

 20 OXBRIDGE
YEARS APPLICATIONS



PERSONAL STATEMENT WORKBOOK



DUKES EDUCATION

PERSONAL STATEMENTS AN INTRODUCTION

There is no set formula for writing the ‘perfect’ personal statement – part of what will make your statement successful is how you convey your personality, interests, academic motivations and potential.

Key information

- 4000 characters/47 lines long
- Uploaded to the UCAS website as part of your application to UK universities
- All universities see the same personal statement
- A chance for you to sell yourself – for most universities this is your only chance
- Some universities will require additional information

Your personal statement is your chance to give the Admissions Tutors at the universities that you are applying to a chance to meet the real you – to demonstrate your interest in the course, show what you would bring to the faculty and the university, and to convince the Admissions Tutors to offer you a place. You have limited space to express yourself so every sentence in your personal statement will need to pull its weight. One thing is for certain, you won't come up with a polished personal statement overnight. It will take many drafts, a lot of editing and a few late-night flashes of inspiration – and it will all be worth it when those university offers start rolling in. To help you get started, we've got a few useful tips to point you in the right direction.

Top tips

- **Research the course before hand** - You need to be expressing your interest in the subject you are applying for and your achievements in that specific area.
- **Illustrate intellectual curiosity** - Make sure that you are not just listing the things that you have done – try to show what your reading and how this has developed your interest and understanding of the subject.
- **Emphasise your academic motivation** - You should mention your extra-curricular achievements as well, but the amount of space that you dedicate to this section should depend on the university to which you are applying. If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge, you should keep your extra-curricular activities to a minimum as these universities are focussed primarily on your academic achievements.
- **Give specific examples of interests** - Your personal statement is a good place to write about any subject-related work experience you have done and any courses or lectures that you have attended, which have advanced your knowledge and will demonstrate that your interest extends beyond the classroom. You can also discuss any books or articles that you have read.
- **Be engaging** - Your opening should set the tone for the rest of the personal statement – showing your enthusiasm and interest in your subject, and introducing the Admissions Tutor to your personality.
- **Be honest** - Don't ever feel like you need to pretend to be someone else in your personal statement – just make sure you are your academic self. Speak as you would to your headmaster or mistress – clearly, maturely, but retaining a sense of who you are.
- **Have the interview in mind** – Two thirds of applicants are asked about their personal statement in their Oxbridge interview so be prepared to talk about anything you write about and expand beyond what you have mentioned, or how you have since explored an area further.

PLANNING YOUR STATEMENT

Activity Instructions

You are going to have the opportunity to begin planning the structure and content you could include in your personal statement. In the bottom third section, start noting down all the extra-curricular activities you have taken part in. These points will eventually become the content of your personal statement. At this stage, you don't have to hold back with the examples you write down. You will be able to refine this and pick out the most relevant examples as you move through the planning process.

When planning your academic content, try to ask yourself the following questions:

- What have you read and done to help further your understanding of this chosen course?
- Which areas of the course are you interested in *and why*? You can then develop several of these interests into paragraphs, drawing in the relevant academic material which demonstrates your interest in this.
- What did you enjoy about the book/article/podcast that you mention? What did you learn, or how did it change your thinking? Does the material relate to something else you have studied or read about?
- What work experience have you done that is relevant to your subject?

**PERSONAL STATEMENT
CONTENT**

Work experience relevant to your course

Competitions or events you have participated in

Projects, EPQs

Special areas/topics of interest relevant to your course

Subject Taster Days and Masterclasses

Independent reading and research (e.g. books, journals, podcasts)

Lectures, courses, trips

Extra-curricular activities

STRUCTURING YOUR STATEMENT

Introduction

Academic Content



Independent reading and research (e.g. books, journals, podcasts)

Projects and EPQs

Special areas/topics of interest relevant to your course

Subject taster days, masterclasses and lectures

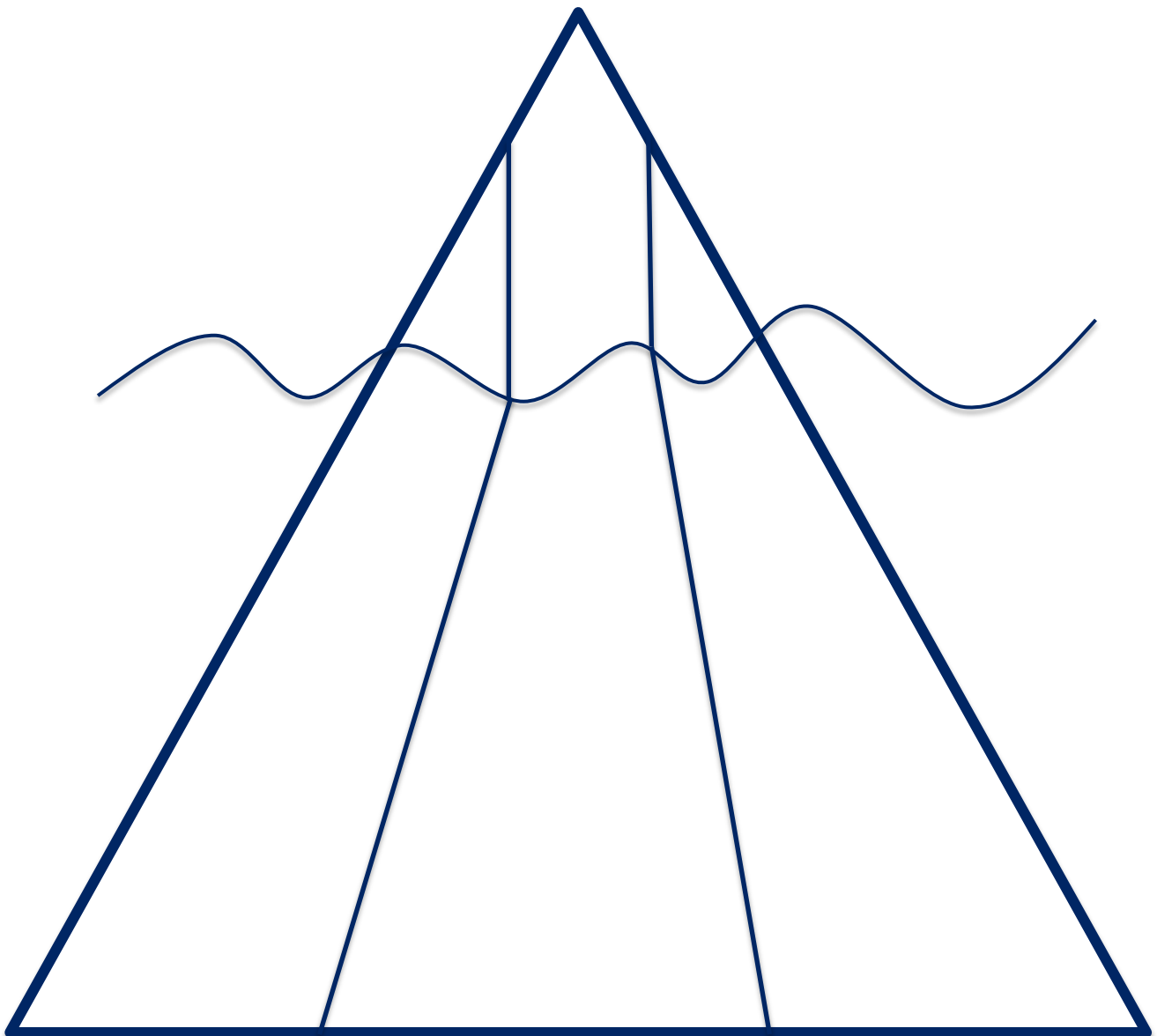
Extra-curriculars

USING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

With only 4,000 characters, you won't be able to include all the academic material that you have covered. Whilst you might be asked about the books you mention in your personal statement, you might also be asked about other material related to that you reference in the statement. It is important to show how you have continued to develop and explore your interests in your subject, beyond the material you cover in the personal statement.

The Iceberg Method

Use the diagram below to help plan the 'mini-topics' you will develop in your personal statement, and the further reading you will do for each area.



PERSONAL STATEMENT ANALYSIS

Your personal statement will be read by Admissions Tutors who teach in the department of the subject you are applying for.

Personal statements help tutors to identify which applicants have genuine interest and ability/potential in the subject area.

Oxbridge is most interested in your subject motivation, so successful Oxbridge personal statements are roughly 80-90% academic.

Activity Instructions

You are about to see two different drafts of the same personal statement. Work with a partner to discuss the strengths and areas of improvement for each statement. In particular, you may want to focus on:

- Structure
- Content
- Tone
- Use of language
- Subject interest and motivation
- Length

Draft 1 – Medicine

Sickness and its devastating effects pervade the lives of every individual and it is this daunting commonality that unifies people of all backgrounds to this vulnerable sphere. It therefore makes sense that, whether it is through a surgeon's anatomical mastery or the brilliance of a researcher, physicians' multifaceted roles in assuaging these afflictions warrant my admiration and hopes to emulate such an influential practice with profound effects on peoples' lives.

I am particularly interested in medical research, and the impact that ground-breaking research can have on common medical conditions. I was intrigued to see an article titled 'Osteoporosis drugs may make bones weaker' on the BBC. During a two-week internship at Imperial's MSk research lab I was able to explore this perplexing paradox further. I was intrigued to read scientific papers on this issue and they deepened my understanding of osteoporosis. Following my research, I wrote a letter to the author of the editorial 'Clinical management and pathogenesis of AFF' outlining two missed opportunities for better treatment of the fracture. With surgical input from Professor Cobb, we were able to suggest alternative options, rather than the non-operative treatment. From this experience, I was able to develop my research skills and ability to read scientific papers, whilst working as part of a team. The experience also highlighted the complex interaction between research and medicine.

To understand the profession beyond a mere surface level cognizance, I have organised a range of work experience placements, through which I have witnessed first-hand doctors' pragmatic resolve and excellent communication skills. Whilst undertaking work experience at a general practice, I marvelled at the way in which the GP was able to adjust his behaviour and communication style for older patients. Communication is a skill that I have been developing greatly myself, whilst volunteering at a residential care home. I have relished the opportunity to get to know a range of the residents and to build relationships with them. This skill is one I am sure will serve me well in a future medical career.

The greatest attraction to study medicine is the chance to explore the human system and the complex and intelligent science behind it. Cancer, a behemoth of medicine, has bearing on a myriad of lives. I was able to explore this topic further by reading Siddhartha Mukherjee's 'The Emperor of all Maladies' where I deepened my understanding of cancer treatments such as using antifolates in chemotherapy. It was then an eye-opening experience to see the stark reality of cancer treatment in a hospital, witnessing procedures such as the portacath insertion in a young woman with breast cancer. This work experience only furthered my admiration of the tenacity and emotional strength of those who work in the medical field.

Acknowledging medicine can be stressful, I also intermedate my work with other activities. I am both a keen musician and sportsman, balancing my time effectively between swimming, playing hockey in the 1st XI and orienteering, as well as being the Head Chorister at Salisbury Cathedral. I am also undertaking the gold Duke of Edinburgh award, where I learned the importance of perseverance and team work during the expedition. All these experiences make me an ideal candidate for Medicine. My A level combination is also ideal for a future as a doctor. I am enthralled by Chemistry and Biology.

As a study inquisitive and empathetic at its core, the duality of medical science tailors to my personal compassion, academic prowess and aspirations to impact lives, even just at the individual scope. Whilst medicine may be a tough and demanding profession, I am certain that I possess the skills, personal stamina and academic curiosity required to thrive in a career in medicine.

Draft 2 – Medicine

One of the most important moments for my understanding of the impact of medicine was seeing my uncle undergo palliative care. Doctors, through their empathy and skill, made what would otherwise have been a very difficult final few months into a more peaceful departure. Medicine has a profound impact on others' lives, and I would like to emulate the work done by those doctors.

'Osteoporosis drugs may make bones weaker' was the title of a BBC article that caught my attention. This paradox surprised me and after reading it I organised a two-week internship at Imperial's MSk research lab. Whilst there I carried out research, by reading various scientific papers on how bisphosphonate prescription for osteoporosis may cause atypical femoral fractures of the femur (AFF). With my findings, I wrote a letter to the author of the editorial 'Clinical management and pathogenesis of AFF' outlining two missed opportunities for better treatment of the fracture. With surgical input from Professor Cobb, we suggested the use of prophylactic intermedullary nailing, rather than the non-operative treatment. Furthermore, we recommended the discontinuation of bisphosphonate treatment to increase serum turnover markers (Black DM et al., 2006). From this experience, I developed my research skills as part of a scientific team, and it has inspired me to carry out further MSk research in the future. I saw how much research can influence the practice of medicine, leading to more cost-effective and enhanced treatment.

My varied work experience placements have shown me the importance of building strong doctor-patient relations and trust. On placement at a general practice, I saw how the GP adjusted his behaviour for older patients. It was clear how he changed his speech, kept eye contact and gave extra time to help the patient understand all the information; I recognised this as an area upon which to focus. Subsequently, I have visited a residential care home weekly, where I have developed my own communication. I try to spend as much time as I can with all the residents, getting to know them and gaining an understanding of their needs. I have developed a particularly strong relationship with an elderly lady with primary open angle glaucoma, which has progressed to total blindness. Her condition led me to research into Ophthalmology and I gave a presentation to my school's Academic Society on achromatopsia after reading '*The Island of the Colour-Blind*' by Oliver Sacks.

One of the key reasons I want to study medicine is to explore the fundamental science behind the most complex human systems. The processes of carcinogenesis introduced to me how these intricate systems can fail. Reading Siddhartha Mukherjee's 'The Emperor of all Maladies' I discovered vital research approaches, like Farber's use of antifolates as a chemotherapy drug that then pushed patients into remission. My reading sparked me to write an essay for a competition, entitled '*Why isn't there a cure for cancer?*', in which I concluded that more of an emphasis should be placed on prevention. Through Radiology work experience, I began to appreciate how cancer psychologically affects people, and gained an understanding of the possible treatment techniques. I witnessed a young woman with breast cancer have a portacath insertion; the way the consultant showed empathy towards the highly nervous patient inspired me.

Music, at diploma level, is an integral part of my life and has shown me the importance of discipline and dedication within a field. Along with music, I enjoy playing hockey in the 1st XI and orienteering. I pushed myself by taking part in the Ten Tors Challenge in which I was the leader of my school's 6-man squad to walk 45 miles. I was also Head Chorister at Salisbury Cathedral. These experiences have taught me the importance of team work, alongside personal drive, in pursuit of a common goal.

I have seen how medicine can be tough, however I believe I have the scientific curiosity and compassion that medicine requires and hope to put it to use.

Draft 1 – Maths and Physics Version

I have a deep love of solving mathematical problems and I first found joy in problem solving aged 5. Since then I have taken on ever more challenging problems and proofs. This satisfaction is intensified in the study of physics, where such endeavours are directed towards furthering human progress and revealing the secrets of the universe. The opportunity to study a subject of such breadth, depth and importance is truly awe-inspiring. Reading 'Fermat's Last Theorem' by Simon Singh, inspired me that I too could contribute to the field of mathematics in this way. In physics, I am inspired by its dynamism and that way it makes us question the world around.

I also enjoyed learning about differentiation and integration in my A level Maths; this led me to Howie's Real Analysis which takes the topic further into university level.

In physics, particle physics is particularly enthralling to me. Reading Hesketh's 'The Particle Zoo' I was enthralled by the experimental and theoretical journey that led to the development of the Standard Model. This model has a satisfying symmetry, but I came to realise that there are still controversial questions to be answered.

Stimulated to read further, I understood that the unexpectedly high rotational speed of peripheral stars in spiral galaxies implies the presence of dark matter. From Chapple's "Particle Physics, Dark Matter and Dark Energy" I discovered theories that might explain its nature. From this book I also gained great satisfaction from performing exercises and solving problems.

Enthusiastic to develop the mathematical skills necessary to prove theories and predict results to experiments in physics, I supplement my Further Maths A Level by using online resources such as NRICH and Isaac. This private study has enabled me to achieve many awards and certificates for my maths ability. Consequently, I have combined this deeper mathematical ability with wider reading of New Scientist articles to reinforce my passion for theoretical physics.

I am equally enthused by the practical importance of physics and its relevance to other disciplines. Awarded a place on the prestigious Headstart course at Oxford University studying materials science, I had the opportunity to visit the JET fusion reactor at Culham, where I was thrilled to witness mass-energy equivalence in action. I explored superconductors directly during work experience at York University Physics Dept: I performed an experiment in which I cooled a superconductor to below its critical temperature while measuring its resistance. At this point the formation of electron pairs (Cooper pairs) move freely through the superconductor lattice without friction, thereby reducing resistance to zero, meaning that extremely high currents and therefore magnetic fields can be produced. Accordingly, aware of the engineering challenges that must be overcome in order to develop new technologies from breakthroughs in physics to facilitate nuclear fusion, I track the developments of ITER on its 'way to new energy'. During my time at York physics department I also prepared a scientific poster and gave a presentation on scanning electron microscopes.

Struck by the scale, expense and intellectual complexity of physics research projects from my work experience, I came to appreciate the importance of global collaboration in science to address the challenges that threaten the future of humanity and our planet. Therefore, I am eager to study abroad as part of my degree. To this end, I developed my Spanish language skills to highest distinction level at AS level, undertook a wildlife conservation project in Mexico in 2016, and I captained a school rugby team, having led them on a tour of Argentina in 2017. Similarly passionate about the vertical exchange of ideas in science, I volunteered as a coordinator at York Physics Olympics to help inspire young people to pursue the sciences.

Alongside maintaining my Spanish and French language skills and volunteering, I play the bass guitar, sing in the choir and serve as the Finance Director of the school young enterprise team, as well as playing both rugby union for school and rugby league for club, I was selected for and participated in the RFU's England Developing Rugby Player Programme. Combining this with a heavy school workload, I have learnt prioritisation and self-discipline and acquired stamina and resilience, which I look forward to applying wholly to the study of mathematics with physics.

Draft 2 – Maths and Physics Version

I am inspired by the revealing harmony of mathematics, coupled with the dynamism of physics, and their ability to throw into question our fundamental assumptions about the world. Mathematical problem solving is particularly satisfying for me and, keen to understand calculus at a deeper level, turned to J. M. Howie's 'Real Analysis' to learn more about sequences, series, limits and differentiation. It became apparent that mathematics at undergraduate level requires creativity, lateral thinking and rigorous logic. The most beautiful proof I encountered was that of Heine-Borel which builds a connection between sequences and the bisection of a segment n times.

Encountering the fundamental theorem of arithmetic in mathematics prompted me to explore related results such as the proofs of Euclidean division, Bezout's identity and Euler's function theorem through G.&M. Jones' 'Elementary Number Theory'. I found Cantor's theorem on power set cardinality particularly powerful and elegant.

Mathematics enables our scientific understanding by securing its foundation and it excites me to see that theory in action when applied in the field of Physics, my second true passion.

The notion that our reality is based on interactions that are beyond human perception makes particle physics particularly captivating for me. Reading Hesketh's 'The Particle Zoo', I was intrigued by the experimental and theoretical journey that led to the development of the Standard Model. This model shows a satisfying symmetry, and through further reading I have learned that Noether's theorem demonstrates that in a system with symmetry, laws of conservation apply. This also extends to particles, and I enjoyed applying the principles of conservation of charge, and of lepton and baryon number, to deduce the identity of particles released during decay reactions, shown in Chapple's 'Particle Physics, Dark Matter and Dark Energy'.

Further reading introduced me to the concept of dark matter, which is used to explain the discrepancy between the luminous mass of spiral galaxies and the velocities of their peripheral stars. Armed with this knowledge, I have explored problems in circular motion and angular momentum using the online resource, Isaac Physics. Enthusiastic use of this and other extension material to supplement my A level studies led to achievement of a UKMT Senior Maths Challenge gold award and becoming one of only two students at my school to gain a silver award in the British Physics Olympiad.

I am equally enthused by the practical importance of physics and its relevance to other disciplines. Awarded a place on the prestigious Headstart course at Oxford University studying materials science, I had the opportunity to visit the JET fusion reactor at Culham, where I was excited to witness mass-energy equivalence in action. I discovered that superconductors are required to provide high strength magnetic fields to maintain the position of the plasma. During work experience at York University Physics Department, I investigated superconductors directly. By using liquid nitrogen to cool the material to below its critical temperature I observed its transition to superconductivity. This inspired me to read further about the theoretical explanations for superconductivity and the quest for high temperature superconductors. While at York University I also prepared a scientific poster and presentation on scanning electron microscopes. I was interested to learn about the important improvements the SEM makes on the optical microscope in terms of magnification and resolving power and to explore the SEM's future potential. I volunteered as a coordinator at York Physics Olympics to help inspire young people to pursue the sciences. Explaining and demonstrating physics concepts taught me the importance of concise communication, and identified areas for further exploration.

I experience great satisfaction from working on mathematical problems and considering scientific concepts, and I have developed stamina and resilience through combining a demanding academic schedule with rich and varied extracurricular interests. The opportunity to study a subject of such breadth, depth and importance is truly awe-inspiring.

Draft 1 – PPE Version

Mother Theresa once said: 'Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.' When I was growing up I wanted to study Medicine. Then I realised before I could help people I wanted to understand how people and societies work. I want to study Politics, Philosophy and Economics because I think the study of these disciplines can explain all human behavior in the world. To fully understand world events, we must not only look at these three subjects but see how they connect. I am passionate to solve the world's biggest problems.

We can see an example of this in a place in Turkey called Iasos. Two summers ago, its coastline was ridden with colourful jellyfish with painful stings, unusual to the area. These were a negative by-product of globalisation: released from the ballast water of Japanese cargo ships. It affected the countries economy as there is a lot of fishing there and also tourism.

Although the problem was short-lived, this is one example of the unforeseen difficulties of growing international trade links. Other issues are illustrated in Stiglitz's 'Globalization and its discontents,' which focuses on the role that large organizations such as the IMF play in encouraging economic growth in countries in transition. He demonstrates that if reform is implemented in an unsystematic manner, as recommended by the IMF in post-communist Russia, then the ultimate benefits of globalisation could be undermined.

I was fascinated when I read Greg Buckman's 'Free Trade'. I have come to the opinion that trade barriers should be gradually lowered by developing countries in order for them to establish comparative advantages. These texts have strengthened my commitment to the study of the subject at a higher level. In A Level English, I had the opportunity to compare modern-day globalisation with a 19th Century colonialist equivalent in the study of the 'Heart of Darkness' in English. I realized that, at that time, trade meant exploitation of developing countries in order to maximize profits. As Antony Hochschild's 'King Leopold's Ghost' demonstrated, this had major political ramifications through the creation of a racial hierarchy whereupon the Congolese had no power but were victims of a colonialist world. Similarly, in A Level German I explored the importance of power during the Cold War when I did my German Oral on the Berlin Wall. Frederick Taylor's 'Berlin Wall' and Anna Funder's 'Stasiland' allowed me to consider the pervasive impact of having two political ideologies housed in one city.

Apart from economic observations, I loved seeing the diverse philosophies societies are made upon. In Justice, Sandel shows how philosophy underpins the decisions society makes about what rules to live by and what role the government should play. Moving from France to England, I've seen how the mildest differences in values can affect the structure and culture of a state.

Apart from my academic interest, I have done some charity work in aid of Alzheimer's Research for which I raised GBP 600 and regularly volunteer at St Clement's and St James' Homework Club. Both of these experiences improved my interpersonal skills which I utilised further when I stage managed our school production Calamity Jane. I also play the Grade 4 Violin and the Grade 6 Piano. This has taught me to persevere even if something does not come easily to me. I also have completed the Bronze DofE award. I have learned how to work with others under pressure as I am section editor for the school magazine and was part of the team that won the TES Newsday competition. Once I have completed this degree in PPE, I will apply for post graduate Medicine or become a banker.

Draft 2 – PPE Version

There is quiet village in Turkey named Iasos which depends almost exclusively on two main incomes: fishing and ferrying tourists in taxis from the airport to their resorts. Two summers ago, the coastline of Iasos was ridden with colourful jellyfish with painful stings, unusual to the area. These jellyfish were released from the ballast water of Japanese cargo ships and highlight the negative impact of globalisation. Although the problem was short-lived, this is one example of the unforeseen difficulties of growing international trade links and the impact on small economies. This example brought Stiglitz's 'Globalization and its discontents' to life for me and helped me understand the role that large organizations such as the IMF play in encouraging economic growth in countries in transition. Stiglitz demonstrates that if reform is implemented in an unsystematic manner, as recommended by the IMF in post-communist Russia, then the ultimate benefits of globalisation could be undermined.

Greg Buckman's 'Free Trade' deepened my understanding of this issue and I learnt that if international organisations are not conscientious, they could have a debilitating effect on the economies they hope to fortify. My reading suggested that trade barriers should be gradually lowered by developing countries in order for them to establish comparative advantages. Looking further into how globalisation is manoeuvred by wealthy countries to self-serve, Stiglitz's 'Making Globalization Work' advanced my understanding of unequal development - how it is propagated by the self-interest of wealthy countries and corporations, and the dominance they have in international institutions such as the IMF. However, his ideas on improving the process of globalisation rely on the benevolence of developed countries, while neglecting the changes poorer countries must undertake. Travelling to Asia last summer and seeing the differences in the economies of three countries in close proximity - Malaysia, Vietnam and China - demonstrated the impact politics can play in plaguing or promoting economic development. In Kuala Lumpur, I did work experience with HSBC global resourcing. Not only did I enjoy learning more technical aspects of economics (contributing to a report on incentive and bonus plans), but I also found the fast trend towards global resourcing fascinating.

In learning about the development of societies I am interested to find out which philosophical theories can be seen to underpin a state's constitution. In Justice, Sandel shows how philosophy underpins the decisions society makes about what rules to live by and what role the government should play. Moving from France to England, I've seen how the mildest differences in constitutional values can affect the structure and culture of a state. I believe that under a hypothetical 'veil of ignorance', as proposed by Rawls, just principles would be chosen for the framework of society; it would try to serve its most disadvantaged members while considering human liberties that go beyond utilitarian calculations.

Apart from my academic interest, I take pleasure in charity work and regularly volunteer at St Clement's and St James' Homework Club. I have learned how to work within a team and prioritise my time effectively as I am section editor for the school magazine and was part of the team that won the TES Newsday competition. These experiences in addition to my academic achievements mean that I would relish the opportunity to take on a rigorous undergraduate degree course.

Draft 1 – Languages

I have always been thrilled by the way people present reality through literature. Language specifically is interesting to me as it can be used to control thought, as shown through Orwell's use of 'Newspeak' in 1984 and theories such as linguistic determinism. To me all literature is political, as realities are constructed through the politicisation of language and the context of the author. These interesting aspects of literature make me want to study English further, at degree level.

When reading post colonial literature such as the works of Azouz Begag, Salman Rushdie and Yasmina Khadra I noticed that there is an idea that people's identity is affected by language. This is compelling especially in the use of English to write by many of these authors who originally come from colonised countries. Similarly, looking at Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' through a postcolonial lens suggests a similar power of language to construct realities and identities. I also connected this to Du Bois theory of the double consciousness and Spivak's idea of the subaltern. I am interested in reading more postcolonial literature and theory at university, especially around the ways in which language is used to construct specific elements of literature, and to be used to express nationalism or a political agenda.

Postcolonialism is similar to feminism in its exploration of identity and marginalisation. I've enjoyed texts that link to postcolonialism and explore the plight of women, such as Walker's 'The Colour Purple', Adichie's 'Americanah' and Rhys' 'Wide Sargasso Sea'. I have also explored the representation of women in theatre in my EPQ, which particularly focuses on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*. I hope to study a range of feminist writings across other forms and periods, for example Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the inspiration for *Wide Sargasso Sea*, or the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

I recently read Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale', at school, which intersects with my interest in feminism, within the dystopian genre. This is similarly represented in 'The Power' by Naomi Alderman. The way in which dystopian novels twist reality or human fear to create a new reality which is fantasy yet realistic particularly interests me. This can also be seen in 'Slaughterhouse Five' by Kurt Vonnegut, 'Brave New World' by Aldous Huxley and 'A Clockwork Orange' by Anthony Burgess. Having read Shakespeare I particularly enjoyed the way his language was re-interpreted in 'Brave New World' and I felt that this was reflected in the use of religious text formation in *The Handmaid's Tale*. I was struck by the way that the meaning of language can be drastically altered through a new framing.

This is also reflected in the variety of interpretations that can be made of the same story or the same play. For example, seeing Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra' performed with a female playing Cleopatra may change the interpretation of some of her lines in comparison to when she is played by a young boy. Similarly, we see a difference in the character of Antigone between the original Sophocles play and Jean Anouilh's re-writing. These interpretations demonstrate the limitless nature of studying literature, which excites me greatly.

My interest in drama is supported by my extracurricular activities; I have achieved a distinction in Grade 8 LAMDA Solo Acting. Through this experience I have been able to create my own interpretation of plays, including at the Edinburgh Fringe. I hope to continue to pursue drama at university to support my studies. I have also volunteered as an English teacher in Thailand, which has helped me to understand the intricacies of language. I have listened and watched talks to support my reading, including podcasts that explore literary issues such as the nature of classics, and an interview with authors Zadie Smith and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

I wish to pursue my interest in the way language and reality is constructed in literature through studying English at degree level.

Draft 2 – Languages

Since bedtime stories I've been absorbed by the different realities that can be created by literature. I have come to realise the significance of language in these constructions; Orwell's portrayal of 'Newspeak' in '1984' demonstrates the way in which language can control and manipulate thought. The potential power of language and the way this is used to contribute to the politicised constructions of realities in literature encourages me to immerse myself in more examples and analysis.

The use of language seems particularly poignant in postcolonial literature. Reading Rushdie's 'The Midnight's Children' I noted the link between cultural features, including language, and identity. The tension between this understanding of identity and Rushdie's use of English, the coloniser's language, reflects Du Bois theory of the "double consciousness" and the potential conflicting identities prompted by colonial history and continued Western domination. After reading Spivak's theory of the 'subaltern', which defines anyone with no or limited access to hegemonic culture, I was interested to consider Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' through a postcolonial lens, particularly the way in which Caliban and Ariel are constructed as subalterns in relation to Prospero as coloniser. The conflicting power of language is prominent in this construction, epitomised through Caliban's exclamation: 'You taught me language, and my profit on 't/ Is, I know how to curse.' Caliban is simultaneously restricted and enabled by the language of his coloniser, demonstrating how language can be manipulated to influence minds and create a desired reality, as in literature.

Reading Orwell's '1984', I noticed the way new realities are constructed in dystopian fiction, generally characterised by an extrapolated element of the author's own society. The presentation of these realities is often a means to convey a fresh perspective to the reader. 'The Power' by Naomi Alderman constructs a society in which women begin to gain more power and agency which eventually subverts society into a matriarchy reflecting the current patriarchal system, thus highlighting its inequalities and flaws to the reader. Huxley's use of Shakespeare quotes in 'Brave New World' demonstrates the way familiar language and ideas can be drastically altered through a new framing, in order to manipulate understanding or create a reality.

Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale' alongside 'The Power' allowed me to explore the intersection of the dystopian genre with feminist writing. I was struck by the resurgence of popularity of 'The Handmaid's Tale' during abortion debates in the US, which gave me insight into the power of literature to convey an idea, even through fantasy constructions. Reading more feminist writing such as Emily Dickinson's poem 'They Shut Me Up in Prose', I came to realise the way in which literature and language provide an opportunity for the marginalised to have a voice. I was fascinated by the way Dickinson manipulates the societal expectations of women's capability to write only prose, both through using the form of poetry but also representing prose as a cage.

In drama, reality is constructed on both a linguistic and visual level for the audience. I have achieved a distinction in Grade 8 LAMDA Solo Acting and my experience of performing has given me opportunity to witness the way in which the original meaning of language can be altered through presentation on stage. Playing Cleopatra in 'Anthony and Cleopatra' I was aware that role may once have been played by a boy, which may affect the perception and understanding of the character by the audience. Similarly, I watched a production of 'Othello' that reversed the races of the main characters, which drew attention to the ideas of racism within the play.

The task of analysing the ways writers harness the power of language and literature to express meaning is what motivates me to broaden and deepen my exploration of literature at university.

Draft 1 - History

'History is a process of struggle' – E. H. Carr. Reading texts such as R.G. Collingwood's 'The Idea of History' and R. J. Evans 'In Defence of History' first introduced me to ideas of historiography and with it the connection between historical writings and the social and political context in which they are written. I became more aware of the many ways in which writing can be influenced, which made me realise the challenges I would face as an historian, to find a truthful explanation for the past among a myriad of possible opposing interpretations. It is this web of stories and a desire to unwind it that compels me to study history at university.

I put what I learned about historiography from these texts into practice when I wrote an essay for the Caius History Prize on the New Deal and how it affected politics in the US. I could see how the viewings of different historical events were influenced by strong political sentiments of the time as well as the demographic of different people who may be writing about it. For example, there is change in the way that the Roosevelt presidency is written about between the 1950s and 1960s. While Leuchtenburg, writing in the 1950s, wrote celebratory pieces around the New Deal, demonstrating his feelings about the Roosevelt administration, historians in the 60s, such as Bernstein and Radosh were more critical, influenced by a new influx of Marxist, anti-capitalist sentiment. Thus the politics that prevailed during the period of writing can be clearly seen to produce different historical perspectives.

My other A Level subjects have greatly supported my exploration of history. Studying philosophy and ethics has promoted me to question every individual action and motive undertaken in history, and has supported my critique of different interpretations of historical events. Learning about morality I've considered how this might apply to the study of history; I do not think that historians should pass moral judgment on things that have happened, but they should question what is behind them in order to better understand the causes and apply it to the future. Studying economics has equipped me with the ability to understand the link between many historical events and economic context. For example, when studying the New Deal, my understanding of economics meant that I could appreciate what drove Hoover and FDR to approach the same crisis so drastically differently.

I have also studied the origins of the First World War as part of my A Level course, which I have found to be a contentious historical issue. I attended a lecture by Doctor Steve Davies about the geopolitical factors that contributed to the outbreak of the war. I then read Halford Mackinder's 'Heartland Theory' and the influence it had on pre-WW1 foreign policy in Britain. This was my first encounter with considering a geopolitical stance in history and I became keen to explore other theories that might give me a new perspective. I started with the Borderlands theory, which broadened my understanding of history from simply considering individual nations to viewing history with a focus on the interactions between different nations and peoples. I've also read Robert Buffington's work on the affect of the US Prohibition on the Mexico-US boarder, which I will use to approach my Extended Project Qualification.

Draft 2 - History

When exploring the re-election of Franklin Roosevelt on the strength of his progressive New Deal in 1936, I discovered an illustration by contemporary conservative cartoonist Herbert Johnson which denounced the New Deal as 'communist' and 'utopian'. It is the connection between history and interpretation, and the way in which changing social and political climates can have on or perspectives of historical events that compels me to explore history further.

I explored the New Deal from a historiographical perspective for my winning entry into the Gonville and Caius History Essay Prize. Reading 'The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform', I was unconvinced by B. Bernstein's criticism of Roosevelt's failure to redistribute power, which came from the more radical perspective of 1968. To me, Bernstein failed to take into account the context of the 1930s and therefore underestimates the radical nature of the New Deal. I believe that W. Leuchtenburg's argument in 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal' that the reforms achieved a fair balance between regulation and enterprise, is more persuasive. However, even this is clearly influenced by the prosperity of the 1950s, and it is this need for constant reflection that fascinates me about the discipline.

The study of history is enhanced by its intersection with other subjects. Through economics, I was able to understand why Hoover and FDR has such different responses to the Depression. Similarly, my exploration of philosophy prompted me to consider the ethics and motives influencing historical events. R. Darnton's 'The Great Cat Massacre' sets the apprentices' murder of the cats in the context of the deprivation and resulting resentment experienced by the artisan workers in pre-industrial France. In doing so, he positions their behaviour as rational, as opposed to despicable. This demonstrated to me the importance of a historian remaining neutral when analyzing events, and also how individual cases can shed light on broader issues and themes in contemporary society.

The Dreyfus Affair demonstrates the influence that a broader consideration of the time can have on our understanding of history. G. Chapman's 'The Dreyfus Case' seems to me to underplay the role of antisemitism in the case. P. Hyman's emphasis on the significance of prejudice was compelling, and J. Merriman's Yale Lecture highlighted the inflammatory role of the press, specifically the sensationalist claims in 'La Libre Parole'. Thus, I believe that endemic antisemitism and a vicious press were largely responsible for Dreyfus's unjust incarceration. With less focus on these aspects, as in Chapman's work, there appears little explanation for his sentence, highlighting the role of the historian in considering all possible factors in a particular event.

When studying US prohibition for coursework I've enjoyed approaching the topic from a feminist perspective. R. Bordin examines the role of women in securing prohibition in 'Woman and Temperance', arguing that the bond between campaigners over the issue of liquor stimulated women's activism in the long term, even after prohibition was achieved. I have also considered prohibition's effects on the Borderlands; I found R. Buffington's analysis of it's effects in the Mexico US border area, which highlights the challenges of cross-border enforcement and cooperation in areas where there is interaction between nations and people.

Outside of my academic pursuits, I run the school's Model UN Society, which has given me greater insight into international politics. I am also an avid member of the Debating Society, which has enhanced my ability to produce and deliver arguments. I have also been part of a production of 'The Crucible', for which I understood the way drama and literature can be used to effectively portray moments in history. I love sport, and play for the county football team.

The multiple interpretations that can be discovered in history, particularly through its intersections with other disciplines is what inspires me to explore these alternative and interlinked perspectives more deeply over the next three years.

Thank you for attending our Personal Statement Workshop. We hope you found the information useful and now feel more confident about the process.

Further Support

Once registered with us, you will have access to our free online resources, including personal statement workbooks, real past interview questions and mini mock admissions tests.

To register, please complete the feedback form with your contact details or sign-up on our website:

www.oxbridgeapplications.com/register/

Tel: +44 (0)20 7499 2394

Email: info@oxbridgeapplications.com

A: 14 -16 Waterloo Place, London SW1Y 4AR

W: www.oxbridgeapplications.com