12. Ensure that the personal statement is within the 750-word limit and the academic statement is within the 350-word limit, each as stated in the

- application rules. If either statement exceeds the word limit, the application will not accept the additional words and your statement may lose its structure.
13. Given the word limits, you cannot elaborate extensively on all points. While the reviewers should be able to follow your train of thought, as evident from the statements, your statements should also be thought provoking, leaving room for further discussion and debate.
  14. Your statements should not merely be a narration of your experiences and accomplishments but should also describe to the reviewer the impact these have had on you, and their contribution in defining your thought process. Use these to further build your narrative.
  15. Ensure that your statements are not merely a more elaborate version of your résumé, as this would be a lost opportunity. The reviewer will already have a copy of your résumé. The academic statement and personal statement should instead connect your various relevant achievements, qualifications, and experiences to a larger narrative, and describe their impact on the choices you have made. At the same time, it is crucial that your academic statement and personal statement are in sync with your résumé. They should reflect the activities and accomplishments mentioned in your résumé, but within a larger context; the résumé should, in turn, reflect the details conveyed in your statement. The reviewer should thus be able to make sense of the three documents together.
  16. It is not necessary to use long sentences and complex language, in an attempt to impress the reviewers. In fact, these might hinder readability and make it difficult to stay within the prescribed word limits. It is best to stick to a style of writing you are comfortable with, as long as it conveys the message adequately. Ensure that you have proofread the essay multiple times, and there are no spelling or grammatical errors. Sloppiness and carelessness are poor signs and are unlikely to be regarded well.
  17. To get started with the process of writing your statements, try thinking about why you are doing what you are doing, what aspects of it most excite you, the way in which the experiences of your last few years have shaped you, etc. It is important to justify your candidacy for the Rhodes Scholarship and to also justify your suitability as a candidate for the

- course(s) of your choice, based on preliminary data (i.e., what you have done so far to work towards your goals). It is well worth spending a few days reflecting deeply on yourself and trying to crystallize your goals. Think about how what you want to do fits in with the Rhodes criteria and how aspects of it address the prompts listed above.
18. Please look through the University of Oxford's graduate admissions page, and the relevant Oxford course pages, department websites, ongoing research and faculty profiles while outlining your academic statement. This will help you to identify potential supervisors and to narrow and define your research interests clearly. Given the tight 350-word limit for the academic statement, doing your homework on courses and supervisors will help to eliminate redundancy and present a lucid and cohesive argument for why the University of Oxford affords you the ideal opportunity to pursue your chosen goals.
  19. Remember that applicants are rarely able to come up with comprehensive and well-written statements on the first go. The key is to think about the various elements that you want to put in them and then find a way of connecting them together across the two statements.
  20. It is important to remember that the Rhodes Scholarship is not a need-based scholarship. Providing gratuitous information about one's family background, injecting pathos or indications of need are not required and will not in themselves strengthen your candidature. Of course, there are no prohibitions on mentioning these if they are relevant to your story.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **I. GENERAL**

#### **A. Is there some prior preparation I should engage in, before writing the statements?**

- Please go through the Rhodes Scholarship website before you start. It lists certain criteria the panel looks for in every potential candidate for the Scholarship. Ensure that your academic and personal statements are broadly responsive to these criteria. It would also be helpful to read the will of Cecil Rhodes, the

founder of the Scholarship, to understand the motivations with which the Scholarship was constituted.

- Further, the Rhodes Trust website and Rhodes Trust's social media accounts also provide information about the Scholarship, along with videos of Scholars from the previous years, narrating their experiences at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, including their views on writing a personal statement and the application process more generally.
- All candidates should also read carefully the Conditions of Tenure for the Rhodes Scholarships and the information provided in the Rhodes India Memorandum. Ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria in terms of nationality, age, education, and academic achievement, as mentioned in Point 2 of the Rhodes India Memorandum. Point 4(i) of the Rhodes India Memorandum details elements the Trust looks for in a personal statement of study and point 4(j) of the Rhodes India Memorandum details elements the Trust looks for in an academic statement.
- As mentioned above, go through the University of Oxford's website, and course, departmental and faculty pages, especially before you outline your academic statement. The University's graduate admissions page is an excellent place to start. It provides information on the courses offered, eligibility criteria, the faculty involved, research centres set up and pedagogic techniques utilized (e.g.: tutorials) along with the non-academic activities available at Oxford.

#### **B. How useful are the sample statements available online?**

- It is important to remember that there is no fixed format for an academic or personal statement. The most important element of a statement is that it is unique to your case. To this extent, sample statements should not be blindly relied on as a template, and emulated, since the elements introduced through the essay vary from person to person. That being said, going through sample statements might be helpful in assessing certain common elements among statements, and the various methods available to convey information about yourself to the reviewer. But try and do this *after* you've done some thinking of your own. Reading others' statements can often influence your thought process in ways that are then difficult to break out of.

The samples provided in the annexures here can help you in that regard. However, please note that many of these statements were written before the prompts for the personal statement and the component of an academic statement were introduced. The excerpts that have been provided as samples of academic statements in this guide have been taken from successful *course* applications to Oxford and may not have been read by the Rhodes selection committees. Hence, these samples should be considered as merely indicative of what a successful application may comprise and might not be wholly reflective of the degree of detailed treatment that certain themes and/or issues can possibly receive in *your* academic statement.

### **C. What are the four ‘Rhodes criteria’?**

It is important that your statements together reflect that you fulfill elements of the four criteria the Rhodes Scholarship looks for in its scholars. *Literary and scholastic achievements* could include your academic performance, awards received for such performance, role as a teaching or research assistant, academic papers you may have published, academic conferences participated in and so on. *The energy to use one’s talents to the full* could include involvement in a variety of activities including sports, music, debate, dance, theatre, and artistic pursuits, with special emphasis on teamwork. *Truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindliness, unselfishness and fellowship* could be demonstrated through work with non-governmental organisations, involvement in committees at your University focusing on public service, participation in activities contributing to society in some manner at the school, community or college level, personal interventions you may have made on issues you care about and so on. *Moral force of character and instincts to lead, and to take an interest in one’s fellow beings* requires you to showcase your forays at leadership, public-spiritedness and other-centredness. Leadership can be of different sorts and there is no one definition: this could include leading a student union, heading a committee at your University, convening a course, leading a protest, organising awareness movements and camps, organising activities at your University including conferences, competitions and fests, being an Editor of a journal, or playing an active role in teams that collectively performed the above activities. Even small-scale but no less impactful examples, like facilitating class



conversation, or mediating conflicts and incidents of crisis, can demonstrate one's integrity. It is important to take heart in work that you may have done which might not have been with a famous or grand institution. In many cases, the selection committee is looking for how you are pursuing your interests and passions in various ways and not with what institution you have worked. Anything that may have inspired or helped others counts. The criteria are broad enough for you to think about your experiences in detail, and consider which ones you would want to highlight to demonstrate that you meet each of them. In addition to writing about the instances that demonstrate that you meet the Rhodes criteria, it would be beneficial to think about how those experiences have moulded your perspective of the world and prepared you for the future, and link them to your ambitions and goals as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford.

**D. Does an aspiration of pursuing a particular professional path either lower or enhance one's chances of getting the Scholarship? Further, are there any weaknesses in one's profile that foreclose one's possibility of winning the Scholarship?**

It is critical to bear in mind that there is no "perfect" Rhodes Scholar. The four criteria set out by the Rhodes Trust are the guiding principles for the scholarship, and even a cursory glance at the list of past scholars and successful candidates reveals that these criteria allow for a remarkable degree of diversity. This being the case, it would be wrong to think that the Rhodes Trust prioritizes applicants aspiring to pursue a particular professional path over others who may intend to pursue a professional path not commonly linked with Rhodes Scholars.

Our advice for an applicant would be to not get bogged down by what you might yourself perceive as a grave weakness in your profile, such as being from an unfamiliar university or not having participated in sporting activities. There is no uniform way in which all successful applicants meet the Rhodes criteria. Just as there is no one thing that is likely to make your application successful, it is equally true that one single perceived weakness is unlikely to overshadow many strengths in the application. There are many ways to satisfy the Rhodes criteria and each is unique.

Further, while political affiliations and ideas expressed in your written personal statements may not influence the application's evaluation, it is important to contextualise ideas within the scope of your work, academics, and larger goals - however it best conveys your story.

Finally, instead of altering your aspirations and goals in a way that you feel would ensure that your application is viewed in a more favourable light by the Rhodes Trust, you would be well advised to focus on building a narrative around your achievements and strengths that is authentic and that you feel truly invested in.

**E. Should I mention prior work experience in the field, considering it is already in my résumé, which is submitted along with the application?**

It is not necessary to list all your prior work experience in the field in either your academic or personal statement, as this information should have already found its way into your résumé. However, it could be useful to mention the particular experience(s) that helped mould your thinking and define your interests. Depending on the purpose of mentioning your prior work experience, you can either incorporate it in your personal statement or your academic statement, the choice is yours! These can be incorporated into the larger narrative that you present in your personal statement or could be used to evidence your interest in a particular course in your academic statement. These statements give you the chance to contextualise prior work experience, detailing failures or stumbling blocks that you encountered on the road to achieving the outcomes listed in your CV. Mention particularly what you learnt from these experiences and how they contributed to helping you identify what you wish to study, drawing a clear thread between the work you have done previously and the work you hope to do in the future. Weigh your work experience stints not based on how prestigious they were, rather on how much they helped shape your ideas and motivations.

Here, a candidate refers to a study she conducted, which helped them identify certain interests crucial to their research:

Course: Economics (M. Phil.)

Fascinated by one of the attempts to eliminate injustices in the domain of health, I chose to independently study the Rasthriya Swasthya Bima Yojana – RSBY (National Health Insurance Scheme) in my summer this year. The scheme provides a handsome health insurance cover to the population below poverty line to deliver social security. I interviewed these beneficiaries to study how their lives changed.

While, philosophical parleys with peers at college always tend to bend to one side, either extreme libertarian or extreme socialist; I have learnt through this study how private sector, government and the poor can all come together in a symbiotic manner and create mutual benefits. Research has been a delightful discovery and the search for truth has instilled a new knowledge hunger in me – to find out bits of truth from the ground and supplement the mathematical rigor of economics with empirical evidence. Most importantly, I have learnt how technology and efficient delivery can create a workable incentive matrix and create social change.

In this extract, a candidate recounts work engaged in during several projects, drawing out their interests based on these experiences:

Course: Organic Chemistry (D. Phil.)

In the summer of 20xx, I worked on Resonance Raman spectra of bound end products of the human Hypoxanthine – Guanine Phosphoribosyl Transferase (HGPRT) enzyme at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS). Later work would involve comparison with spectra of bound end products with malarial analogue of the enzyme, which would thereby help design a specific inhibitor for the malarial enzyme, which is known to have different substrates from human HGPRT, despite having considerable sequence homology.

In 20xx, I was awarded the Indian Academy of Sciences Summer Research Fellowship to work at the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), where I synthesized and studied the aggregation of the human Islet Amyloid Polypeptide (hIAPP). The aggregation of this peptide has been found to induce pancreatic  $\beta$ -cell death, and has thus been implicated in the pathology of Type II Diabetes. I attempted to study its aggregation pathway and

its association with aggregation inhibitors, which could potentially be used to enhance the current treatment of Diabetes.

Although each of these summer projects were only two months long, the knowledge I gained, and the passion I discovered for biochemistry has inspired me to pursue long term research in these fields. I feel proud to have some part in the fight against malaria and diabetes, and am absolutely geared up for more. I am excited by the opportunity to pursue my D. Phil. at Oxford, as I believe I would get the opportunity to bring together my formal education in Chemistry with my interest in biological sciences involving extremely interesting, but also socially beneficial research.

**F. How important is it that my long-term plans should involve coming back to India?**

There is no compulsion to state that you wish to come back to India, and your leadership and social impact could be anywhere – the Rhodes Scholarships have as their mission facilitating the journeys of those who ‘*stand up for the world*’. You could make your impact while teaching in a university in India, or equally by litigating at the International Criminal Court in Hague. As important as the details of your long-term plans is a clear explanation of how the Rhodes Scholarship and studying at Oxford will help you pursue them.

**G. The Rhodes Scholarship requires four letters of recommendation and an optional fifth letter. Who should I approach for these and when?**

Persons giving you letters of recommendation should be familiar with you, and your work. To this extent, rather than looking for recommendations from well-known persons, you should approach people you have worked with substantially and who know you and your work as a result of this engagement. The idea is to get people who will be able to confidently testify about your work ethic, your academic and extra-curricular interests, and your personality. Needless to say, they should not be people who you have a personal relationship with, such as members of your family.

As per the application rules, three of these letters have to be *academic*, implying that you have to ask people who have taught you during your undergraduate or

postgraduate degree. They have to be able to comment in detail on your academic ability and be confident that you will fare well at Oxford. Which of your teachers you choose is up to you - for instance, you could approach those who have taught you subjects particularly relevant to your stated areas of interest, or those whom you have worked with as a teaching or research assistant as part of coursework.

The fourth letter must be a *character* reference. The letter could be written by someone you have interned with, a teacher from your school, a sports coach, dance teacher, etc. This referee will have to - and should have had the experiences that enable them to - attest to your character and/or your involvement in extracurricular/service or leadership activities, commenting critically about whether you fulfil the non-academic requirements of the Scholarship.

The additional - and optional - fifth letter may be either an academic or a character reference. This is a recent revision to the Rhodes Scholarship Selection Criteria.

Since your referees may be called upon later to speak about you with the selectors, and given that you may later choose to submit these very academic references as part of your separate application (if you are eventually awarded the scholarship) to Oxford, you should choose your referees wisely. Ideally, your referees should be people who know you and your work and can comment meaningfully on your interactions.

A good referee is not one who might write a generic reference that overstates your abilities but should be someone who will have personal insights to offer. The reviewers are generally skeptical of reference letters that portray that the candidate has no flaws (or scope for improvement). Hence you should approach trusted professors or persons who have supervised your work and know you well enough to attest to your character critically and faithfully. When read together, your references should be able to provide a working image of who you are as a person and how you fulfill the four Rhodes Scholarship criteria. You are expected to have discussed your motivations and aspirations with all your

referees at some length. Your referees should not be people who only incidentally know you but those who have been your well-wishers for quite some time.

It is ideal to approach your potential referees at least 6-8 weeks before the reference submission deadline in order to give them sufficient notice and avoid any delays.

Point 4(k) of the Rhodes India Memorandum, along with the 'Guidance for Referees' appended to the Memorandum provides information on the nature of references the Trust requires.

**H. At the time of applying, I will not be able to provide official transcripts for the entire duration of my degree since I will complete my studies only after the application process. Is this acceptable?**

Many Rhodes candidates apply for the scholarship in the final year of their current degree and, therefore, have not completed their studies at the time of application. In that case, it is perfectly fine to submit official transcripts for the terms or semesters you have completed thus far in your degree. In some instances, you may be asked if there are any updates to your academic transcript during the course of the selection. As such, be aware of recent results declarations and keep your latest transcript ready for submission. The same applies to any internships/extracurricular/leadership activities undertaken or completed during the selection process- you may be asked for updates to your CV that have occurred during this time, so keep track of them and make sure supporting documentation is available.

**I. Does the age at which one decides to apply for the Scholarship have a bearing on one's chances of being chosen as a Rhodes Scholar? Does the fact that you were unsuccessful in a previous attempt to get the Scholarship negatively impact one's chances?**

Your age (as long as it falls within the bounds set out by the memorandum) is not a deterrent to your chances of winning the scholarship. In other words, whether or not you are awarded the Scholarship will be a function of your ability to meet the criteria that the Rhodes Trust is looking for, and not of the age at

which you apply. Relatedly, it is important to note that multiple attempts at the scholarship are allowed, and don't work against you – there have been multiple Rhodes Scholars who have won it on their second attempt.

**J. Will I be required to submit any test scores at the time of applying for the Scholarship, such as English proficiency test results or GRE scores?**

The Rhodes Scholarship application process does not require the candidate to pass any qualifying exams (GRE, Subject GREs, etc.) or language proficiency exams (TOEFL, IELTS, etc.) but the specific course that you are applying to may do so. Since your application for your chosen course at the University of Oxford is to be submitted after scholarship results are released, there is no need to submit any test scores along with the Rhodes Scholarship application.

**K. What is the section titled “Is there any other information that you would like to add to your application?” meant for?**

This space is provided for candidates who wish to make a clarification about some aspect of their application (for example, a grade on their transcript, additional details about one or more of the documents they have submitted, etc.) or provide some other pertinent information that it has not been possible to mention elsewhere in the application. If you don't feel the need to provide any such clarification or supplementary information, you can leave this space blank. Importantly, this should *not* be used as an extension to your academic statement or personal statement or to add information that the word limits did not provide you an opportunity to include.

**L. What if I have further questions?**

We have set up an informal Google Group that you can join. It is not mandatory to join it. Remember that the Rhodes Trust remains the only and final authority on the conduct of the interview. However, if you want to access the Google Group to ask us questions on an informal basis, you click [here](#).

We are also including recordings of two previous webinars where current Rhodes Scholars discuss the process of crafting an application [here](#) and [here](#). The first of these webinars occurred before the academic statement was introduced,

and the second one was hosted before the most recent changes to the personal statement and academic statement, but they still have advice that you might find helpful.

We have also annexed to this guide a few personal statements of previous candidates (which have been anonymized). We would like to emphasise once again that there is no set format a personal statement has to follow. These have been provided solely as examples for guidance and should not be relied on as templates.

## **II. PERSONAL STATEMENT**

### **M. Are there certain elements that a personal statement must mandatorily have?**

As mentioned above, there is no set format that a personal statement should follow. However, with this year's rules requiring the personal statement to be written and structured in a manner that responds to the three prompts discussed above, candidates will need to think about how they incorporate their responses within the personal statement while also talking about your unique motivations and personal experiences. The personal statement is not just an essay where you respond to the prompts in a generic fashion. It is a personalised piece of writing, through which the panel seeks to understand you better. Through your personal statement the panel expects to obtain a clear idea about your motivations, the areas of your interest, and what you have done to develop these interests/ how they came to be your core interests. The prompts do not take away the opportunity to elaborate upon these aspects but are aimed at helping you focus on them in a more systematic manner.

At its core, the personal statement is your chance to showcase your unique perspective by drawing on the experiences that have shaped it and highlighting how it shapes your engagement with your academic field of study and your goals for the future. The panel also looks for whether the University of Oxford is a good fit for these interests, although we could assume that your academic statement is the main document through which they will ascertain this. Finally,



the panel is interested in understanding how an education at Oxford and the Rhodes scholarship fits into your future plans. While it might be difficult to exactly identify what your future path may look like, it is useful to have an idea of what career options you are considering and why. You can address these elements in any manner you desire, as long as you are able to weave them in while responding to the prompts, and clearly convey your thoughts to the reviewer.

For example, a candidate details their areas of interest and how they lead to their goals:

Course: Women's Studies (M.St.) and Film Aesthetics (M.St.)

Deeply invested in the politics of art and performance as sites for both normalization and subversion, I aspire to explore how space and time are reified, recast and rendered through filmic languages—imaginary lines, color, bodies, light, background scores. Moreover, the politics of (participatory) spectatorship, interrogating the 'male gaze', film theatres as spaces for aspiration and creation, active mediation by audiences through intra-audience interactions, new media technologies, and memory-- provide crucial arenas for research, particularly in the Indian subcontinent. I aim to address these questions through the vantage of filmic and gendered intertextualities. Keen to examine how cinema shapes and negotiates the feminine, and within the feminine, narrative ideals and deviations, it is imperative to me that this exercise is not situated in an academic vacuum.

In the future, I aim to teach film through film, exploring the possibilities, limitations and challenges the audio-visual possesses in pedagogy. I hope to bridge the gulf between theory and praxis, between seas of words and worlds of seeing, working on feminist media technologies and texts—both through the creative and the academic. It is my dream to establish screenwriting and filmmaking labs and schools, affording access to story-tellers whose voices have been subordinated, often along the intersections of class, race, caste, gender expression, and sexual orientation. I want to explore the ethics of aesthetics, through blank spaces— simple subtitles change audience viewing and mediation, and silently (violently) determine the intended audience.

#### **N. What should my opening paragraph for the personal statement cover?**

A strong opening can be one way to distinguish your personal statement from those of other candidates. It helps to catch the attention of the reviewer right at the beginning, making them curious about how you will develop your story from that point. There is no set formula for what could be an interesting beginning. The opening should ideally be a reflection of the central theme in your statement, thus setting the tone for the entire essay. There is no real value in providing a striking quote from someone famous, especially if it has nothing to do with the personal statement.

In the extract below, a candidate begins their essay by talking about a movie, which left a profound impact on them, tying together different concepts which have always been a source of interest for them:

Course: Law (Bachelor of Civil Law)

A homosexual client. A homophobic lawyer. A deadly, incurable disease. An unsympathetic law firm. A quest for justice. As a third year law student, I watched Philadelphia, horrified as the narrative of sexual taboos and the resultant social condemnation overpowered humane considerations towards a life-threatening disease. Philadelphia made me think- long and hard- about the link between gender, sexuality and health, putting a name to and forging a nexus between concepts that have always fascinated me.

Here, candidates begin their essays by each recalling a childhood memory:

Course: Genomic Medicine and Statistics (D.Phil.)

My first student was my younger sister. She would sit trapped amid a rag-tag bunch of stuffed toys as I “lectured” on my latest scientific fancy. My family teases that I was a professor even then, six years old and already explaining the water cycle or floral anatomy to my eclectic audience. My hapless sister, often at the receiving end of my soliloquies, is now so weary of this that she has abandoned the pursuit of science altogether to study law instead. Yet my enthusiasm for science and science education remain undeterred.

Course: Neuroscience (MSc+DPhil)

Travels with family to less explored biodiverse ecosystems and an undergraduate education in zoology have primed me into appreciating the natural world around me. I am always in wonder of life forms. The fact that from microbes to whales, every living organism is composed of one fundamental unit – the cell – fascinates me ever since I learnt about it in junior school. These unifying concepts of biology spurred my interest in animal sciences. Unsurprisingly, this childhood fascination now manifests in my research and academic interests.

**O. What kind of non-academic experiences should I mention in the personal statement?**

The personal statement should not be limited to purely academic aspects of your life. In fact, it might be prudent to include overtly academic concerns, achievements, and activities in your academic statement. The personal statement can be considered as an opportunity to foreground issues that matter to you, discuss your talents and passions, and mention anything that you think substantiates your claim of fulfilling the various scholarship criteria. As mentioned above, the Rhodes Scholarships focus on several criteria beyond the scholastic ability of the candidate, and your engagement in various non-academic activities could demonstrate these qualities. However, once again, try to weave these accomplishments into the larger narrative of your essay. Please remember that the Rhodes Scholarship is not a recognition for past achievements but an investment into the future of someone who is willing to “stand up for the world”. The personal statement, therefore, is an excellent avenue to showcase your vision, for the future of yourself, your community, and the world at large.

For example, a candidate talks about how their extra-curricular activities helped shape aspects of their personality:

For the disciplined life that I lead, I have my extra-curricular involvement in sports, yoga and music to thank. They have given me rigour and fellowship. In

waking up at 4 a.m. to speed skate on empty roads and assist my coach in training young roller hockey teams, in practicing A Capella singing for hours with the college choir to perfect enunciation, regimented drills have shaped the way I work and live.

Interdisciplinarity and a zeal to popularise science drive me. 'XXXX' is a beautiful amalgamation of these two passions – music and science. I am training to make scientific illustrations that can convey complex science simply and creatively. Through wildlife videography, I try to urge urban people, especially children, to value the world's species diversity and help conservation efforts. I see a spark of undiluted joy in the eyes of my six-year-old cousin when he watches my bird videos. I believe that if children are sensitised at an early age, they deeply appreciate the gift of nature. As the research head of XXXX, the animal welfare club at my college, I work towards building empathy among citizens of Delhi and neighbouring areas with animal rescue and rehabilitation drives.

**P. I took a year off to work after my graduation, but spent my time working on something unrelated to my core research interests. How should I make sense of this in the statements?**

If the work experience is absolutely unrelated to your area of interest, there is no strict need to mention it in either of the statements. Remember: the personal statement is about taking your narrative forward. If something does not take your narrative forward, it need not find space in your personal statement. However, often things that seem 'unrelated' can be 'related' if they lead to skill building that will ultimately help your long-term project. These skills can be mentioned in your academic statement. For example, you may have acquired practical or soft skills that would facilitate the realisation of your long-term plans.

### **III. ACADEMIC STATEMENT**

**Q. Are there certain elements that an academic statement must mandatorily have?**

The separate academic statement should ideally be thought of as a springboard for ideating about and writing the statement of purpose and/or research proposal

for your eventual University of Oxford *course* application. However, not all courses will require such a statement and/or proposal. The academic statement should nonetheless provide a tentative plan of study or research at the university and delineate the broad field you are academically interested in.

The academic statement should reflect an awareness of the existing literature in your proposed field of study, and in the case of research degrees, an identifiable research hypothesis or problem OR alternatively, questions that you wish to probe while pursuing your course at Oxford. You may choose to talk about past academic and/or professional experiences (such as publications, conferences, internships), a methodological outline and relevant skills that you possess in the academic statement, so as to highlight why you might be a good fit for the proposed course of study. You may also flag the research centres, libraries, archival collections, and/or laboratories where you will be interested to study and work, while at Oxford. In this regard, your specific academic objectives can also be demonstrably tied to the long-term goals or vision that you may have.

Since the Rhodes Scholarships are awarded for the minimum duration of two years, it is important to lay down a tentative academic plan beyond the first year of your scholarship, in case you are applying for a one-year degree. Some scholars go on to do a DPhil after their first year at Oxford, while others often apply for another one-year degree course. Career trajectories are unique to every individual and you need not emulate others without giving some thought to a plan of your own.

Your academic statement should give some sense of what you want to do at Oxford and how you wish to go about it. An academic statement, however, should NOT be used to merely narrate your CV, as that would be a lost opportunity. It should instead be viewed as a chance for you to add crucial detail about which specific experiences outfit you best for your chosen course. You will not always have everything figured out beforehand. Nonetheless, you may always use your academic statement to reasonably anticipate the gains of pursuing a particular course at Oxford: it may be some kind of technical expertise

that you wish to acquire or even the prospect of working with a certain faculty member in your preferred department.

Above all, your academic statement should evoke a feeling of genuine interest, academic promise, and clarity of thought. For more information on the distinction between the personal and the academic statements, see Rhodes India Memorandum points 4(i) and 4(j).

Finally, and very importantly you must also demonstrate your eligibility and suitability for the course and that you meet the admission criteria. This could include the courses/degrees you have completed or are in the course of completing, your academic standing (including grades and ranking) and other things that would enable an application to the course to succeed. Given the 350-word limit, it will not be feasible to provide exhaustive evidence that you meet each criterion. Rather, it is more helpful to consider the information already available on your CV and transcripts, and highlight the ones most relevant to the course requirements in your academic statement.

*Note: the following samples also include extracts from personal statements of previously successful candidates that were written prior to the introduction of the requirement of a separate academic statement. While they explain the candidates' motivations behind pursuing their courses of choice and their plans thereafter, they do not touch upon their eligibility and suitability for the said courses in a way that the academic statement of 350 words requires you to pointedly do.*

Here, a candidate explains in their essay how they developed an interest in economics:

Course: Economics (M. Phil.)

Five years ago, I chose to opt for economics out of sheer enthusiasm of exploring it. I wanted to study a discipline which could understand the social complex of interrelationships objectively and evaluate it quantitatively. Over time, I have discovered the depths of the discipline and the implements it equips its follower

with. Economics principles are like a toolchest. Through analytical frameworks and models, I feel equipped with more gear at the end of every lecture. The freedom it bestows on its student is just so enthralling – one could study anything from markets in education to health to nuclear physics. This limitless horizon has allowed me to explore my minor fields in depth along with my major. My philosophical inclinations along with a brush with Boulding's views on going beyond the rudimentary and strait-jacket assumptions of the discipline have motivated me to integrate my everyday ruminations with the principles of economics.

As I look ahead at the expanding horizon that economics has thrown open for me, I see myself doing an M. Phil in Economics from Oxford. This would equip me with more tools in my toolbox and allow me to understand the world of inequalities and injustices better. I have had a vibrant exposure to financial markets and live trading in a stock exchange during my internship and I have seen the world of poignant injustices. Capital markets offer huge dividends and bonuses, of a scale and size that people down the poverty lane, below the poverty line cannot even dream of. I aim to use my learning from the study of social sector schemes in developing countries and that about capital markets to arrive at logical solutions. An M. Phil in Economics will provide me an academic base and better foundational framework within which these inequalities could be examined. I shall be in a better position to assess various developmental strategies and propose better solutions, most importantly. A dedicated focus on academic research at Oxford will help me explore the world further and allow me to go beyond limited model-specific assumptions of the discipline.

Here, a candidate explains in their essay how they developed an interest in international criminal law:

Course: Law (Bachelor of Civil Law)

The intersection between criminal law and constitutional guarantees triggered my interest in constitutional law – a direct result of my quest to understand broader issues of accountability for mass rights violations. My passion for constitutional and comparative constitutional law led to the three papers I published or presented in University, my membership on the Editorial Board of

the Environmental Law and Practice Review, and my role in organising the first ever Mock Constituent Assembly Debate at my University. I particularly enjoyed working on a comparison of the judicial attitudes towards secularism in India and Israel, since this helped me gain a practical understanding of the operation of law in both jurisdictions. This manuscript was accepted for publication in the prestigious Student Law Review at my University.

Such an interest finds reflection in my grades - I topped the constitutional law course in my third year and received the highest possible grade in a Comparative Law course while on exchange at the University of Illinois. My exchange program, for which I was selected based on my academic achievements, broadened my outlook towards social issues by understanding how they manifest themselves in developing and developed societies.

The potential of the systems of criminal justice dispensation was brought out in full force for me once again when I studied international criminal law. Slowly, painfully, the world had witnessed the establishment of a permanent, international criminal tribunal and I realised with a thrill that my generation had been entrusted with the responsibility of making it successful. This desire to promote international criminal law led to my participation in the Henry Dunant Moot organised by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the activities I undertook as an Executive Board Member of the University International Law Society. It is with a view to understanding the relationship between law and mass atrocities that I opted for the Law and Anthropology of Violence course this semester.

In this extract, a candidate elaborates on their future career plans in their personal statement, justifying these based on work they have previously undertaken:

Course: Material Sciences (M.Sc.)

Why such excitement and fuss over solar energy one might ask. Well, the sun's energy is bestowed upon us as a precious gift, free of cost, every single day. Just consider the magnitude of the gift. The earth receives  $4.3 \times 10^{20}$  J of solar energy every hour which is more energy than mankind uses in one calendar year! In addition solar technologies are clean and do not emit harmful green house gases that contribute to global warming. Nevertheless, this technology is still not cost



competitive with traditional fossil fuel based technology. This is because fossil fuel technology has had a head start of two hundred years. It is my belief that changes in policy will be crucial to bridge this gap and lead to the large scale deployment of solar technologies quickly.

Vested interests in the fossil fuel lobby delay the progress of solar technology. I got a taste of this when I did an internship in Delhi and presented a paper on 'The Hydrocarbon Sector of India'. Energy is the biggest barometer that measures political pressure as; if the cost of fuel rises the government becomes unpopular. This is true for governments of all countries. Therefore, despite the obvious advantages of solar energy most governments are uneasy about antagonizing those vested interests of fossil fuels. India needs policy makers who recognize the urgency of shifting to solar energy sources and I wish to be one of them.

Here a candidate explains why they want to study law at Oxford and how this aligns with their future plans:

Course: Law (Bachelor of Civil Law)

My aim as a lawyer is to subvert power structures by deploying the language of rights. Change is deliberate, requiring systematic collective efforts. I want to play my part in catalysing social transformation through engagement in strategic litigation. As such, I wish to pursue the Bachelor of Civil Law ('BCL') at Oxford on the Rhodes Scholarship. I meet the entry requirements of the course, having secured a first-class undergraduate degree in law with honours.

My desire to pursue the BCL stems from the course content and the expertise of instructors. Specifically, I want to study comparative courses on equality law, human rights law and constitutional law and theory. The potential that comparative legal material has for use as legal strategy became clear to me when clarifying the conception of 'dignity' under the Indian Constitution in a co-authored article on XXX, for XXX journal. In another publication, while arguing against the invocation of 'unique' cultural norms for the retention of the XXX, I demonstrated how culture-based arguments were directly

controverted by the experience of jurisdictions having cultural contexts comparable to that of India.

Indian constitutional courts frequently rely upon comparative legal material in rights-based adjudication, pointing to the strategic potential of such material. Furthermore, I view Professor M's work on anti-discrimination, Professor N's contributions to the fields of comparative human rights law and equality law, and Professor O's unique analysis of intersectionality in discrimination law, as being crucial to the interpretative strides that I envision the Supreme Court making over the next few years. Learning from all of them is a singular opportunity, available only at Oxford.

It invigorates me to know that my training in the law affords me the unique ability to translate my knowledge into useful strategies for legal intervention. The BCL will allow me to hone my existing skills and build a sound academic foundation for my future work. Additionally, I will be able to undertake similar work as I have performed at XXX and XXX, by getting involved with Oxford Pro Bono Publico. Such holistic training will complete my journey from a law student to a consummate public interest lawyer.

**R. Is it acceptable to propose a course of study at Oxford that is not directly related to what I studied as an undergraduate?**

It is certainly possible for you to state a course in your academic statement that is not directly related to your current major/undergraduate course. However, you will need to cogently explain and justify your reasons for doing so in your academic statement. The selection committee will be interested in obtaining a clear idea about your chosen area of study, how you came to be interested in it, and what you have done thus far to deepen your engagement with that field. This can be done by reflecting on your past academic and work experience and identifying the elements that have shaped your interest in your chosen area of study. In other words, it is important that you think carefully about your motivations for pursuing a different stream of study and articulate those reasons clearly.

**S. Is it alright for me to state a course in my academic statement which is not directly related to what I want to do in the future?**

The Rhodes Trust is interested in understanding how an education at Oxford fits in with your future career plans. While it is certainly understandable that one's eventual career trajectory may differ somewhat from one's initial plans, it is important to have a certain degree of clarity on why you wish to study a particular course at Oxford University and how that will steer you towards the career you are interested in. Therefore, it is alright to select any course so long as you can clearly explain how this course will benefit you in your chosen career. In your academic statement, it will be beneficial to show coherence with respect to the course you are pursuing, the course you intend to pursue at Oxford, and your career plans.

**T. How do I show that the University of Oxford is a good fit for me?**

Your application should clearly specify what aspect of the training you would receive at Oxford makes it unique, and particularly suited to *your* interests. One way to do this is to identify certain specific courses, and subjects within these courses, which are relevant to your interests (though these choices might change by the time you ultimately get to Oxford). You could also look at faculty you would like to work with, research centres at Oxford specializing in your area of interest, the teaching methodology at Oxford (the tutorial system- although note that this is most widely employed across the undergraduate curriculum), the academic and social culture at Oxford or other factors which you can relate to, or a combination of all of these. Try to avoid generic remarks about Oxford's academic environment, history or excellence, and tailor the reasons to suit your background and interests, thus personalizing your essay.

Three candidates use a combination of several of these factors to show why Oxford would be the ideal next step for their careers:

Course: Law (Bachelor of Civil Law)

Given that my ultimate goal is to work in the field of international criminal law—whether through fieldwork, academia or practice—I feel that the BCL course is

ideal for me. Many of the courses on offer seem to be tailored to specifically suit my interests. For instance, the aforementioned cross-section between criminal and constitutional law is the thrust of the Criminal Justice and Human Rights course. Again, I feel that my understanding of individual liability for war crimes will be enhanced by understanding how the humanitarian law regime works in that context, through the International Law and Armed Conflict course. The structure of the BCL course is another incentive. Oxford University offers the unique advantage of being focused on personal tutorials, while still allowing for independence of research. I believe that such guidance will equip me better to realise my dream of engaging in the international criminal law regime.

Course: Material Sciences (M.Sc.)

In order to amalgamate my technological insights with a clear understanding of the politics, economics and social aspects of the world's energy scenario, I intend to pursue a one-year M.Sc. degree in Environmental Change and Management in Oxford. This is a very specific program designed for people who are interested in fighting climate change. I believe that the skills I will acquire from this program will allow me to be able to frame energy policies for India. The program at Oxford is the best of its kind in the world inasmuch as the program is a fusion of people from diverse backgrounds who are associated with ministries, the United Nations and with research and development. In addition, the curriculum includes several project-based assignments and field trips. I believe that hands on learning is the best method in the dynamic field of energy and thus I feel as though the program was tailored for me.

I am keen on following this up with a one-year M.Sc. degree in Materials Science as Oxford is famous for its research on renewable energy devices, in particular, second generation solar cells. Materials are the key to achieving a fundamental breakthrough in this field. A Master's degree in Materials Science would enable me to pursue my love of the sciences and pave the way for a future PhD in solar cells. Oxford has achieved several fundamental break-throughs in metal oxide solar photovoltaics. It is for this reason that I believe Oxford is the best place for me to carry out research.

I am also deeply interested in going to Oxford because it has a vibrant chess scene. I have won the national chess tournament in India and I have participated in some International tournaments where I have won prizes. The Rhodes scholarship will allow me to pursue my dream and I hope with all my heart that I will be given a chance to do so.

Course: Neuroscience (MSc+DPhil)

Oxford offers a multidisciplinary and diverse ecosystem where the pursuit of sciences, especially my area of interest – sleep studies – is widely revered. Using my present skills, I want to research sleep in humans and other mammals and understand the inner cellular and molecular workings of sleep, conditions of hemispheric asymmetry and how they change in different environments. I would eventually like to elucidate the functions and evolutionary significance of sleep. I am quite enthused by the work of XXXX's lab in the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics. As an MSc+DPhil scholar in neuroscience, I would like to study sleep at the molecular level in organisms that show unusual or extreme sleeping habits. I would also love to further my co-curricular interests in music and sports.

**U. If I am applying for a one-year degree, do I also need to talk about what I will do in my second Rhodes year?**

Point 4(j)(ii) of the Rhodes India Memorandum requires your academic statement to provide an indication of your plans for the second year in case you are listing a one-year course as your first course. The academic statement should provide a firm idea of which course/courses are viable for you to study at the University of Oxford, given that all Oxford courses are not covered by the Rhodes Scholarship. Applicants should refer to the Conditions of Tenure on the Rhodes House Website for details regarding permitted degrees/degree combinations. For applicants interested in pursuing a second B.A. degree please see guidance under 'Procedure after Selection' at point 6(c) of the Rhodes India Memorandum. It is fine to mention just the one degree in your personal statement if you feel that it might make your statement more focused. It is also good to have a sense of what you would want to do in the second year in preparation for the interview round,

where it may come up. Whatever route you choose, the emphasis is on having clarity of thought and a desired course of action that matches this.

The following extracts may give you a sense of how to incorporate plans for your second year in your academic statement:

Course: Law (Bachelor of Civil Law) and Criminology and Criminal Justice (MSc)

The Constitution guarantees the rights of individuals while prescribing limitations on institutional power. Conversely, criminal law prescribes limitations upon the rights of individuals. My research and academic pursuits have led me to conclude that any serious engagement with rights-based issues, requires me to build a strong academic foundation in both these sub-disciplines. As such, I wish to pursue the Bachelor of Civil Law ('BCL') and the MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice ('MSc') at Oxford in the first and second year of the Rhodes Scholarship. The BCL and the MSc afford different analytical perspectives to the study of rights-based issues. Such an interdisciplinary understanding of the law will be essential to devising effective litigation strategies in human rights adjudication, the complexity of which demands an understanding of the political, socio-cultural and historical context.

Course: Women's Studies (M.St.) and Film Aesthetics (M.St.)

Oxford offers two Master of Studies courses in Film Aesthetics and Women's Studies, both under the Department of Modern Languages, and ancillary Humanities' departments like History and Philosophy, allowing me to critically engage with practical implications of feminist film theory, through one-on-one mentoring, tutorial work, and resources available at the Bodleian library and Taylor Institution.

**V. As an applicant from a science background, how can I convey my passion for a very technical subject in an accessible fashion and situate it within the broader context of my other interests and larger goals?**

As mentioned in the General Tips section above, your focus should be on communicating your areas of interest with clarity, in language that captures the nuances of the points that you are trying to convey but is at the same time accessible for a generalist audience. Annexure II to this Guide contains an essay submitted by a Rhodes Scholar from a science background that effectively balances these conflicting interests. Additionally, Annexure III contains excerpts from applications to Oxford that demonstrate some approaches to recounting academic experiences. It is important to remember that your academic statement may not be read (at least initially) only by specialists in your particular field. Focusing on the importance and impact of your work in your journey rather than the technical procedural details will generally make for a more compelling statement.

**Note: The annexures include personal statements (and extracts) of previously successful candidates. These were written prior to the introduction of the prompts for the personal statement and the requirement of a separate academic statement. While they may give you a sense of the kind of information that you may want to share with reviewers and also help you think about how you would like to articulate your ambitions and experiences impactfully, they may not touch upon all the elements that the rules for this year's application require you to necessarily include in your two essays.**

### ANNEXURE I

The lights dim, my eyes skim the audience. We are watching *Fishing at the Stone Weir*, two parts of Quentin Brown's project documenting the lives of Netsilik Eskimos. Subtitles are provided for the hearing-impaired, but I notice something is amiss—every time the Netsilik people speak, [non-English narration] blares from below the frame, reducing their language's complexity to merely something we are not required to comprehend. Absence of human conversation is abbreviated to [sil.], short for silence. Crashing waves, sounds of the industrious architects creating the weir, breaths a woman takes as she braids her hair-- all relegated to [sil.].

The lights dim, my eyes skim the audience. My second public performance, I perform an intensely personal and political piece responding to misogyny in pop culture. I gather strength from the sea of faces staring at me, indulging me, laughing with me, not at me. My universe of verse is all about pace- fast, seething, breathing, multiple rhymes. Beginning in haste, I try to say as much as I can within the first minute. Slowly, however, I register the audience's response. It is in that silence I realize that my poetry truly belongs.

I have explored my own motivations and imperatives, concluding that I am fascinated by silences, by absences—that which we render mundane, profane, not worthy of enquiry. Fortunate to have been guided by undergraduate history



and literature professors, I've realized that processes of inscription and documentation are as much projects of concealment as they are of discovery. After multiple (and admittedly, challenging) trysts with Foucault in libraries, I want to interrogate those lapses, the absence of filmic texts as legitimate sources of academia, the absence of women/ femme and queer voices behind the screen, and indeed, to engage with the problematic of what makes a woman a woman, what makes a film a film, what happens when films make women, and when women make films?

I have approached pro-filmic realities at pre-production, due to my background in theatre and amateur screenwriting, production through the two projects I undertook for my classes and videos of my poetry pieces, and in post-production, with sales and marketing initiatives, as part of my internship with XYZ. I have however, yet to explore the philosophy and ontology of film itself—the languages in and through which it is articulated, the activation of the past through the present, the imposition of the present's politics on the past, and how films are constantly being created—not just through processes of production, but those of consumption.

Similarly, I have recognised and expressed my feminist politics through my art—registering protest against the hystericisation of the feminine, queerphobia and menstrual taboos through slam poetry. As a working member and later head coordinator for the Gender Studies Cell at my University, I interacted with luminaries in the field of gender-based and sexual equality, and organisations addressing child abuse, sex work and marital rape. I have feminist awakenings while reading Judith Butler, writing poems as catharsis, or reading feminist film theory by Teresa de Lauretis, yet it is only when I ask people what personal pronouns they use, or unlearn the everyday ways in which the patriarchy manifests itself that I feel I have received an education.

It is in pursuit of these perceived trivialities, these educations hidden in what we confirm as mundane—like intimate human interaction in the frenzy of the subway, or histories of the humble bench in my neighborhood park—that I turn to Oxford. Oxford offers two Master of Studies courses in Film Aesthetics and

Women's Studies, both under the Department of Modern Languages, and ancillary Humanities' departments like History and Philosophy, allowing me to critically engage with practical implications of feminist film theory, through one-on-one mentoring, tutorial work, and resources available at the Bodleian library and Taylor Institution.

Deeply invested in the politics of art and performance as sites for both normalization and subversion, I aspire to explore how space and time are reified, recast and rendered through filmic languages—imaginary lines, color, bodies, light, background scores. Moreover, the politics of (participatory) spectatorship, interrogating the 'male gaze', film theatres as spaces for aspiration and creation, active mediation by audiences through intra-audience interactions, new media technologies, and memory-- provide crucial arenas for research, particularly in the Indian subcontinent. I aim to address these questions through the vantage of filmic and gendered intertextualities. Keen to examine how cinema shapes and negotiates the feminine, and within the feminine, narrative ideals and deviations, it is imperative to me that this exercise is not situated in an academic vacuum.

In the future, I aim to teach film through film, exploring the possibilities, limitations and challenges the audio-visual possesses in pedagogy. I hope to bridge the gulf between theory and praxis, between seas of words and worlds of seeing, working on feminist media technologies and texts—both through the creative and the academic. It is my dream to establish screenwriting and filmmaking labs and schools, affording access to story-tellers whose voices have been subordinated, often along the intersections of class, race, caste, gender expression, and sexual orientation. I want to explore the ethics of aesthetics, through blank spaces— simple subtitles change audience viewing and mediation, and silently (violently) determine the intended audience. Poetry is about enunciation, and renunciation. I seek to pursue a double major in Film Aesthetics and Women Studies at Oxford to find the joy in exploring silences, and to triumph in the silences that joy affords.

## ANNEXURE II

I would like to begin by talking about my years of schooling.

The first thing I was struck by was the importance given to questions, discussions and conversation. No question was ever dismissed as being trivial or insignificant. Rather, we were encouraged to come up with more of them, think about them deeply and converse with one another. In the process, I learnt three things at a very young age. One, I had a voice and mind of my own, and was capable of thinking constructively about any subject. Two, it was supremely important to listen carefully with an open mind. Lastly, every discussion needn't end with a definite conclusion -oftentimes the questions we were left with were greater sources of learning.

A particularly significant period was my year as a Class 11 student. As a part of our curriculum, we had to work with an NGO in Kanchipuram, and later that year, worked in the ABC and DEF in Maharashtra, and GHI and JKL in Rajasthan. It was the first time I engaged with deeply complex issues like education, sanitation, water and food distribution, women's rights and land ownership, and it was a very humbling experience. I remember being frustrated because it took me weeks just to appreciate the many layers to the problems, much less find a way that I could meaningfully contribute. I came into intimate contact with a world starkly different from mine. These interactions have made me look critically at how I live my own life, the choices I make and my place in the world around me.

These two aspects of my education grew into aspects integral to my personality. I consider myself to be open minded. Second and relatedly, I have diverse interests and influences, and I celebrate this diversity. Lastly, I engage deeply with things that I come across.

I study western classical music and have played the piano since the age of five. In 20xx, I completed the Grade 8 from Trinity College, London with a distinction, and I'm pursuing the ATCL, a Performance Diploma awarded by the same

institute. Music has been a significant influence in shaping my work ethic, ideals, and emotional and intellectual growth, and is something I want to continue to pursue.

From a young age, reading has been a source of great pleasure, of new ideas and perspectives, and has helped me be more articulate. I enjoy reading fiction -most recently, I have been particularly taken by the authors AB, CD, EF and GH. Aside from this, a significant portion of my reading is academic.

This brings me to something I am passionate about - theoretical physics and mathematics. During my study, I've had the good fortune to travel, interact and, more recently, collaborate with professors and graduate students from some of the best institutes across the world and this has greatly augmented my understanding and love for the subjects. Over time, I have become interested in three topics - quantum field theory (QFT), general relativity, and string theory. Last summer, I was an ABC Fellow at the XYZ Centre for Theoretical Sciences with Dr. DEF. We worked on understanding recently proposed  $N=3$  superconformal field theories by mapping them to a class of integrable systems. While this project ultimately turned out to be only partially successful, it was an extremely rich learning experience, particularly in learning how research is done.

Having completed a majority of the credit requirements for my MSc. early, I returned to XYZ for my thesis. Here, I am working with Dr. DEF and Dr. GHI (postdoctoral researcher) on formalising the Worldline approach to QFT, and using it to address issues in standard QFT. Apart from potentially being a fresh source of perspectives and techniques for QFT, it's been extremely rewarding because it has involved learning a lot of string theory and revisiting older ideas in a newer light.

I am also working with Prof. JKL on the relationship between certain soft theorems (specifically, the sub-leading double soft theorem) and asymptotic symmetries. Doing so successfully, would bring to a close one leg of the pioneering program initiated by Prof. MNO, et. al. in 20xx, and I've been particularly excited by this. It's been thrilling to be a part of a large group of

researchers across the world piecing together our current understanding of these theorems over the past three years.

I would like to pursue a DPhil. in Theoretical Physics - I want to do research, specifically in the field of QFT and strings. Between the Rudolf Peierls Centre and the Mathematical Institute, Oxford has a strong and diverse string theory group, and would be the ideal environment for me to pursue my research and mature as a physicist. Given the opportunity, I would like to work in Prof. ABC's group (on holography and transport phenomena) or with Prof. DEF (on string phenomenology) for my doctoral studies.

Alongside my research, I want to work in education. I enjoy teaching, and have been fortunate to have ample opportunities to do so - I've taken numerous lectures in college, helped teach a course, and have taught mathematics and physics at school. Through school and college, I have been surrounded by people who take education seriously and actively work towards addressing the many questions it raises, and I've seen myself grow interested in the same. I'm excited to see what form this interest takes in the future.

In conclusion, I would like to say that over time I have discovered for myself that I am happiest and at my most productive when I'm learning, or when I'm using what I've learnt in a meaningful and helpful way. If there is one overarching aim or wish that I have for myself, it is that I continue to do so.

### ANNEXURE III

The academic statement of study [more information about this can be found in Information Memorandum points 4(i) and 4(j)] is a new addition to the application process. This statement is an opportunity to describe your interest in your chosen field, highlighting how your experiences have led to the course you would like to pursue at Oxford.

Below are the excerpts from applications for doctoral and master's courses, respectively, that are intended as examples of one approach to recounting your academic journey.

Course: Biochemistry (D. Phil.)

My undergraduate degree in Biological Sciences allowed me to explore the full spectrum of life from bacteria to blue whales, studying life at the microscopic scale and placing it in the context of populations and ecosystems. I am most fascinated by life at the cellular and molecular scale, and my module choices of Bacterial Physiology and Advanced Bacterial and Eukaryotic Cellular Biology reflect this. The Bacterial Physiology module introduced me to the immense diversity, functional variability and adaptability of bacteria, emphasising overarching principles of how bacteria sense and respond to changes in their environment while the Advanced Bacterial and Eukaryotic Cellular Biology module showed me the fascinating complexity of life at the cellular level, focusing on the organization and control of cells with a particular focus on imaging. For graduate study, I have discovered that I am most interested in microbiology, particularly the intersection between understanding cellular processes and their application to industry.

My work with ABC, as well as my experience with literature review through my tutored dissertation and wet lab projects in my course have shown me that I enjoy conducting research. Thus, I would like to undertake a DPhil to gain the skills necessary to complete a complex and novel project of my own. Areas I hope to explore include learning about proteins and protein engineering in bacteria and bacterial membranes, as well as Bioimaging which combines my passion for art with the clarity provided by quantitative approaches. As such, I am particularly

excited by the prospect of access to the training and facilities at the Micron Advanced Bioimaging Unit.

Working on ABC project highlighted how much there is to know about protein expression in bacterial membranes as well as my enthusiasm to learn more about the topic. I found the work done by Prof DEF's lab fascinating, as it is studying transport across bacterial membranes - especially the work with the Type IX secretion system in *Bacteroidetes* bacteria and the functioning of adhesins in gliding motility. I was first introduced to the idea of directionality at the cellular level through writing my tutored dissertation, where I learned about the origin and maintenance of axuality in the growth and development of plant shapes. I would like to understand this concept in the context of gliding motility, investigating the basis of the direction of adhesin movement across helical tracks, using live cell imaging and fluorescent tagging.

Course: Global and Imperial History (M.St.)

My interest in the history of German civilians' internment in India during the Second World War stems from a chance discovery. It was while reading AB's book on Polish refugees in wartime India that I began to ponder the question of those who were not sheltered but detained in the subcontinent. My preliminary research on this theme revealed that from 1939 to 1945, all German civilians residing in India (not just men of military age), whether protestant missionaries, or mountaineers, or employees of multinational corporations, experienced some form of internment by virtue of their status as 'enemy aliens'. As I prepared to write an article on this understudied theme for the History Society of my college, I realized the inadequacy of the nation-state as a spatio-political level of analysis to disentangle 'a twentieth century mass global phenomenon' as complex as civilian internment during a 'total war' that involved multi-ethnic and polymorphous empires as belligerents.

Civilian internment involved classification—legal and social, displacement of large numbers of people, and their protracted incarceration in foreign territories. By focusing on the Indian subcontinent—neither a home front nor a war zone—I seek to recalibrate the largely Eurocentric discourse on the Second World War. My

approach is aimed at de-militarizing and de-masculinizing histories of war in the context of modern South Asia which remain enmeshed in discourses surrounding military technology or nationalism, save for a few exceptions. I am also interested in interrogating the 'globalizing' tendencies of global conflicts in general and of internment in particular.

To this end, I have also worked on the reconfiguration of existing military-civilian relationships due to the advent of American soldiers who functioned as wartime cultural conduits in Calcutta (1942-46), as part of a short-term research internship. For me, engaging with the theme of civilian encampments in wartime India implies writing local histories of a global war. The sites of these camps were scarcely akin to conventional prisons. Camp tectonics depended as much on political propaganda and war-rumours as they did on interactions with the local populace and strategies of everyday resistance. In a way, these were what Foucault called heterotopias—mimicking yet mocking the order outside—featuring both disciplining and inversions.

What I find interesting about these camps is that they are given new leases of life during international conflicts. Almost all the camps that had been constructed to intern foreigners in the subcontinent during the First World War were reopened during the Second, which underscores their palimpsest-like nature and enduring relevance for the imperial war-machine. The legal bulwark of the British Raj against 'enemy aliens' in wartime India finds a strange resonance in the postcolonial politics of citizenship. Having interviewed partition-survivors for an oral history archival project, I have increasingly come to appreciate the commonality of experiences—of turmoil, hopelessness, forced mobility, and fractured positionalities—that are often shared by displaced communities and families detained on foreign soil, during or in the aftermath of conflict.

Oral history accounts are as fallible as any other historical source. Matthew Johnson has shown how New Zealand POWs used their post-captivity accounts to distance themselves from the perceived shame of coerced collaboration with enemy powers. Yet, these constitute an important springboard for understanding the dynamics of wartime internment, the totality of which cannot be effectively captured by official records alone. I believe that an M.St. in Global and Imperial History at Oxford will equip me with the necessary skills and methodological clarity to conceptualise my



doctoral research on both civilian and military aspects of foreigners' internment in India during the Second World War.

The history of German civilians' internment in India (1939-45) can offer critical and novel insights regarding the political debilitation of the British Raj throughout the 1940s. The imperial legislation underwriting such internment was not only governed by the security concerns about possible espionage but was also mediated by a racialized fear of the 'enemy'—a monolithic category defined by citizenship that heralded ominous repercussions for national minorities such as German-speaking Jews, who could not escape the fate of being interned. Keeping this in mind, I aim to unpack the nuances of identity formation within the campsites as well.

Three questions predominantly frame my research—first, what can the practice of interning German civilians in wartime India tell us about the nature of the late colonial state as a pre-eminent node of the multinational British Empire? Second, what were the politico-economic and cultural ramifications of the presence of interned German civilians on Indian communities in the vicinity of the encampments? And third, what can the idiosyncrasies of decision-making at the level of campsites tell us about decolonization as an extended process that was initiated well before 1946-47 through localized transfers of power?

Course: MSc in Translational Health Sciences

As a physician foraying into the sphere of healthcare problem solving, I wish to pursue my formal education in a course that gives priority to real-world problems and offers flexibility with the theoretical concepts that are used to understand and analyze them. With its significant focus on case studies of novel health interventions, the MSc in Translational Health Sciences course offers just that. Quoting the program director Prof Trish Greenhalgh, the course helps “translate airy-fairy, arty-farty research findings into practical applications in the real world”. Of the 8 course modules offered, I am particularly interested in the ones on analyzing and designing technological innovations and on using behavioural interventions to address patient and healthcare professional behaviour.

As a Public Health Fellow at the XYZ situated in ABC, I have had the unique opportunity to observe public health problems in a place rife with geographical and socio-political phenomena that directly affect health outcomes. The migrant refugee crisis of the Bangladesh War of Independence, left-wing extremist violence and thick forests where many villages are isolated for 4 months when it rains to name a few. Here, I have participated in organizing communities in the villages to promote alcohol prohibition and am currently managing patients that present to the XYZ hospital. I believe that with my distinctive experiences at the grass-root level, I will be able to significantly contribute to the classroom learnings in a course that 'expects all of its students to have past experiences and anticipates a vibrant, international cohort of students from multiple sectors sharing their ideas and experiences'.

Course: MSc+DPhil Neuroscience

My academic interest in sleep studies were stoked by the book "XXXX" by XXXX. The importance of rest and how the brain minimises wasteful processes and rejuvenates during sleep fascinate me. My ongoing research on the neurobiology of sleep and wakefulness alongside an undergraduate course in physiology gives me a kaleidoscopic view of the world of neuroscience.

Since April 2021, I have been interning with neurophysiologist XXXX at the University of XXXX. We conduct non-invasive northern elephant seal sleep studies on the beaches of Año Nuevo, California. I am learning methods involved in studying electrophysiological and behavioural sleep. I interpret data generated from polysomnography, a multi parametric test used in sleep studies. This data includes electrophysiological signals such as EEG, ECG, EMG, EOG, heart rate and respiratory patterns. I also analyse pressure, illumination, accelerometer, gyrometer and magnetometer data from bio-logging sensors. Such data intensive studies require skilled understanding of data. We learnt creative visualisation techniques to simplify data using programming scripts, illustration and animation software.

Some other research projects and internships in the fields of molecular biology, bioinformatics and stem cell biology have given me the chance to try my hand at some of the major avenues of biological research.

Sleep neuroscience research in humans and other animals is my core area of interest. How different neuroanatomical and neuroendocrinological components of the brain control sleep get me thinking. Dr XXXX's lab at the Department of XXXX at Oxford focuses on the brain's spatio-temporal dynamics during sleep, a research area I am very keen to pursue. If chosen for an MSc + DPhil in Neuroscience, I could employ my sleep studies skills to better understand XXXX.

An interdisciplinary approach will allow me to combine my interests in neuroscience and cell biology. Oxford's holistic atmosphere will also help nurture my broader interests of merging science with creative artistic pursuits.