

## Unofficial Guide for Prospective Rhodes Scholarship Applicants from the Caribbean



*This guide is **NOT** an official communication from the Rhodes Trust. It was collaboratively prepared by Jamaican and Commonwealth Caribbean Scholars to ensure that all applicants have equal access to sufficient guidance for preparing their application for the Rhodes Scholarships for Jamaica and the Commonwealth Caribbean.*

## **GENERAL TIPS:**

Start by—[APPLYING](#)! Most scholars will tell you they did not expect to win so bet on yourself.

1. The Rhodes Scholarship seeks persons with strong moral character, instincts to lead (this doesn't mean you have to be the next President/Prime Minister), and an interest for the welfare of others. It is really important to consider beforehand how you meet those foundational requirements.
2. Introspect: *Who am I? Where am I going? Who am I doing this for? Why this particular scholarship? What might I gain from this experience?*
3. Treat the process as a holistic application, where all elements should give a cohesive presentation of you (tailored to the criteria)
4. Don't feel discouraged by where you went to undergrad. We have had amazing scholars from both local and foreign universities.
5. Ensure you are applying for the scholarship that best describes your situation. You can find more details on Nationality/Residency eligibility criteria [here](#).
6. Highlight how you use your energy to maximize your talents and contribute to your communities through sports, art, debate, activism, etc. (the list is endless).

## **FAQ:**

### **1. Is there an age limit?**

- Yes, but specific circumstances are sometimes considered. If you find yourself in that situation email [scholarship.queries@rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk](mailto:scholarship.queries@rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk) who are happy to offer support.

### **2. What is the GPA cutoff?**

- You will need to meet the GPA requirement for your chosen course; you can find the cutoff by navigating to the "Entry Requirements" tab on your [specific course page](#).
- It is worth noting that given the very intense international competition for places at the University of Oxford, you will have a greater chance of successful admission to Oxford if you have:
  - A First Class Honours Degree or equivalent, or,
  - A GPA of 3.70/4.0 or higher
- If your GPA is on a different scale, you can look at [qualifications equivalences](#) on the dedicated page of the Oxford University website, or directly contact the department of your [chosen course](#) (contact details can be found on the course page).

**3. Is the GPA cutoff strict?**

- Yes, it is. All Rhodes Scholars are academically excellent, but if you have gone through circumstances that led to your GPA being lower than the requirement, you might be able to get away with it if you use your personal statement or academic statement to explain those circumstances clearly.

**4. Can I see your personal statement?**

- Maybe. The response to the request will vary from scholar to scholar. If they say no it is less about gatekeeping and more about the fact that the personal statement is... personal.
- As outlined in the [Information for Candidates](#) document, your personal statement should be 100% your work. It is a piece of writing that represents your most authentic self, so don't get too caught up in reproducing what others have done.

**5. How do I strengthen my CV?**

- You can strengthen your CV by ensuring you include relevant experiences and opportunities. If you lack “real” work experience you can choose to detail other relevant activities such as volunteer experience.

**6. What content can I share with my referees?**

- Who and where to send the reference and when
- Official Rhodes Trust guidance for referees
- An annotated or narrative CV
- Important written work or excellent performance
- Personal Statement (but you cannot receive edits, feedback or comment)
- Academic Statement

**7. How do I stand out?**

- Be AUTHENTIC, and as honest as possible throughout the process.

**8. Does getting the scholarship mean I automatically get into Oxford?**

- Every Rhodes Scholar has a different journey. Being named a Rhodes Scholar does not guarantee a place at the university. You will still need to apply to Oxford separately, but the Rhodes Scholarship team will offer their support throughout the application process.

### 9. What degrees can I pursue using the scholarship?

- Please refer to the [Conditions of Tenure document](#) to check what degrees can be pursued under the scholarship.
- You can apply for *any* course within the accepted degrees even if you change your mind after being selected.

### 10. When do I apply for the scholarship?

- Apply for the Rhodes Scholarship in the year prior to when you want to start your degree at Oxford (usually applications open in June of each year, but make sure to check the [Rhodes Scholarship website](#) to keep you up to date).
- If you're a Bachelor's degree student, this would usually mean applying a year before you graduate if you want to start your Oxford program immediately after graduating from your Bachelor's.
- It might also be useful to know that you can also choose to apply to med school/law school and defer your entrance until after Rhodes (no need to delay all your plans).

### 11. When do I apply to Oxford?

- Applications to Oxford are usually done after winning the scholarship. There is tight turnaround time for submitting Oxford applications
- Deadlines for most courses are in early/mid-January except:
  - Second BA: end-November (finalists might submit application for second BA before selection)
  - Medical Science and Engineering: early December
- Check the programme requirements to see if you need to write (new) essays or take entrance exams (e.g., GRE/GMAT)

### 12. What are the most important aspects of my application?

- Ensure you present a cohesive application
- Assuming you meet all the eligibility criteria, the most important aspects are your personal statement, your academic statement, and your recommendation letters.

## **HELPFUL LINKS**

- Video link of the Information and Q&A session run by Jamaica & Caribbean Scholars on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2022: <https://vimeo.com/725341864/d5a83cfa1e>
- Short overview videos on various phases of the application:  
[www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/application-overview/](http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/application-overview/)

- Essential information for prospective applicants from Jamaica:  
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/applications/jamaica/>
- Essential information for prospective applicants from the Commonwealth Caribbean:  
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/applications/commonwealth-caribbean/>
- Conditions of tenure (Course covered by the Rhodes Scholarship)  
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/files/conditions-of-tenure/>
- List of all graduate degrees at Oxford: [www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/courses-a-z-listing](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/courses-a-z-listing)
- If you prefer to complete a 2nd undergraduate degree:  
[www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/undergraduate-course-search](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/undergraduate-course-search)
- If you are not successful with the Rhodes Scholarship and would still like to attend Oxford, there are other scholarships that you can consider:  
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/other-scholarship-opportunities/>
- Notably, Caribbean nationals who meet the eligibility criteria and apply for your course by the relevant December/January deadlines will be exclusively and automatically considered for the following scholarships:
  - All Souls Hugh Springer Graduate Scholarships
  - Oxford-ID Travel Group Foundation Bonham-Carter Graduate Scholarship

### **TIPS FOR SPECIFIC PARTS OF THE APPLICATION**

#### **Personal Statement**

- **Start early.** Your personal statement requires deep personal reflection. So, give yourself enough time to produce a well-written piece of work.
- The easiest way to work through the personal statement is to think of how you can connect these three key things:
  - *Values (who are you)*
  - *Experiences (what have you done)*
  - *Aspirations (how does a Rhodes Scholarship help you achieve this)*

- Three Ps:
  - *Personal*
  - *Passionate*
  - *Purposeful*
- Ask yourself how you align with the principles of "standing up for the world", as these are recurring aspects in the Rhodes journey to come.
- This is by all means a personal statement, so don't be afraid to discuss experiences that are personal to you! Leave it all on the table—you want selectors to think "I want to meet this person".
- When thinking about ways to start the essay, it might be useful to think about "what makes you tick."
  - *"Start with what makes you tick. Why does this make you tick? What experiences have you had in your life that have made you care about this issue? How have your past experiences shaped you into being the person you are today? How are you going to take those experiences and where do you want to go with them?" - Rhodes National Secretary for China*
- Your CV details your accomplishments, so make your personal statement a space for the things you haven't mentioned. For example, talk about why you pursued certain opportunities and you can do so as creatively as you'd like.
- Given the word limit, you will not be able to discuss every single thing you did, so focus on a couple instead. Remember, quality over quantity.
- No one can help you create, write or edit the personal statement, but you can use conversations with family and friends to inspire reflection.

### **Academic Statement**

- The prompt here is very straightforward, and feedback is allowed, so you may find it easier to start there versus the personal statement.
- Start off by looking at the research projects, specialties, and professors in Oxford whose work or thematic areas might align with your interests.
- It never hurts to reach out as a simple conversation with someone involved in these areas might help you highlight how your previous training and skills have equipped you for study in Oxford.
- Be sure to express how that course is a logical progression for your chosen career.
- If you are planning to join a new field, be very intentional in your statement about how your previous coursework has prepared you to undertake that degree. Be sure to explain the reason for the switch.
- Something to keep in mind when writing a compelling academic statement is thinking about how this course might advance your field or community.

## **Reference Letters**

- Start reaching out to potential referees early, and have a few back-ups.
- Pick referees who know you best and who care about you. It won't really help getting a recommendation of a pioneer in your field if they can't write you a meaningful letter.
- Be strategic: consider that each person has an opportunity to speak to a different set of your strengths or interests, or scholarship criteria
- One to two of your recommendation letters should address your character. For those, try to choose someone who is familiar with you outside of academics. For example, your coach in a certain sport, your supervisor in an internship or a job, or someone you worked closely and extensively with on a non-academic project.
- Don't hesitate to ask your referees if they know you enough to write you a letter. Sometimes, referees ask you for a one-to-one meeting or to write an essay about yourself so they can get to know you on a deeper level. If they don't offer, you can take initiative!
- Your referees will need to recount scenarios and anecdotes that are specific to you, so don't hesitate to remind and inform them of the achievements and qualities you want them to highlight in their letter.
- You can look up sample letters of recommendation for the Rhodes Scholarship online and show them to your referees to give them an idea of what these letters should look like. Make sure to tell them not to copy and paste the text! These sample letters serve as a form of guidance, not a template. As stated earlier, the letters they write for you should be specific to you.
- Recommendation letters are submitted through the application portal by your referees. You cannot upload the recommendation letter yourself, so enter your referees' information in the application portal as soon as possible. This is to make sure your referees have plenty of time to submit your recommendation letters. You will be notified when they submit, so keep track of that, and make sure you remind them, so they do not miss the deadline.
- Manage your referees: check in routinely; communicate why you are applying; give them time; meet with them about what aspects of your relationship that they might speak of.

## **Resume/CV**

- Make content brief but targeted, specific, and quantifiable
- The selection committee reviews your CV thoroughly, so ensure it complements the rest of your application.
- You might choose to approach the CV by listing activities thematically. For example, instead of having general categories like "experience," you could have categories like "community service," "advocacy," and "athletic participation" that are tailored specifically to your pursuits and highlight the causes you're passionate about.
- Detail the responsibilities and impact associated with your activities.

- Others can review your CV. Try your university's career office or someone who has experience looking over CVs.

### **Interview preparation**

- You will be interviewed by a panel consisting of 6-8 people who are advanced in their area of expertise from a variety of backgrounds and professions.
- Know your application - perhaps this is the most important piece of advice. Go through each line of your personal statement, resume, and transcript. Selectors have spent time getting to know you through these papers and chances are they can ask you about even the smallest detail.
- Do at least one mock panel interview. This can be with some of your professors, or even with family members or friends. Just ask some people you respect (and who will challenge you) to read your application material and then interview you together, even if remotely.
- Practice vocalizing what you care about.
- Stay up to date with current affairs in your country, the wider Caribbean, and globally. Don't consume this information passively instead make sure you have an opinion on the issue you're reading about.
- If you don't know something, admit it rather than make stuff up because chances are you'll just give a confusing answer that will prompt many more follow up questions.
- Do not over-prepare so much that you end up sounding rehearsed. The interview is supposed to be a conversation that flows organically, so you don't want to end up just reciting memorized answers. In that vein you might find it useful to take some time off from prepping a couple days before the interview in order to relax.
- Finally, don't be afraid of asking the panelists questions, whether you're asking for clarification or challenging a point of view. Consider the interview a conversation with highly intelligent, skilled, and experienced people. Make use of that.