

Example personal statements and UCAS references

Please see enclosed a range of reasonable personal statements and references. The Careers Department has a range useful resources including a short programme that you can use that will guide you through researching, planning and writing their personal statement. This optional programme might help you structure the research and draft personal statements during the Michaelmas and Lent Terms and beyond until you have a final draft personal statement (before the end of the summer term please).

[How to begin - Personal Statement Planner](#)

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Tips for writing your personal statement

How to write a personal statement? It's difficult to know where to begin. Get hints and tips on structure, content and what not to write from a university expert.

An insider's view

Personal statements may seem formulaic, but they can be critical to the decision-making process, and admissions tutors do read them.

If you're applying for a high-demand course, your personal statement could be the deciding factor on whether or not you get an interview.

The Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment at the [University of Gloucestershire](#), James Seymour, shares some top tips on how to write a personal statement.

What makes a good personal statement?

This is your chance to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment and show us what value you can add to a university. In the vast majority of cases, universities are finding ways to make you an offer, not reject you – the personal statement is your chance to make this decision easier for them! First, you need to explain why you want a place on a course. Take a look at James' tips on what you should include:

- Explain the reason for your choice and how it fits in with your aspirations for the future
- Give examples of any related academic or work experience
- Show you know what the course will involve and mention any special subjects you're interested in
- Demonstrate who you are by listing any positions you've held, memberships of teams or societies, and interests and hobbies
- Show consistency in your five UCAS choices. It may be difficult for an admissions tutor to take you seriously if your other choices, and references to them, are totally different. If your choices

are different, you should explain this in your statement. The UCAS form is blind. Admissions tutors don't know the other universities you've applied to, or your priorities, but you should still be consistent

- Keep it clear and concise – UCAS admissions are increasingly paperless – so most admissions tutors/officers will read your statement onscreen

Explain what you can bring to a course and try not to just list experiences, but describe how they have given you skills that will help you at university.

Don't just say: I am a member of the college chess club. I also play the clarinet in the orchestra.

When you could say: I have developed my problem-solving skills through playing chess for the college; this requires concentration and analytical thought. I am used to working as part of a team as I play clarinet in the college orchestra and cooperate with others to achieve a finished production.

READ MORE

[Applying to university and UCAS deadlines](#)

[Applying and studying in the UK](#)

[University interviews](#)

What will admissions tutors look for in your personal statement?

To decide if you're the right fit, universities and colleges are interested in how you express your academic record and potential. This should be backed up by your reference.

Those working in admissions look for evidence of:

- Motivation and commitment
- Leadership, teamwork and communication
- Research into your chosen subject
- Any relevant key skills

Admissions tutors aren't seeking Nobel laureates. They're looking for enthusiasm for the course being applied for, and self-reflection into why you'd be suitable to study it. What value could you add to the course? Where would you like to go once you graduate?

Ben, the Admissions Manager for Law at the [University of Birmingham](#), shared with us what he expects applicants to tell him in their personal statement:

The personal statement is not only an excellent opportunity to showcase applicants individual skills, knowledge, and achievements, but it also provides us with an insight into the type of student they aspire to be and how they could fit into the academic community.

Ben Atkins, Law Admissions Manager at University of Birmingham

Real-life example: the good

Name: [REDACTED]

Course applied: Bsc Mathematics

Looking back over a complex equation that has been reduced to a simple solution provides an addictive sense of achievement. So far with mathematics, I have found that frustration and success go hand in hand, and I thrive upon the challenge. At my primary school, mathematics was always my favourite subject, and increasingly as I move through education, I feel a sense of excitement when I start to study a topic which before had only been a mysterious concept. Mathematics provides a perpetual opportunity for expanding knowledge and learning, and in reading into the subject I have started to realise how my studies so far have been very much the tip of the iceberg.

For me, areas of particular interest in the subject are the applications of pure mathematics in the real world - ideas that may at times seem to be extremely abstract in fact have remarkably common applications - an example being the use of complex numbers for technology such as mobile phones. After attending a 'Maths Inspiration' lecture in [REDACTED], my eyes were really opened to the sheer scale of mathematics that is involved in structural engineering, specifically the design of the Olympic Stadium in London. Even in music, mathematical theories can be applied to study of pitch and harmony. Over the last few years, I have attended various mathematics workshops and seminars, including the 'Making Maths at [REDACTED]' two-day course. Also, each year I have entered the UKMT Maths Challenge, in which I have found success - I reached the European 'Kangaroo' stage on two occasions. Books such as 'The Code Book' and 'Fermat's Last Theorem' by Simon Singh have made me realise the enthralling nature of the history of mathematics.

Handwritten annotations:

- SHOWS GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF COURSE AT START
- HONEST ASSESSMENT
- SUPPORTS CLAIMS WITH EXAMPLES
- SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

Real-life example: the not-so-good

Name: [REDACTED]

Course applied: Bsc Accounting for Management

I am currently a final year student studying Accountancy, English Literature (AS and A2 in the one year). From my childhood I have always been interested in, and practised, dealing with numbers. Whether it was counting objects from my buggy, or calculating profit from sales of my drawings, I have always had a passion to learn more about and engage in numeracy. Studying accountancy, has been really exciting for me, as I love seeing how each figure affects the overall 'landscape' of the accounts, and how one misplaced item can ruin the whole balance. I know that if I put my head down, work hard and focus, I can achieve a good result from this subject. I have considered other numeracy careers such as banking, however, I feel the role of Accountants suit my passion more adeptly, and for this reason I have decided to choose Accounting as my university course. My ambition is to one day become a Chartered Accountant, and I believe that studying Accounting in university will be another stepping stone towards reaching this goal.

Outside of the Educational surroundings, I have partaken in many activities and tasks which have helped me become more responsible. One example is from a few years ago; I was part of a select board, which included a former Home Secretary, which was put together in order to familiarise ourselves with certain changes that were occurring within the community. I was chosen to represent [REDACTED] alongside a few other individuals from [REDACTED]. In addition to this, I have been involved in a lot of sporting activities from my youth, predominantly football, where I have gained opportunities to work with a team. Because of this I have been able to play at [REDACTED], representing [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] respectively. Furthermore, one of my many passions is poetry and I write new pieces on

TOO MUCH INFO; OCCASIONAL WAFFLE

LISTING A LEVELS NOT NEEDED

FOCUSES ATTENTION ON NEGATIVE

DATED EXAMPLE

SPELLING/GRAMMAR

Structuring and preparing your personal statement

You could have excellent experiences, but if they're arranged in a poorly-written statement then the impact will be reduced. So, it's important to plan your statement well.

A well-written personal statement with a clearly planned and refined structure will not only make the information stand out, but it'll demonstrate you have an aptitude for structuring written pieces of work – a crucial skill needed for many university courses.

You can use it for other things too, such as gap year applications, jobs, internships, apprenticeships and keep it on file for future applications.

There's no one 'correct' way to structure your personal statement. But it's a good idea to include the following:

- A clear introduction, explaining why you want to study the course
- Around 75% can focus on your academic achievements, to prove how you're qualified to study it
- Around 25% can be about any extracurricular activity, to show what else makes you suitable
- A clear conclusion

READ MORE

[How to start a personal statement](#)

What to write in a personal statement

Your personal statement is your chance to really show why you deserve a place on your chosen course.

Remember to keep these in mind:

Do

- Be clear and concise – the more concentrated the points and facts, the more powerful
- Use positive words such as achieved, developed, learned, discovered, enthusiasm, commitment, energy, fascination...
- Avoid contrived or grandiose language. Instead use short, simple sentences in plain English
- Insert a personal touch if possible, but be careful with humour and chatty approaches
- Use evidence of your learning and growth (wherever possible) to support claims and statements
- Plan the statement as you would an essay or letter of application for a job/scholarship
- Consider dividing the statement into five or six paragraphs, with headings if appropriate
- Spelling and grammar DO matter – draft and redraft as many times as you must and ask others to proofread and provide feedback
- For 2022–23 applications, refer to the challenges you've faced during the pandemic in a positive way

Don't

- Waffle
- Over-exaggerate
- Come across as pretentious
- Try to include your life history
- Start with: "I've always wanted to be a..."
- Use gimmicks or quotations, unless they're very relevant and you deal with them in a way that shows your qualities
- Be tempted to buy or copy a personal statement – plagiarism software is now very sophisticated and if you're caught out you won't get a place
- Make excuses about not being able to undertake activities/gain experience – focus on what you were able to do positively, e.g. as a result of coronavirus

For further details, read our detailed guide on [what to include in a personal statement](#) and the best things to avoid.

Note that if you decide to reapply for university the following year, it's a good idea to consider making some changes to your personal statement. Mention why you took a year off and talk about what skills you've learnt. If you're applying for a completely different subject, you'll need to make more changes.

Examples to avoid

James gives us real-life examples of things to avoid:

- I enjoy the theatre and used to go a couple of times a year. (Drama)
- I am a keen reader and am committed to the study of human behaviour through TV soaps!
- I have led a full life over the last 18 years and it is a tradition I intend to continue.
- I describe myself in the following two words: 'TO ODIN!' the ancient Viking war cry. (Law)
- My favourite hobby is bee-keeping and I want to be an engineer.
- My interest in Medicine stems from my enjoyment of Casualty and other related TV series.
- I have always had a passion to study Medicine, failing that, Pharmacy. (A student putting Pharmacy as her fifth choice after four medical school choices – Pharmacy can be just as popular and high status as Medicine.)

Some final advice

Above all, remember that a personal statement is your opportunity to convince a university why it should offer you a place. So, make it compelling and there's a much higher chance they will.

Writing a positive and tailored UCAS reference

One of the key factors in successful UCAS reference writing is to focus on positives rather than negatives.

So, as a referee, how can you make sure this happens?

Have a conversation

A vital ingredient of a good UCAS application is the synergy between the [personal statement](#) and the reference. So this message is aimed at both students and teachers – the best references will complement the personal statement, without repeating any of it.

Here are some points to discuss with your students:

- Any key selection criteria for their chosen course that they want you to factor into the reference.
- Extra-curricular activities or extenuating circumstances that you might not be aware of.
- Anything students can't fit in their statement that you could include in the reference.

A personal and individual approach

To ensure admissions tutors get the right impression about your students, here are some tips from university staff on how to do just that.

- Ensure there is enough 'meat on the bone' in subject references to differentiate between applicants (see more tips below).
- Be course-specific — focus on their suitability and potential for the courses they're applying for and name the course in the reference.
- Information about extra-curricular activities are useful, but not in excessive detail, unless it's directly relevant to the course.
- It's OK to repeat some information from one student to the next, but it's the student's individual academic skills that are of interest.
- Show that you know the student well — focus on their academic performance and transferable skills.
- Show that the applicant is someone they will want to teach — demonstrate their academic progression, motivation and achievements.
- Use objective comparison or ranking — if the applicant is in the top 10% of the year group for chemistry, say so.
- Detail any challenges students have overcome, such as juggling their workload with part-time work, peer mentoring or volunteering.
- Include any widening participation activities they have taken part in.
- For professional courses (like medicine, nursing or social work) do endorse the student's suitability for the profession itself, not just 'Emma is interested in the healthcare field'.

Focus on the positives

Universities like to read references that are honest but that also focus on strengths, not weaknesses. Rob Evans, Head of Admissions at University of Sussex, says that he is looking for 'reasons to make an offer, rather than to reject'.

When you edit the reference, consider how to accentuate the applicant's strengths. You could arrange individual subject reports in order of relevance to the course applied for, or in order of success, with the student's 'best' subjects appearing first - or a combination of both.

Sometimes it pays to leave out a subject that has no bearing on the student's application, or to reduce it to one or two lines. There is no rule that says they must all appear in the reference.

However, it's not a good tactic to leave out lower grade subjects altogether. Universities will be quick to realise that the reference has one less subject than peers at the same college or school. And, an E in maths might actually be worthwhile later in life, so it's best to include a couple of lines about what the student gained from studying it.

Putting 'meat on the bone'

Universities want to see evidence of an applicant's clear potential for undergraduate study. This is the kind of content that could really help to make your student stand out above others. Think about:

- Do they demonstrate intellectual curiosity and the ability to question?
- Do they demonstrate critical thinking skills?
- How willing are they to read, think or debate beyond the syllabus or prescribed materials?
- How much enthusiasm do they show for learning?
- How well do they communicate?
- How interested are they in evidence-based discussion?
- How willing are they to be self-critical?
- How motivated are they to achieve and drive their own learning?
- How capable are they of getting work done to a high quality?
- How well do they work with their peers in group situations?
- How well do they follow instruction?
- Could you give examples of particular contributions they have made in class?

Make it specific to your student's work

Mentioning a specific piece of excellent work in a subject reference can be an effective way to bring a reference to life. Wherever it's justified, always seek to highlight a student's strengths by describing something from their portfolio or coursework that has made a good impact.

For me the best quality references start with really good quality subject comments. It helps if the tutor then writing the reference knows the student well, but actually if you have good detailed subject comments with lots of concrete relevant examples to use, you can pull together a strong reference even if you don't have much personal knowledge of the student.

Melanie Moorhouse, Head of Careers, St. Clare's, Oxford

Example Personal Statement – Engineering

A fascination with how a person can be strapped to a controlled explosion and find themselves, safely, on the surface of another celestial body started my passion for Engineering. My love for the idea of space travel led me to create a computer model of the gravitational interactions of the Earth and Moon, using numerical methods to calculate forces, accelerations, velocities and positions. I successfully applied the Euler-Cromer method, but encountered an issue with accuracy. I, therefore, plan to include the Sun, as its gravitational influence on the Moon is 4x that of the Earth. I was fascinated to learn how similar models can solve so many Engineering and Physics problems. For example, non-linear vibration equations such as Van Der Pol and Duffing oscillations for springs and dampening. Having read about the uses of metamaterials in aerospace Engineering, I presented to my school's academic society their ability to enhance other materials, in this case topological crystalline insulators, with the potential to host fractional electron charges at disclination defects. By creating a metamaterial with up to 100 million times more space between atoms, fractional charges became possible to observe.

Motorsport is a great example of the key concept in Engineering of balancing performance and safety. I read 'How to Build a Car' and learned about Frank Dernie's fascinating solution to the problem of F1 chassis roll, due to lateral cornering forces, and how this disrupts aerodynamics. By replacing springs with electronically timed valves and hydraulic dampeners, connected directly to the car push rods, the ride height of the Williams FW14B remained almost constant, to within a few millimetres. This was possible due to the advances in digital technology in the 1990s, with primitive versions of active suspension first appearing in 1983, but unsuccessfully due to available computing speed. Reading about this introduced me to electrical engineering, including how F1 cars use solenoids to regulate fluid flows within the engine and suspension. I went on to read 'The Science of Formula 1 Design' and learned how torsion bars solved the lateral load problem, following the ban of active systems. Steel alloy bars absorb impact by twisting along one axis and, having showed a lack of reliability, were annealed to improve wear resistance and ductility. Active suspension and torsion bars are now used in almost all new road cars, which I believe shows the value of F1 as an accelerator for useful technologies.

In July I worked with the Alpine F1 team in vehicle performance, gaining insights into how cars are designed for varied environments. For circuits with more braking zones, brake discs with more holes help to prevent overheating, oxidation and failure. However, the disc loses rigidity, decreasing optimum performance and this provides another example of an optimization problem in engineering. I compared on-track distortion of the car's T-tray to Alpine's simulation data and measured downward flex via sensor data of the aerodynamic load above. The aim was to improve the accuracy of the simulator and use this to inform car setup. My time at Alpine confirmed my aspiration to strive for constant improvements in technology beneficial and accessible to the population. To apply myself further, I entered the F1 in Schools competition as elected team manager and chief designer. We developed two 3D printed front wings, one which took longer to manufacture but was smoother and generated less air friction, and another that was lighter but with a higher frictional coefficient. We concluded that, with the high impulse of the car's propulsion, the former was better.

I represented Buckinghamshire at the English Schools Cross-Country Nationals. I was a member of my school's CCF and led a team of 10 cadets at the Welbeck College STEM Leadership Challenge. I am the president of my school's Physics and Economics societies, a senior sports prefect, and Head of House.

Example reference – Engineering

Gordon is the consummate all-rounder, balancing high-level commitments in sports, pastoral responsibility as a senior prefect, and outstanding academic achievement. A natural engineer, Gordon delights in discovering clever ways to solve real life problems, often through his high aptitude for Physics and Mathematics. As an independent thinker he is capable of tackling challenging problems on his own but, as demonstrated through his captainships of three sports, prefect role and presidency of the school's Physics Society, he also collaborates well and has clear leadership potential. He has become an accomplished public speaker through debating and giving talks in Chapel and at academic societies, and as an ambassador for the school's bursaries programme. Gordon is whole-heartedly committed to everything that he does and we expect him to thrive at university on academically demanding courses, and to be a valuable asset to any institution. He is among the most impressive pupils we have encountered, and we recommend him without hesitation.

In Mathematics and Further Mathematics, Gordon is brilliant - listening intently, asking good questions and challenging others to match his skill and level of engagement. He has a serious attitude towards his work, but also brings a sense of fun. He loves to have his skills and understanding tested and is an eager participant in optional extension lessons, during which he has successfully tackled STEP questions and off-syllabus problems in areas such as number theory and combinatorics. He is frequently top of his class in assessments and is never satisfied with less than 100% in anything that he does. His extensive algebraic manipulation for topics such as series and proof by induction is thorough and clearly laid out, and he rapidly grasps new and challenging concepts such as complex numbers, matrices and vectors. He is very confident and proficient with Mechanics and his self-directed project on gravitational interactions has been a joy. He taught himself the relevant Euler-Cromer numerical method and programming skills and recently presented this work to a visiting astrophysicist who was impressed by its quality.

Gordon is an exceptionally able physicist and his talent and sense of humour make him a pleasure to work with. He has an intuitive grasp of the workings of the physical world, as demonstrated through practical work and his appreciation of sources of errors, and a prodigious ability for quantitative analysis. He clearly enjoys the explanatory power of both classical and quantum mechanics and is not fazed by abstract concepts and the use of models; rather, he draws comparisons and appreciates implications, and goes on to apply what he has learnt to novel situations. He has given memorable talks on the illusion of gravity, and cosmic rays, and is currently working on a presentation involving radioactive sources and transistors. He was top of his year at the end of L6, his work in quantum and electricity was impressive and, in a particularly difficult recent test on waves, Gordon was top of his year group by quite some way. Indeed, he is among the speediest thinkers in his cohort and his subject knowledge grows stronger as his thirst for knowledge drives him to explore topics beyond the scope of the A-level syllabus.

Gordon is exemplary in Economics, being sharp in class discussion and diligent with assignments. His perpetual curiosity strengthens his work and develops his understanding beyond core theories. He is making excellent progress in macroeconomics and scored highly in microeconomics, and his technical analysis is superb. Whilst understanding new concepts quickly, he also demonstrates a high level of synoptic understanding, revealed through his excellent extended writing. He achieved a high A-grade in the end of year assessment and his latest progress test score, based on A-level questions, was an astonishing 94%.

Example personal statement – Human Sciences

How can I define myself firmly in a world where values are so subjective? I longed for an answer to this as I navigated my multicultural background and moved between contrasting schools. Human value seemed to be so volatile in our society, and I quickly became fascinated, yet disturbed. My Opinion-Editorial (over 21,000 views) highlighted this problem, discussing the prejudices heaped on ethnic minorities and the psychological effects of stereotyping within a community. Shocked at the ease with which a victim's identity could be manipulated, I longed for a taste of objective meaning that could tell us the truth about who we are. But did it exist?

In my search for answers, I was struck by the proposal of C.S Lewis and Francis Collins that the beneficence and depth of love and justice in the human experience could never be explained purely biologically; instead, they could be inspired by a divine creator.

My essay exploring this hypothesis was awarded first prize in Keble College's theology competition. Delving into 'intersubjectivity' and other socio-biological phenomena, I argued that humans in a godless framework were worthless biological machines created by random genetic mutations. Rather, our worth comes from being made in the 'image of God' (Genesis 1:26). Building on these ideas, I am now interested in how humans, even without a theological framework, seek to attach themselves to an external 'deity', whether it be a significant other, a football team or a hobby. My pursuit of human and social sciences flows from my fascination with these kinds of polarities and my desire to utilize knowledge from the study of human behaviour, psychology and sociology, in combination with many other fields.

The importance of the human sciences is also exemplified by its modern relevance. In my highly commended 'Royal Society's Young Geographer of the Year' project on anthropogenic climate change, I considered how human hubris can have a detrimental effect on humanity's harmonious relationship with the natural order. It is ironic that in thirsting after money and power, we render a rich world uninhabitable. Additionally, as part of my work with the Yale Young Global Scholars, I completed a project on worldwide COVID vaccine equality, in which I argued that, much as we might want high income countries to have moral integrity and behave ethically, it is also important to recognise the motivational power of selfishness: donating vaccines to low income countries would defend against the emergence of new variants with global reach and help to prevent economic regression.

Climate change has also had a direct impact on my life. In a 5000-word independent project I investigated the genetic and environmental contributors to eczema pathogenesis. It became clear to me that, as well as correlating with levels of external pollutants, the prevalence of Atopic Dermatitis (AD) is worsened by extreme fluctuations in environmental temperature. Furthermore, reading 'The Language of Genes' led me to consider the mutations in FLG and SPINK5 genes that are responsible for AD; whilst from 'The Epigenetics Revolution' I gained an insight into the possible relevance of epigenetic changes through acetylation and methylation. It was inevitable that I would discover this interconnectedness between sociology, geography and genetics as I live with this disease. Thus, the scope of the human sciences found me before I even knew what they were.

I therefore wish to study, as anthropologist Tim Ingold says, 'humanity unsliced'. Gaining a multi-disciplinary insight into the human experience, and building up the critical mindset that follows from this endeavour, will give me a broad intellectual foundation and equip me for a positive and impactful future.

I play piano and viola at Grade 8 level and am learning guitar and organ. I played in the National Children's Orchestra until 2016, and I am also a Senior Prefect and the captain of my school's 1st Team for badminton.

Example Reference – Human Sciences

Gordon is a highly inquisitive, driven, and intelligent student who demonstrates leadership inside and outside the classroom. He has a broad range of interests, all of which he excels in, evidenced by his first prize essay in the Keble College theology competition, his robotics victory in the 2018 Lockheed Martin competition, his highly commended “Young Geographer of the Year” project, his participation in the Yale Young Global Scholar program, his command of piano and viola—which earned him a musical scholarship to Stowe—and his performance in Mathematics and Science courses.

Gordon transcends the boundaries of academic disciplines in his search for deeper meaning, motivated by his faith. This is apparent in his Keble College essay, which combined Computer Science, Biology, Philosophy, and Theology to brilliantly discuss the societal implications of artificial intelligence developing consciousness. That he was able to engage in rigorous philosophical application of faith-based ethical principles to his strong knowledge of artificial intelligence demonstrates his strength as a scholar and critical thinker.

With exceptional results in all subjects at GCSE, Gordon could have chosen an arts and humanities or sciences route for his A-Levels. While he picked the latter, he is constantly cultivating his artistic side—by learning the organ and guitar, for example. Moreover, he enjoys reading about Anthropology and Theology in his spare time, discussing key texts with his peers, teachers, and religious community. However, his artistic and humanistic sensibility is not merely confined to the academic realm; it infuses his vitality, shaping his interaction with the world around him. As a senior prefect, he has championed a “Visiting the Elderly” program through which, by encouraging students to care for and accompany the elderly, he has bettered student pastoral life at Stowe.

In Mathematics and Further Mathematics, Gordon has made outstanding progress with conceptually challenging topics while solving difficult problems from STEP, MAT, and TMUA papers. At extension classes he produced innovative solutions to statistical problems involving medical testing and, notably, was the first to produce an effective numerical simulation of the orbits of multiple free bodies in space via the Euler method. His acute logical thinking and meta-cognitive ability earned him a silver award in the 2020 UKMT Senior Mathematics Challenge. His excellent attitude and tendency to relish challenges are a welcome addition to any class.

Gordon's excellence in Mathematics allowed him to understand the core of Physical Chemistry quickly; for instance his mastery of numerical analysis for equilibria. While he enjoys logically applying rules, he is imaginative—not rigid—in their application, allowing him to successfully decipher mechanisms in organic chemistry problems. Furthermore, he is an enthusiastic presence in the Biology classroom, actively contributing to discussions, conveying his understanding coherently, and asking challenging questions motivated by a genuine interest in the subject. He is a conscientious and mature student, intuitively threading together concepts from discrete modules.

Gordon's command of the sciences enables him to appreciate that the sciences on their own do not harbor the solutions to societal problems, such as that of the potentiality of consciousness in artificial intelligence. Thus, he turns to anthropology, theology, and sociology to supplement his

scientific understanding. It has been a pleasure to see his academic interests converge on a desire to study the human sciences at university level, and we expect him to thrive there. Excelling in the sciences academically—and boasting an artistic, religious, and social sensibility personally—Gordon is an ideal candidate for a human sciences, sociological or anthropological course of study at the intersection of his passions. We wholeheartedly support Ben's application.

Example Personal Statement - Psychological & Behavioural Sciences

I actually wanted to become a doctor. That was until all the medical books I seemed to read were of psychosomatic patients, then of psychological disorders. Whilst my interest in medicine faded, my interest in Psychology grew exponentially. The more I read, the more I realised that elements of Psychology can be found in all aspects of life.

By nature, I have a strong affinity with languages, with a broad knowledge of German, and a fascination for the Latin language. I am also a scientist with a deep appreciation of Chemistry and an innate lust to learn about Biochemistry. At times we feel that we must choose between science and language, thinking we are better suited to one or the other. However, Psychology and all the behavioural sciences benefit from both academic disciplines - the clear communication of thoughts and ideas a linguist has to offer, and the evidence a scientist will use to prove and explain them. For example, during an online lecture from the University of Sheffield about Psychoanalysis and the German language, I had the chance to engage with information about Breuer's work with 'Anna O.' as well as terms such as "Verschiebung" where suppressed emotions are displaced onto something else and "Die Triebe" exploring how emotional drives can be converted into their opposite (e.g. love into hate). Then I found myself asking where and why Psychoanalysis arguably loses some credibility and the extent to which this was due to scientific discoveries?

I, therefore, began to read about the more scientific aspects at the intersection of Psychology and Neurology. Sacks' intelligent anecdotes and lucid explanations of his cases in 'The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat' helped to foster an interest in Neuropsychology and first showed me the world of Experimental Psychology. Having already completed a fascinating FutureLearn MOOC on 'The many faces of Dementia' I undertook their 'Introduction to Cognitive Psychology: An Experimental Science'. The ability to learn through psychological testing about the way humans think and process information, and where our limits and flaws lie, is genuinely beautiful. During this course I was particularly intrigued by idea of two systems that govern the way we think: our quick but unreliable system 1 and our slower, more critical, system 2; I therefore decided to find out more in Kahneman's "Thinking fast and Slow" and thoroughly enjoyed learning about heuristics, different biases and how making the right decision sometimes requires a great deal of critical evaluation.

This also piqued my curiosity in the specifics of Neuroscience. Feeling I must deepen my understanding of the brain, I began to research how neurons communicated by passing chemicals to each other which translate to electrical signals, and how the Neuron Doctrine was confirmed by staining and revealing the first whole neuron, illuminating the composition of our nervous system. But we are now so far beyond that - to the point where microchips are being implanted into human brains, and new treatments for conditions such as Parkinson's are being found. Although this advancement is undeniably vital, I can't help but be equally fascinated and even concerned by the possibilities of what this means for our future. How far are we willing to push the boundaries of what it - currently - means to be human? What is certain is that Psychology will be essential to understanding what lies ahead and I am determined to be at the forefront of these developments.

At school I am a Senior Pastoral Prefect and have had the opportunity to empathise with hundreds of individual pupils first-hand, learning which questions to ask to get a better idea of where the student is mentally and help them to come up with a fitting solution. In short, this confirmed to me that I would love to use the knowledge I will gain through Psychology to work with others and potentially be able to aid them, and I am eager to start this new journey.

Example Reference - Psychological & Behavioural Sciences

Gordon's commitment to academic excellence, combined with a genuine affinity for learning cultivated throughout her schooling, makes her a stand-out candidate. A perceptive, intelligent and charismatic student, Gordon is already thinking and writing well beyond the conceptual level commonly attempted or understood at A-level: combining erudition and intelligence with an easy and attractive personal grace, she has grasped every opportunity during her time in the Sixth Form and has developed into a formidable academic prospect of outstanding potential. Studying for a degree in Psychology is Gordon's absolute goal, an interest fuelled and confirmed by her reading around subjects including Neuropsychology, Biochemistry, Anthropology, Psychoanalysis and Behavioural Economics.

Gordon is a very fine A-level classicist in the making. She has an excellent knowledge of linguistic structure, which has enabled her to engage consistently and comfortably with tackling Latin's intricacies, especially in the particular challenges of verse translation where she routinely delivers first class unseen translation with an accurate, idiomatic and flowing style. The psychologist in her has actively relished the opportunity through her Tacitus set text to explore the mores and human foibles of the Roman imperial court, while her approach to the epic verse of the Aeneid has likewise been impressively confident and nuanced.

From the start, Gordon also proved to be an exceptional chemist, scoring 38/40 in her first progress assessment. She consistently displays a simply outstanding commitment to her work, rarely making the same mistake twice. Gordon has great strength on the organic side where she quickly picked up mechanisms and instantly applied them to unfamiliar complex molecules. She really enjoys applying rules but is imaginative rather than rigid in their application allowing her to thrive in unknown territory. Gordon's great mathematical ability has helped her to excel in Physical Chemistry.

Gordon is an inquisitive mathematician whose clear and concise work is a real credit to her, Gordon has demonstrated strength in algebra and multi-step problems where she is able to use her well-developed problem solving skills to solve the most complex questions. Her equally high aptitude for applied mathematics, especially probability and statistics, along with her drive and hard work, mean that she would be a well-suited candidate to read Psychology at a leading university.

Throughout her studies in German Gordon embraced extension work such as an oral presentation on Gustav Klimt to look into more depth at the topic of "Art and Architecture" and the Viennese Session movement more specifically. Her essays on the film "The Lives of Others" have also shown great depth of analysis and an ability to read between the lines, sensing the subtleties of each character in the film, as demonstrated in her mini- assessment essay on whether Gerd Wiesler is a good person or not. She was able to view the character from all angles before coming to her own conclusion, using relevant scenes from the film to support her arguments.

Combining a deft interpersonal touch, the gravitas of a senior prefect, and the academic punch of a consummate thinker, Gordon is a highly exciting prospect for the future. She has a huge portfolio of extra-curricular achievements and has, in many ways, outgrown the confines of the A-level classroom and syllabus: her impatience to explore the wide academic spaces of university is palpable. An intelligent, driven and highly capable student, she shows an empathetic, generous and mature side that perfectly complements the formidable academic aspect of her character, and which firmly reinforces our conviction that she will be a huge asset to the Psychology department of any high-tariff university that values attention to detail, conceptual understanding and careful research. We present her to you without reservation and with our strongest recommendation.

Example Personal Statement – History

Through examining history, we can understand the complex relationships between politics, geography and the arts, whilst better appreciating the unchanging elements of human motivation: fear, pride and love. As Lord Acton observed "history is not a burden on the memory, but an illumination of the soul".

My affinity with the past began with naval history; as a child the sea consumed my imagination - quite a feat living in the landlocked Midlands. I begged my parents to visit Portsmouth Historic Dockyard and the SS Great Britain. Inspired by the visit, I read 'Brunel: The Man Who Built the World' by Brindle. Only re-reading it recently have I fully appreciated the Brunel family's position at the heart of the crucial shift towards Victorian industrial ideas, which affect the UK today. I read the Sharpe and Hornblower series, which evolved into academic texts like 'Trafalgar' by Atkins. The contrasting French, British and Spanish accounts at Trafalgar helped me to appreciate for the first time how History is not an objective truth but a farrago of subjective facts affected by a range of influences. As a child, I asked for a replica of Nelson's uniform for Christmas, much to the dread of my parents. Since then I have built a collection of historic uniforms, weaponry, and items: from a Byzantine merchant's signet ring to Weimar coins. For me, material culture conjures stories of the people who touched, loved and lost these objects. During lockdown I built a forge, making Viking weapons and tools, and a 13th century-style arming-sword. This gave me knowledge of historic design and skill, allowing me to re-live history in the backyard.

Moving from state to private school after earning a scholarship, I focused on Early Modern History for A-Level as I had little awareness of critical periods like the Wars of the Roses and key individuals like Martin Luther. Exploring the intersecting themes between these topics is especially compelling. Just looking at King's College Chapel, half-smothered in Henry VII's usurping crests and symbols, despite being built by Henry VI shows how relevant this period still is. My reading began with 'The White/Red Queen' by Gregory, an introduction to the period. Eager for academic texts, Johnson's 'The Shadow King: The Life and Death of Henry VI' gave me a deep look at the personality and formation of characters who are dismissed by public history. I also read 'The Wars of the Roses' by Stewart, which struck me with his passion for the period, especially around invisible characters like John Morton.

My thirst is not slaked at the classroom; I give weekly tours around Stowe House, the incredible 18th-century home of the extravagant 3rd Duke of Buckingham. For me Stowe is a view into the class system, which witnessed the rise and fall of a powerful family. Giving tours illustrated the difficulties of accessibly explaining history, illustrating Kipling's point that "If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten". The relationship between public and intellectual history fascinates me, from Shakespeare to Wertenbaker and Mantel, it is incredible how literature affects waves of historical thinking and continues to re-direct revisionists' works. With this in mind, I created my own narratives: an animated film about the Battle of Bosworth and a film about the experience of a soldier in the West Indies Battalion in the wake of BLM. Furthering a Black History theme, I chose the historiography of the American Civil War for my coursework, given its resonance with current affairs. I was especially gripped by Randall's argument in 'The Blundering Generation', which for me presented parallels between Brexit and the Civil War with his argument that the war was due to a lack of compromise between extremists leading to a polarisation of moderates. This is why history is so engaging: its trends affect our lives every day and lays the groundwork for the future. Only through history can we see souls.

Example Reference - History

Gordon is a thoughtful, eloquent and articulate student with a high verbal and written capability. He is also a true history enthusiast and his love of subject flows through his curriculum and consumes his spare time. In History, Gordon is mature in approach, reading voraciously and with a varied interest. Though his passion for 18th/19th century naval history is clear, he is equally enthusiastic and nuanced in his understanding of the religious changes of the Reformation, the changing nature of Tudor government and the complex machinations of the Wars of the Roses. Choosing to study the consequences of the American Civil War is unusual as a coursework topic for a pupil studying the early-modern modules and further exemplifies Gordon's wide range. Through this, he has refined his understanding of historiography and the craft of the historian by considering the extent to which the Civil War was a war of necessity. He writes extremely well, even under pressure, with his essays sharply structured and his points expertly supported. His recent timed essay on how far the king's relationship with parliament was the key factor limiting 14th century royal power was especially well-structured and tightly argued. Gordon consistent production of A* essays in the Lower 6th and his excellent 81% in the end of year exams (a narrow 3rd in a cohort of 40) makes an A* the most likely outcome.

Gordon also stands out among his peers in English for his tenacity in pursuing ideas. His intellectual curiosity compels him to reject an interpretation at face value and he seeks out alternative and less obvious positions; when comparing the novels *Dorian Gray* and *Beloved*, Gordon convincingly put forward a case for a sympathetic reading of Dorian as a victim of Victorian hypocrisy. An essay on Dr Faustus was also commended for its excellent links to historical context. For coursework Gordon is studying "The Tempest" and "Things Fall Apart" through a post-colonial theoretical lens. Though his teachers are a sounding board for his ideas, he is unusually independent and self-motivated. Gordon is especially good at synthesising varied ideas into a clear argument; something that many A level student struggle to grasp.

Gordon's excellence is also clear through Drama. In acting, directing and set design, he shows excellent focus, original creativity and a clear development of ideas. He works with immense concentration, calmly discussing his analysis of characterisation and the structure of plays. This is also advanced in written work, as shown in his assessment of Hedda Gabler, which scored an impressive 84%. His capture of original and vivid creative ideas puts him top of his cohort and the obvious choice for the 2021 Drama Award. His EPQ to create a set design for 'Amadeus' was also one of the best in recent years and Gordon was specially commended by the Head for his high quality of research. Though Gordon's academic ability is excellent in itself, his ability to blend this with his creative vision is unusually strong.

Gordon joined the sixth form with clear talent but has responded extraordinarily well to being stretched by his teachers. He has embraced the myriad opportunities unavailable to him previously, developing rapidly in his core curriculum. Beyond this, he enjoys Model United Nations and play a mature role in choosing topics. His ability to think on his feet in debates is impressive and a recent motion on colonial reparations showed his depth of research and knack at rapidly appreciating key nuances. He is also a keen musician, playing oboe and piano, and an excellent rower, being the youngest on the water at Henley in 2017. His roles as a Prefect, volunteer sailing instructor and historical tour guide are also a testament to his excellent character. Though he excels academically, Gordon's talents for explaining ideas across formats is especially exciting. He has a bright future ahead of him and has our highest recommendation for undergraduate study.

Example Personal Statement – Law

The ongoing conflict between law and natural justice is, for me, the most fascinating aspect of the modern civil state. Justice can sit awkwardly with our sense of fair play, an idea explored by Nick Freeman in *The Art of The Loophole*. He argues that the consequences of acquitting potential offenders are justified by the benefits of exposing fundamental flaws in legal procedure. I am not entirely convinced but I appreciate his argument. It is this nuanced, mischievously shrewd approach to rhetoric, advocacy and the delivery of justice that compels me to read law at university.

Natural justice was similarly centre stage in the trial of Abu Hamza al-Masri. His recourse to the rules of the civil state, the legitimacy of which he has openly challenged, might strike many as distasteful or disingenuous but I would argue that it is for our own safety's sake that we afford everyone equal protection, human rights, and the right to a fair trial. Thinking about this led me into an exploration of the concept of limitation and its roots in Roman Law. The way that this idea is treated in different countries seems to me to demonstrate that, try as we might to ensure a fair trial with evidence and witnesses, justice is a far from agreed concept.

A further problem with justice is neutrality. The treatment of Ben John, an avowed white supremacist, rose to national attention when he was 'sentenced' to read Dickens, a marked contrast to the treatment of convicted BAME terrorists in the UK. That the case has been referred to the AG suggests that a problem has been recognised. Perhaps Judge Timothy Spencer had forgotten Bleak House's contemptuous description of 'foggy glory' clouding the common sense of members of the judiciary. I investigated implicit racial bias in the judicial system for my school magazine, seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of practical solutions such as interdisciplinary research between data scientists and lawyers relative to the easier, yet often ineffective, 'colour-blind' approach to bias. In this I must declare a personal interest: my Nigerian grandfather was caught up in the recent Windrush debacle. Despite contributing to the UK for over 25 years, he was only granted indefinite leave to remain due to my right to freedom of movement as an EU citizen.

Despite the lockdown, I was determined and able to secure work experience at Abraham Dresdens LLP. Observing cases concerning litigation and mediations, particularly those involving property, landlord and tenant law, opened my eyes to the struggles faced by tenants. One particularly interesting development was the way solicitors and barristers had to adapt under the pandemic. Technical problems in court compromised the cross-examination of a liquidator attempting to evade creditors and led me to wonder how problems of this nature will only grow more acute in an ever more litigious, stubbornly complex, and increasingly unpredictable legal environment.

Outside of the classroom, debating is my passion and it has earned me several years' experience of the MUN and ESU's Schools' Mace. Advocacy presents a thrilling intellectual challenge as well as offering exposure to a myriad of fascinating topics. A recent motion on elected judges led me to *The Law Machine*, and I have found Marcel Berlins to be a perceptive and articulate guide through the delicacies of judicial appointments and other corners of the UK's legal system.

Through my studies I have acquired the transferable skills vital for tackling the rigours of a law degree; Maths and Further Maths have developed a keen eye for accuracy, Chemistry has stimulated my analytical approach to complex issues and English has refined my essay-writing. As an Academic Scholar and Prefect, I often help younger students with difficult areas in their studies. I believe that the ability to deconstruct and logically explain complex concepts is a skill that will be a valuable asset for studying law at university.

Example Personal Statement – Human, Social, and Political Sciences

I first remember realising the power a vote can have when I was 12 years old. 2016, the year the UK voted for Brexit and Donald Trump became President: two events that 12-year-old me thought impossible. I didn't know it at the time, but I lived in my own political echo chamber; until then, politics always appeared black and white. Since then, I have wanted to understand the many shades of the world of politics.

My interest in politics extends far beyond lesson time: I am a keen member of various school societies, including the Religion and Philosophy Society. I combined my interest in politics and religious studies in a presentation on the impact of religion on International relations. In this presentation, I explored the hold that religion has on global politics, from elections in the US to the international sanctions that China has received because of their treatment of Uighur Muslims and how the relationship between religion and International relations was forever changed by 9/11.

My curiosity in the ramifications of 9/11 was heightened by reading 'Only in America', a book about a BBC correspondent living in America in 2002 with the shadow of 9/11 hanging over the country. This inspired me to complete an open learn course on "Politics, media and war: 9/11 and its aftermaths" with the Open University. I began to question the concept of a 'war on terror', which appears to be a catch-all phrase that would seem to justify almost any response to global terrorism. It also, by calling it a war, exaggerates the role of military operations in fighting terrorism and possibly even gives unwarranted prestige and legitimacy to America's adversaries.

I have also been an active participant in the model United Nations; for example, winning highly commended delegate for my committee in the MUN conference MUNCH 21. This has been incredibly valuable towards my understanding of different countries' foreign policies and led to me writing an article for the school's newspaper on "Should the US end its sanctions on Cuba?" I explored whether or not President Biden should keep his campaign promise of reversing the sanctions of President Trump and then looked at how the sanction's Trump introduced ended up having a detrimental effect on the people of Cuba, rather than Cuba's government, as was entirely predictable.

The book 'Politics ideas in a profile' highlights three main threats to political security: violence, justice, and technology. The increasing incidence of technology as a threat to political security led me to investigate the linkage between internet usage and extreme polarisation and radicalisation in my submission for the R.A. Butler Prize in Politics and International Studies. My essay, which looked at whether people offending each other online should be a matter of criminal justice, argued that unregulated social media is a threat to democracies and that states and social media platforms need to work hand in hand with governments to create clear legislation that outlines hate speech, along with financial motives for social media companies to regulate their platforms.

Outside school, I was invited to participate in the annual parliamentary taster day session with my local MP. This experience taught me about the implementation of politics in the real world and the personal aspect of an MP's job, from constituency casework with deeply personal stories to being expected to support and help implement government policy. While in school, I have been incredibly dedicated to my learning; I was invited into the Politics Society and was made an academic prefect for my House and school academic prefect.

My profound passion for politics stems from an interest in understanding the world, and to do this, you must understand complex and ever-changing political and social structures. That is why a degree in political science is the most logical next step, and I honestly cannot wait to begin.

Example Reference - Human, Social, and Political Sciences

Gordon is one of the most astute and observant political scientists I have ever had the good fortune to teach; she clearly enjoys the intellectual challenge afforded by her study of Politics, and whilst she is never boorish or cantankerous, she does have clear beliefs and can always offer trenchant and well-supported conclusions. She is a clear antidote to our current polarised and often toxic political climate.

Gordon is a very strong student of Politics. She is not only able to grasp new ideas very quickly and with ease but eloquently communicates her thoughts both verbally and in writing. Her interest and passion for the subject are vast, and she is a regular reader of more comprehensive material to support her studies. Gordon has written numerous essays about a whole range of political issues. In particular, she demonstrated superb evaluative skills when considering how far the Labour Party in the UK still upholds its socialist principles and utilised a range of evidence to demonstrate the turbulent changes which the political party has undertaken since its origins at the beginning of the century. Gordon is well-read and regularly listens to political podcasts, which keep her arguments *au courant*. She is a stalwart member of the 12 Society, a group of students who meet every week to discuss all things political, as well as organising meals and visiting speakers. All in all, she is a ferocious intellect coupled with an inquiring mind.

Gordon has an acutely philosophical mind. Ever-intellectually curious, she also has a rare ability to think creatively and empathically when it comes to processing ethical conundrums. Combined with her commitment to hard work, this means that Gordon is now reliably excelling at all levels of her Ethics paper, including the most challenging area of meta-ethics. She recently demonstrated a high level of conceptual fluidity in a 30-mark essay debating whether ethical statements are no more than expressions of emotion. She carefully drew connections between Ayer's verification principle and emotivism and explored Stevenson's development of the latter theory. Likewise, her writing on euthanasia, done under exam conditions, was argumentatively well-balanced, incorporated the works of scholars, made comfortable use of specialist language and showcased her clear and mature writing style.

Gordon is an excellent mathematician who can grasp new concepts with ease; she is performing at the top of her class and year group. Gordon works well with other students but equally is very good when working independently. She is never satisfied until she understands every aspect of the material that has been covered. Gordon has strong algebra and problem-solving skills, which have been hugely beneficial in the multi-step questions. The questions that she asks in class are succinct and demonstrate an inquiring logical mind, and she always seeks a complete understanding of a topic. She demonstrates a genuine enthusiasm for the subject and self-improvement, remaining resilient and learning from her errors.

Gordon's love of learning is palpable and branches out into several other areas; she is just as at ease discussing philosophical principles as debating what cockfighting tells you about Balinese social structure. Her conversation is informative and, at times, witty; she engages you in a flow of topics which she is often highly knowledgeable about but has a deftness of touch which means she never bores- or worse, lectures. At school, she is a valued member of both the Philosophy and Politics Societies. She writes for the school newspaper, has completed online MOOC courses, is currently a school prefect, House Academic Prefect and was awarded the Politics department Speech Day Prize. In short, she is tremendously hard-working, proactive, and a hugely exciting prospect for the future, and we recommend her to you without reservation and in the strongest possible terms.

Example Personal Statement – Mathematics

I was first drawn to Mathematics by its ubiquity - from fractal properties of ferns, to the prime number life cycle of cicadas. But it was when I first saw the fundamental difference between Maths and Sciences, that I felt its fascination in full. Scientific theories are based on current observations, hence may be false in some cases in future, however, mathematical theorems are built from axioms through logical proofs, hence once proven, remain true forever. This eternal beauty and trueness of Mathematics led me onto my mathematical quest.

'Fermat's Last Theorem' by Simon Singh has been one of my favourite books. Not only did it demonstrate to me the power of a mathematician's single-minded effort, but it also brought to my attention the links between seemingly different areas of Mathematics. Andrew Wiles met Fermat's challenge by proving the Taniyama-Shimura Conjecture, the link between elliptic equations and modular forms. Also, fascinated by Singh's narration of Galois' role in proving the theorem, I went on to teach myself group theory using the undergraduate text 'Abstract Algebra' by Dan Saracino. Although its purpose was mysterious to me at first, I soon realized its connections to Number Theory. By establishing a one-to-one correspondence between elements in two right cosets of a subgroup, I proved Lagrange's theorem which, surprisingly, leads to Fermat's Little Theorem, while by proving a theorem about the direct product of cyclic groups, I derived Chinese Remainder Theorem. Such links allow problems in one area to be transformed and solved by techniques from another, hence they deepen my understanding of mathematics as a whole and motivate me to learn about new branches of mathematics that I am yet to encounter.

I was also surprised by group theory's important role in decrypting messages enciphered by the German Enigma machine, whose fascinating structure and algorithm inspired me to program a simulator in C#. As the number of possible Enigma settings was a 17-digit number and the rotor wirings were unknown to codebreakers, I could hardly imagine how to defeat it. Researching into its decryption I learnt that Polish mathematicians formed equations in terms of group permutations and revealed the rotor wirings through manipulating conjugate permutations and cyclic structures. I was amazed by their method of separating the effects of different machine components, as this cut down the possibilities to only 105,456 settings. I wrote a programme accordingly which decrypts Enigma, when enough messages are received. Cryptography has become a favourite topic of mine and I went on to learn about its future. Quantum computing, utilising particles' superposition of states, might weaken existing ciphers while transmission of differently polarised photons will enable truly uncrackable encryption.

More recently, I have been exploring the links between numerical analysis and calculus, using methods such as Runge-Kutta to approximate solution curves for differential equations that are otherwise unsolvable. In order to derive 2nd order RK methods, which have two stages of gradient calculations, I wrote the second stage as its 2D Taylor series, combined this with the first stage, compared the resulted expression with the Taylor expansion of the solution value, and found the conditions required to achieve the desired accuracy. As higher order RK methods result in smaller global errors, I applied RK4 and RK6 in a simulation of the gravitational interactions and orbits of the Sun-Earth system. The versatility of mathematics, demonstrated by such applications, is another aspect that I find truly intriguing.

Outside the classroom I play lacrosse for my school's 1st X team and I am trialling for the U19 Chinese National Squad. I have also played table tennis for my province. Inspired by the great mathematician Graham, I have learnt to juggle five balls, and another hobby of mine is solving sudokus while holding a 20-minute plank.

Example Reference – Mathematics

Gordon is one of the most extraordinary pupils we have ever seen at Stowe. She has an impressive mathematical aptitude, but also a genuine and intense love of learning that she has demonstrated time and time again. For example, her love of languages saw her start German from scratch when she arrived aged 13 and, by the start of the next year, she was already predicted an A* in A-level. In addition, she has decided to learn Russian and is likely to finish with five or six A-levels at the end of this year, including those that she has already attained; A*A* in Mathematics and Further Mathematics, along with Grades 5 and 1 in STEP 2 and 3. Gordon is also a top-level sportswoman who has played representative table tennis in China and is now looking to trial for the Chinese lacrosse team. Although two years ahead of her age-group, Gordon is a confident and mature young woman who has quickly embedded herself in her new year group and socialises easily, while following her own path and aspirations.

Gordon is phenomenal in Mathematics. Her ability to learn new methods, concepts and ideas is way beyond that of any other student we have ever taught. Her appetite for learning about all aspects of Mathematics is voracious and she can explain university-level material eloquently and succinctly to non-experts. Whether writing for Chalkdust Magazine or giving presentations to her peers on the story of Fermat's Last Theorem, Enigma or numerical methods, Gordon is an empathic communicator, taking care to pitch her thinking at just the right level for her audience. One of our favourite things about working with Gordon is that she is so receptive to advice and looks to improve at every opportunity. It is a delight that she never needs to be told anything twice and, as such a capable pure mathematician, it was also good to see her adapt her skills to applications in Further Statistics, whilst understanding their limitations in particular contexts. Her extracurricular project work is extraordinary - there can't be many school pupils who can decrypt Enigma messages or who are working towards their own simulations of the solar system – and she is currently exploring new avenues in Mathematics with Professor Bishop from UCL. Gordon is relentless in her pursuit of excellence, works tremendously hard, and is eager to share her excitement and enjoyment of Mathematics with others. There is no doubt that she is ready for the next stage and we truly believe that her potential as a student and researcher in Mathematics is limitless.

In Computer Science Gordon demonstrates a level of knowledge that belies her age. Her contributions to discussion are razor-sharp and go far beyond simple recall, and she is able to see wider consequences, applications and connections with other parts of the syllabus. Her exam-based responses reveal ideas that far exceed A level and, with her strong ability to reason logically, she excels in programming and in all technical aspects of the course.

In Biology and Chemistry, Gordon's work is outstanding and indicative of a keen intellect, a fierce drive to succeed, and a natural affinity for the sciences. As well as picking up new concepts quickly, she has an incredible ability to remember detail. When explaining her thinking and understanding she uses the correct technical terms and conveys an appreciation for the finer details. Her insightful points in class discussion help others to understand and she is able to link the various sciences together in a way that other students find challenging. A fine example of an independent learner, Gordon is also impressive in the laboratory, understanding the scientific principles behind the observations she records. In Biology, she scored near or above 90% in every assessment and, despite some strength and depth in the year group, Gordon is also without exception our top scoring Chemistry student.

Put simply, we are delighted to recommend Gordon to you without hesitation, and in the strongest possible terms.

Example Personal Statement – History & Politics

I became engrossed with political history after interviewing a North Korean defector. Theirs was a truly moving testimony, yet a stark realisation of my blindness to the tyranny continuing in the world today. Despite feeling frustrated at our failure to learn from the past, it made me appreciate our democracy despite its issues. I decided to make a documentary on the 1979 General Election which involved an interview with Thatcher's defence secretary, who contended that the collective wisdom of the British electorate cannot be overstated. I would argue that this is now at risk from the growing complexity of the media, something I recently enjoyed reading more about in 'How Democracies Die.'

The position of women in politics has always fascinated me. Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' developed my egalitarian perspective, which led me to explore the issues that held women's rights back for so long, many of which stemmed back to religion. In response, I centred my EPQ around Christian complementarian theology and how it has impacted the subordinate position of women over the centuries, thus distorting the political landscape.

MUN and debating have shown me the plasticity of facts in the face of politics and have sparked my interest in international affairs. I was recently awarded a history scholarship to explore the changing political landscape of Northern Cyprus, primarily examining the 1571 and 1974 invasions, a brilliant experience of tangible history and investigation. Moreover, working in a ship insurance company whilst the June 2019 Gulf of Oman incident hit and my recent volunteering work with Afghan refugees have both given me first-hand insight into the compelling effects of an international relations breakdown, igniting my want to study it further.

I became captivated by constitutions during the Brexit crisis but even more so during Trump's final weeks in office. ACB's appointment to SCOTUS seemed to articulate the politicisation of the judiciary at the highest level, a significant problem considering the arguably undemocratic power the branch has accumulated. I was intrigued by Bogdanor's 'Beyond Brexit' and reasons for a written constitution, but I remain tentative over giving judges more authority than our history and elected officials. I deepened my constitutional understanding in a podcast I created in response to an article regarding the Miller cases, questioning whether our courts' long-established neutrality and independence is under threat.

Studying Music A-level has markedly aided my other studies as it is intimately intertwined with history and politics. In 'The Republic', Plato asserts that music could be a danger to the state as it can change minds. From protest song to patronage, I agree that music can be a perfect tool to embody the passion of a political movement, and therefore so much history can be learnt through it.

I have recently been involved in political campaigning and have attended conferences to listen to experts on post-pandemic policy. The talks have reminded me that the key to a beneficial forward-focused outlook is looking to the past first. I demonstrated this in an undergraduate and post-graduate essay competition in which my entry was awarded third prize and published. I examined epidemics from 165AD to 1527 to formulate a pragmatic response for a citizen in the face of this adversity.

Over this year and next, between working two jobs in creative industries, I will be a researcher for Prof. James Tooley, focussing on education policy; an opportunity gained by voicing my opinions on his previous work. This unique experience will further develop my political understanding. My studies have already enhanced everything from my songwriting to my speech-writing and school

leadership as Head Girl. So, to explore this subject further at university is the logical next step down a journey of understanding that has already given me so much, and I cannot wait to begin.

Example Personal Statement – Medicine

Watching a doctor stitch up my sister after a roof collapsed on her was an incident that would prompt most to rethink a career in Medicine. Despite the fear I was feeling, I watched with fascination as he threaded the fine needle through her skin and sealed up the wound, and knew then that I could see myself in the doctor's shoes.

For three months, I worked in a care home with patients with a variety of conditions, including dementia. This led me to undertake an edX course on Dementia to better understand the disease, triggering my interest in the brain. Whilst reading a Nature article about using organoids to study neurodevelopmental diseases, I learnt that smaller, less complex cultures of cells can be made by an in-vitro mechanism, where stem cells are put in a bioreactor to induce specialisation and neural differentiation, as a more ethical alternative to human testing. This sparked my interest in medical ethics, particularly the nuances of such a complex issue.

To build my knowledge, I completed a MOOC on the Neurobiology of Everyday Life, covering the role of the brain in homeostasis, proprioception, and abstract functions such as cognition. After this I took part in a Neuroscience research programme with University of Oxford. During the programme, my group conducted an experiment to discover if the brain can distinguish between white noise and music. We collected the fMRI results from a real test subject and used t-tests to determine if the data was statistically significant. The signals recorded from the MRI translated to voxels, which are the 3D pixels that form the image from the MRI scan. The frequency of the various signals, produced by the movement of H⁺ ions in the brain, determines if the level of brain activity is significant compared to the baseline. The results showed that there was significant brain activity in the auditory cortex when music was played as opposed to white noise. Due to my interest in neurological diseases, I also read a Nature article on the re-engineering of psychedelics to form analogues that could treat depression, anxiety, and addiction. During the programme, I asked about the feasibility of this and was shocked to find that psychedelics are extremely effective in treatment especially when paired with CBT.

Whilst preparing for the Biology Olympiad, I became interested in Immunotherapy and read a research paper on the 'Oxford Academic' site about peptide-based vaccines and how they can overcome the "variability" of the peptide presented by tumour cells. I became fascinated with other potential forms of cancer therapy and did work experience with the University of York. I worked with an academic who was researching auger electron cancer therapy, which utilizes low energy electrons emitted by decaying radio-nucleotides, and could possibly treat metastasis without damaging healthy cells. Witnessing the unburdened potential of research in medicine is another reason that fortified my desire to be a doctor.

As a result of COVID-19, my planned work experience in the A&E and GP sector did not happen. As I was eager to get experience in a clinical setting, to better understand the NHS system, I did the Observe GP and the Brighton and Sussex work experience. Through these, I learnt of the various moving parts that comprise the NHS, particularly areas of Allied Healthcare that I was unfamiliar with. I also gained a better understanding of the doctor-patient relationship and the importance of establishing a line between empathy and duty-of-care. Due to the prevalence of COVID-19, I attended a talk by a trauma surgeon which highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on the NHS and the changes that occurred as a result. I also volunteered at a COVID-19 vaccination centre where I observed the impact of the virus on our healthcare system and gained first-hand experience in patient care, cementing my resolve to become a doctor.

Example Reference – Medicine

Gordon is an exceptionally gifted and passionate pupil who joined in Lower Sixth, making an immediate impact with her proactive approach, determination, and drive. Exceptionally strong academically, she has been consistently in the top handful of our Biology and Physics pupils, and has excelled as the highest scoring student out of our 44 mathematicians and top student in her year of 33 students in Chemistry. We have full confidence in her ability to achieve her predicted grades and to thrive at university level.

Gordon has been repeatedly recognised for her academic excellence, receiving an Academic Scholarship for excellence at GCSE with 9 A*'s, the Years 10 & 11 Head of Year Award for excellence, the Year 12 Chemistry and Harvard book prize for the top academic progress in Lower Sixth. She has also successfully competed in national competitions, achieving Silver in the Intermediate Physics Challenge, Commended in the Biology Olympiad and she has also been appointed President of the School's Biomedical Society.

Her ability to excel academically is matched by her range of successes outside of lessons. She has a passion to develop her knowledge beyond the curriculum through extensive additional reading and learning across her subjects. This includes Brian Field, Parallel Universes, and additional courses such as MIT's Paradox and Infinity Course. She has a hunger to learn which was evident from her presentation on Wave Particle Duality and subsequent research into the Many Worlds Interpretation. Her preferred topic of reading is of course medicine and, this year, she has read and discussed several titles including 'Do no harm', 'The man who mistook his wife for a hat' and Nature papers on COVID mechanisms and the possible origins of COVID. Her reflections on this broad reading show a deep level of understanding and, moreover, a desire and determination to understand how and why things work and their effects on wider systems.

Olamna's fascination of all things medical is clear and, as a member of the Medics Society, she led a group of students in a PBL task to develop their knowledge of epilepsy. She has been volunteering, working with elderly patients with dementia on a weekly basis. Due to COVID restrictions this has been limited but, despite this, she undertook an 'Understanding dementia course' to continue learning about the disease. Having found this fascinating due to her love of Neurology, she went on to complete a MOOC on Brain, Addiction and Dementia. As in-person work experience was limited, she took full advantage of other opportunities to broaden her knowledge, completing BSMS online work experience, Observe GP online, Dr OJ's weekly surgery and watching a BBC obesity post-mortem video. Her most formative experience this year has been lab work as part of the Oxford University Work experience project. She is a unique blend of a natural research scientist with an absolute fascination and drive to understand the minutiae of a problem, with the ease and ability to talk to and take a real interest in others. There is no doubt she will continue to flourish both in a lab and by a patient's bedside. Her drive is boundless and she snapped up the opportunity of the University of York Auger Cancer Therapy research work experience.

Olamna excels in all aspects of life, from providing instruction and being an effective team member and goalkeeper of the school's Lacrosse and Netball First teams, to being appointed a School Prefect. She is a talented sportswoman, having been selected to be part of The Wasps County Netball squad, and is also an accomplished swimmer gaining a Bronze and Silver England swimming Award, as well as Certificate A, B and C in the Netherlands. Her positive attitude and ability and willingness to talk to everyone of any age has been noted by all members of staff who teach and interact with her. Gordon will excel in any branch of medicine she chooses to pursue and we recommend her unreservedly.

Example Personal Statement – Physics

The most gratifying outcome from studying Physics is the ability to ask and more importantly answer the question why? Yet, as my understanding evolves, I find myself asking the more potent question how? How can there be a single framework of Physics that fully explains all physical aspects of the universe? How can complex physical phenomena be explained by simple, unequivocal theories? As I have delved deeper into these fundamental questions, I have encountered a certain elegance concealed amongst disorder. I am fascinated by how Physics can uncover the fundamental knowledge of our physical existence, and this has enabled me to explore refined concepts and motivated me to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

Professor Brian Greene's book 'The Hidden Reality' revolutionised my perception of existence. The simple but astounding concept of endless doppelgängers inspired me to investigate how, by using Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, it is possible to calculate the distance to our nearest copy - approximately $10^{(10^{122})}$ m away. Furthermore, recent developments in the use of string theory to unify all of nature's laws impressed on me the true extent of what the human mind is capable of when it comes to quantum mechanics. String theory has enabled me to explore concepts such as Braneworlds and landscape universes, and I have explored how observational results of the last century, such as using Hubble's law to calculate the increasing rate of expansion, provide sufficient evidence for space being filled with diffuse energy, comparable to Einstein's cosmological constant. I gave presentations on these ideas to my school's Maths and Physics Societies.

Over the summer of 2019 I was selected for a STAAR (Summertime Advanced Aerospace Residency) STEM programme run by RAF Cosford and Northrup Grumman. Through this program, I gained an insight into how the needs of an air mission shape the way that engineers and scientists design aerospace systems. I had the opportunity to compare the aerodynamic performance of double wedge and bi-convex airfoils and analyse how they generate lift efficiently during hypersonic flight. After the programme, I felt inspired to delve deeper and studied a paper on giga-voxel computational morphogenesis for structural design, in which topology optimisation using a supercomputer produced an unrestricted and lighter wing design, with a resolution two times the magnitude previously obtained. At the end of the residency, we had the opportunity to plan our own mission, with support from RAF Cosford engineers, and to design appropriate advanced aerospace systems solutions. We presented our project to RAF dignitaries and STAAR partners and I received a Crest Award for my efforts.

Alongside my studies, I have undertaken an independent celestial mechanics project and created a computer simulation of the gravitational interactions and orbits of the multiple free bodies in space that make up our Solar System. I started with Euler's method to calculate the constantly changing accelerations, velocities, and positions, and am currently working on increasing the accuracy by implementing more sophisticated and accurate Runge-Kutte numerical methods. With so many gravitational interactions at work, and, therefore, calculations to perform, I am expecting to have to think hard about overcoming computational performance issues, but I aspire to create a complete model of the eight planetary bodies in our solar system. This experience, together with my reading and experience on the residency course has very much confirmed my desire to study Physics at university.

I am a keen cricketer, representing the Buckinghamshire Cricket Academy, and I am also a runner and a single figure handicapped golfer. I currently serve as a school and a House prefect, and an NCO in CCF, with the rank corporal. I have gained valuable teamworking experience and skills through these experiences, and also by completing my Gold DofE Award.

Example Reference – Physics

Gordon is humble yet multi-talented, excels across the board, and has an intense curiosity that drives him towards Physics. His strong academic ability enables him to read with breadth and depth, and his mathematical and programming skills have enabled him to take on projects that are well beyond the scope of A-level. He is never satisfied with a superficial level of understanding and he constantly strives for more knowledge and skill in everything he does. He is also resilient, demonstrated by his ability to juggle a host of other commitments, including strong performances on the cricket field and his role as a school prefect. This high level of extra-curricular engagement, coupled with a desire to learn and perform academically at the highest level, will stand him in good stead for demanding degree courses and we highly recommend him.

In Physics, Gordon listens intently and uses all available resources to deepen his understanding; making use of any spare time in lessons to bolster his notes. Gordon uses meta-cognitive strategies to great effect and enthusiastically asks pertinent and insightful questions, often linking topics to his wider reading. He showed particular interest in the relationship between quantum mechanics and quantum field theory, marvelling at the latter and clearly relishing the prospect of studying it in detail. He enjoys the process of solving problems and participates in extra classes to tackle complex problems similar to those found in the British Physics Olympiad. For example, he recently tackled questions where 'SUVAT' equations must give way to calculus and he shows an outstanding determination to solve problems independently. Given his abilities, it was unsurprising to see him achieve the highest mark in the year (93%) in his most recent test on quantum mechanics. Furthermore, last year, Gordon gave a very well researched talk on probability in the universe, calculating the number of possible arrangements for matter to determine how often the universe would inevitably repeat itself, and how far we would need to travel to meet another 'Gordon' giving, exactly the same talk.

In Mathematics, Gordon pays careful attention to the feedback of his teachers and has relentlessly improved his understanding and problem-solving skills week by week. Through these outstanding work habits he has become one of the strongest in his cohort. This is evident from his work on conceptually challenging and abstract topics such as complex numbers and vectors, and also from his adept algebraic manipulation for topics such as series, roots of polynomials and proof by induction. He has been a keen participant in mathematics extension activities, learning off-syllabus topics such as number theory and combinatorics, tackling questions from STEP, MAT and TMUA papers, and developing his own numerical simulation of the solar system using the Euler method to compute forces, accelerations, velocities and positions.

Gordon is highly motivated in Chemistry to establish a deep understanding of all parts of the syllabus. Of particular strength is his ability to see how to link abstract theories to practical outcomes. Gordon's thoughtful and independent approach to his work inevitably leads to great successes and he has fully internalized every concept he has encountered, and gone on to connect them to others. His strong 3D perception enables him to readily apply organic mechanisms to previously unseen complex molecules and, although he really enjoys applying rules, he is imaginative rather than rigid in their application and he thrives in unfamiliar territory. He uses his strong mathematical skills to great effect in physical chemistry, where a numerical approach can be deployed to unlock rates and equilibria. His meaningful questions reveal a high level of understanding and he is confident in the laboratory, carrying practical work carefully and with a high level of consideration to the chemistry behind what he is doing.

Example Personal Statement – HSPS

My passion for Political Sciences is borne of a love for English Literature and a fascination with dystopian novels, such as '1984' and 'Animal Farm', and 'The Handmaids Tale'. The most important message of all these novels, namely the terrible damage and suffering caused by too much state power, is even more prescient in our post-pandemic societies, where governments have justifiably intervened directly in citizens lives. All governments must be coercive to some extent, ironically, partly to ensure our freedom. It is the balance between individual autonomy and government intervention that I find most captivating- and the possible consequences of getting it wrong.

As an A-Level Politics and Economics student, my curiosity about damaged political systems widened. I found it fascinating that the strongest advocates of democracy could be its harshest critics, epitomised in Churchill's famous quote: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others." After spending a week with my local MP, I soon realised that the faults within our political system are more difficult to diagnose than I first thought. Anybody who believes otherwise is probably a case in point of the Dunning-Kruger effect. I observed that MPs are often left to achieve outcomes that are impossible. It helped me to see how many of the perceived faults were not directly attributable to the Government, but that in many instances, the words of the Labour politician, Sir Ernest Benn, still rang true: "Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy."

Last year I earned a scholarship to attend the John Locke Institute's summer school via its Social Sciences essay competition. The thought-provoking title, 'What, if anything, gives the government the right to force you to pay tax?' made me recognise how crucial John Locke's social contract is and how it should enable the people and the state to form a trusting relationship. But it must be reimagined for the twenty-first century: Locke's views on the role of the state would, by modern standards, be so limited that governments would be unable to deal with global problems, like pandemics, financial crises or climate change. This course led me to enter The New College of Humanities essay competition, where my answer to 'Is democracy experiencing a setback worldwide?' received a commendation. Unfortunately, my conclusion was that democracy is failing globally due to a lack of education in two senses; firstly, the younger generation is becoming less aware of the horrific histories of authoritarian states, and secondly, people are becoming less inclined to participate politically or at least in a meaningful way.

I am a proactive and passionate student; I have worked with the Dubai based AMSAF Investment LLC. I have interned at Andersen Global to explore how people find alternatives to navigate complex tax law legally. I have also been fortunate to visit many developing countries and experience their political systems first-hand. During my backpacking trips to countries such as Thailand, India, Tanzania, Mozambique and Kenya, I volunteered in multiple orphanages and schools. I was left saddened by the lack of funding and horrific conditions children face daily. Their political systems were often crumbling under the weight of severe corruption, economic inequality and social problems.

Achieving a Distinction in my Grade 7 LAMDA exam has given me the confidence to articulate my arguments clearly and effectively. Furthermore, being selected for the England Hockey Performance Centre and leading my county team to becoming National Champions has taught me the importance of teamwork and developed my leadership skills as captain of my school 1st XI for hockey. The opportunity to learn more about politics internationally, as well as the social sciences behind it, is a hugely exciting prospect and one I cannot wait to begin.

Example Reference – HSPS

Gordon always displays admirable thoroughness in whatever tasks are put in front of her. Her quiet intellectual curiosity in class, not calling for admiration but quietly compelling it, is borne out by perceptive and aphoristic contributions to discussions and debates. She has a lightness of touch which means she can render the intricate and elaborate with direct simplicity, without losing any necessary complexity; straightforward but never simplistic; captivating but never frivolous; intensely knowledgeable whilst always mindful of nuance and complexity. We are lucky to have her, especially as she received scholarship offers from seven other schools.

Gordon is a very strong student of Politics. She can grasp new ideas very quickly and eloquently communicates her thoughts both verbally and in writing. Her interest and passion for the subject are vast, and she is a regular reader of more exhaustive material to support her studies. Gordon has written numerous essays about a whole range of political issues. In particular, she demonstrated excellent evaluative skills when considering how far the image and reputation of a political party impact their electoral success. She considered how the effects would differ depending upon the size and type of party in question and synthesised her findings into a superbly eloquent answer.

Gordon is an avid reader; in recent months, she has read "The Great Gatsby", "The Handmaid's Tale", "1984", "Animal Farm", "The Tattooist of Auschwitz", and "The Book Thief". All novels with a socio-political focus. For her coursework, Gordon has chosen to explore aspects of madness and the supernatural in "The Little Stranger" and "The Turn of the Screw". Gordon chose these texts independently and is working on an interesting piece, well-structured and supported with wider reading of critics and theory. A recent essay on Desire in *The Picture of Dorian Grey* and *Beloved* demonstrates that Gordon can synthesise, taking the two entirely different texts and find links, similarities and differences. Gordon made brilliantly original points and supported them with reference to syntax and structure, weaving between the two novels seamlessly.

Gordon is a highly motivated and hard-working student of Economics. Her essay-writing is very strong, writing with clarity of analysis and consistently includes astute insights and evaluation. Her work ethic was demonstrated by a significant rise in her average scores through the last year, from around 65% (B-grade) initially to 75% (A*) by the end of the L6 year. Gordon regularly attends and contributes to the Economics Society, delivering papers that are as original as they are excellent. She picks up new ideas quickly and responds to feedback very well. Gordon is a strong independent learner, which will suit her well to the rigours of an Oxbridge course.

Gordon is an intelligent, curious and imaginative student whose passion for political science, as well as her determination to make the world a better place, is demonstrated by her exploits in and out of school. She is a member of the youth parliament, went out knocking on doors to get young people to vote before the 2019 election and is a member of the Conservative Party; she has also been to Mozambique to speak about environmental issues with other students- as well as donating bras to young girls; Gordon has also been to orphanages in Thailand, Tanzania and India to deliver donated clothes, toiletries and toys. And is also a member of the Stowe School climate action group, working with other schools to achieve carbon net-zero. She is a passionate student but never feels as though she is preaching to others; she manages to talk about contemporary politics in a restrained but perceptive manner, without the knicker-twisting diatribe of many. All in all, we feel she has the intellectual mettle and the drive and ambition to be very successful, and we recommend her without reservation.

Example Personal Statement – Physics

I have always had a genuine scientific curiosity about how the universe works and my first encounter with this was on a school trip to the local astronomy centre 'Herstmonceux.' I remember feeling utterly fascinated by the various science exhibits. How could I hear music through biting a straw? Why did the big silver ball make my hair stand up on end? Even in early childhood I had an urge to understand how the world operates and, most recently, this culminated with an independent project on celestial mechanics and my own attempt to code a model of the solar system. I first defined gravitational forces using Newton's law of universal gravitation, I then created spheres that represented a star and a few planets, and I set things in motion using the Euler-Cromer method. I found the Lagrange points between the star and one of the planets and this project was greatly beneficial for my understanding of how our solar system operates, and the utility of numerical methods for solving otherwise intractable problems.

Throughout my sixth form, I have been a member of my school's Scholars' Society, at which I have presented scientific articles. One that I found particularly interesting was about giant magnetar flares. I found it fascinating that it took so long for scientists to identify these, as the source of sudden outbursts of x-rays and gamma rays, purely, because they are too blindingly bright for space borne telescopes. Space fills me with awe, and I would love to increase my understanding of Astrophysics at university. I am a member of a Physics Society which meets once a week to discuss such things as the effects of cosmic rays on electronics or the mechanisms of fire. I also attended a masterclass by Cambridge University lecturers via the problem-solving site Isaac Physics. This commenced with a few hours of solving complex problems on light waves and then finished with the professors discussing topics such as the Doppler effect, decibels, and prism deviations, which deepened my understanding of waves and light.

A key catalyst to my mathematical curiosity was a book that I received as a reward for qualifying for the next round of the Junior Maths Challenge. 'Alex's Adventures in Numberland' by Alex Bellos introduced me to probability, geometry, algebra, sequences, and calculus. Following this, I read Simon Singh's 'Fermat's Last Theorem' and I found it amazing that such a simple conjecture could cause so much commotion. I went on to read Richard Feynman's 'Six Easy Pieces,' which was excellent in providing me with an improved understanding of Physics due to how well Feynman elucidates the fundamentals of quantum and astronomical physics. From there, I read 'The Ascent of Gravity' by Marcus Chown, which opened my eyes to how fascinating and mysterious the forces that work invisibly around us are, with the gravitational force a key example.

Over the summer I completed a MOOC titled 'How things work: an introduction to Physics.' This course was created by the University of Virginia and taught by Professor Louis A Bloomfield. I completed 12 hours of videos and tests which consolidated my grasp of the mechanics of everyday life. It helped to build my knowledge of torque, inertia, friction, angular momentum, and how gravity affects objects on Earth. Bloomfield explained these concepts in the context of common objects, for example, skateboards, see-saws, and ramps. I received a certificate of verification, was proud of my overall grade of 98%, and the experience confirmed my desire to immerse myself in physical and mathematical sciences at university.

In addition to my love for Physics, I am an enthusiastic musician playing both piano and bassoon at grade 8 level, and I play a modest amount of guitar. I am in the school choir and orchestra, and I am eager to play music as I continue with my education. I also love sport and am a member of various teams, such as swimming, rugby, and hockey. I am also Head of House and a school prefect.

Example Reference – Physics

Gordon is highly intelligent, quick-thinking and holds himself to very high personal standards. In his early years, as he applied himself to music, he quickly rose to grade 8 in piano and is now playing bassoon at the same level. His profound curiosity now draws him to Physics and he has an immense appreciation for the fundamental nature of the subject; recognising that it addresses the deepest questions in science and provides the foundations for further understanding. He is fascinated by the great mysteries that remain and by the ability of the human mind to overcome its frequently abstract nature. He delights in solving problems, bringing to bear the same focus that he applies to music, and excelling as he tackles questions that are well beyond the limits of A-level. In addition to his top academic performance, he also manages to juggle his Head of House, School Prefect and musical responsibilities; demonstrating an impressive capacity and resilience that will stand him in good stead for a demanding undergraduate course and that enables us to recommend him unreservedly.

In Physics, Gordon demonstrates an eye for detail and outstanding intuition. He has the ability to 'see' the answer when others need to draw diagrams and perform calculations. He works through challenging questions rapidly, including those from the British Physics Olympiad. Being quick to spot inadequacies in explanations is often the first step of his journey towards greater understanding. For example, he immediately recognised that how two waves travelling in opposite directions in 'open-open' pipes form a standing wave is not clearly explained in common A-level presentations of harmonics. This prompted him to delve deeper and learn how pressure changes at the end of the pipe can lead to a new wave. His desire to pursue Physics beyond the limits of the syllabus was also demonstrated by his attendance of a masterclass by Cambridge lecturers and his work on computational simulations of celestial mechanics.

Gordon is focussed and engaged in Mathematics and is incredibly numerate and determined to succeed. He has been an exceptional member of the Further Mathematics class, standing out in several ways, not least by being top of his year group in the end-of-year exams. He grasped new and unfamiliar concepts such as complex numbers and matrices quickly and a particular strength of his is the rapidity with which he spots ways to attack problems. He propagates a sense of fun around the class when working, and demonstrates resilience and perseverance when faced with longer and more demanding questions. He always seeks out the most demanding questions and attends all of the optional after-school extension classes, submitting excellent solutions to extension problems; indeed, he was the first in his year group to complete a STEP 2 question. He enjoys applying mechanics and combinatorics to real-world situations, and he is fascinated by more abstract fields such as number theory. He appreciates the importance of mathematical notation, supporting his solutions with carefully presented arguments, enabling him to produce particularly outstanding work with series, roots of polynomials, and proofs by induction.

In Chemistry, Gordon delights in looking at abstract theory from all angles and is very successful in linking this to practical outcomes. His highly motivated approach has enabled him to establish a genuinely holistic understanding of Chemistry. He routinely links topics across the syllabus and to other subjects, such is his drive to see the whole picture. He picked up organic mechanisms very quickly and applied these with ease to unfamiliar complex molecules. He also uses his impressive mathematical skills to excel in physical chemistry, most notably in rates and equilibria. He is thorough in everything that he does and has proved himself to be very proficient in the laboratory. His thoughtful and independent approach makes him a delight to teach.

Example Personal Statement – History Of Art

When I consider Art History, what emerges is an image of a magnificent yet incomplete tower, like the Tower of Babel. Built to reach heaven, at first Babel's builders were united in their task but were confounded by God and divided by language. I see myself as trying to rebuild the tower; driven by my endless curiosity, I seek to collect scattered knowledge and unite it to reach the 'heaven' of deeper understanding.

In Lockdown, the media cycle of disaster and hope prompted me to study Bosch's 'Garden of Earthly Delights'. With its absurd figures and vignettes that feel at odds with other religious paintings of the period, I was attracted by his tendency to confuse and challenge the natural rule whilst many of his contemporaries were injecting greater order and rationality into their work. I approached my reading of the work from different perspectives including sociology, psychology, and philosophy and in doing so, I found that none of the disciplines is isolated from the other.

Taine suggested an artist can never shed the influence of period, ethnic identity, living customs and geographic environment in his 'Philosophie de L'art'. And yet, despite similar circumstances, Bosch's works don't present many similarities with his contemporaries. This paradox led me to focus more on the artists themselves in the first instance. Margot Wittkower asserts in 'Born Under Saturn' that an 'artistic' temperament of depression and obsession renders artists unique. I found Bosch to be a pessimist with a strict ethical ideology, which explained the subject matter of his works, but did not satisfy me as to why he depicted these scenes so surreally. Some scholars link his style of his work to 'Ignis Sancti Antonii', which can trigger hallucinations; they believe that Bosch was affected. While this is not verifiable, it interested me in the idea of hallucination and its links to creativity by showing the 'nonexistent'; I am intrigued by examples such as the thought that the Eleusinian Mysteries attended by Plato may have featured psychoactive kykeon. These considerations of illusion and reality, the concrete and the abstract are so interesting to me because I see similar intersections between the philosophy of Chinese Literati paintings and Western Modernism with Chinese augury and astrology, Buddhism, Tao and Ching Theory.

I also see connections between these beliefs and western psychology, as demonstrated in the works of 20th Century Chinese artists who travelled to Paris and incorporated their traditional artistic philosophies with Western forms. Chinese traditional culture is deeply influential to me; at school in Shanghai, I was selected for recognition for my essay associating Song dynasty porcelain with modern Minimalist aesthetics. I apply this international perspective frequently and while I speak Chinese and English, I am learning Sanskrit and Spanish so that I can access an even broader range of art and scholarship. I also consider field study and wherever possible interviews as vital to my research. When I studied the Dun Huang frescos, I travelled there to learn directly from local experts and my own observation. While a trainee at the LISSON Gallery, I researched artists in one of the exhibitions through interviews and drew connections between their ideologies and the forms of their art. From this research, I wrote and delivered tours for the exhibition. I have also interviewed the artist and archaeologist Bing Yi about her documentary work as well as the founder of the How Gallery about his experiences in curating, which opened my eyes to the impact of market forces in art.

The Tower of Babel was destroyed due to mortal hubris, but I am not discouraged. Humanity may once have been united in a shared understanding; I wish to unite within me these scattered, diverse perspectives so that the deeper my understanding can be. Though a tower to heaven may be a vain hope, I remain driven by the desire to learn more.

Example Reference – History of Art

Gordon joined Stowe School from Shanghai last year and quickly emerged as a remarkable, highly able student, with an exceptional and genuine love for Art History. Making the considerable adjustment to a new education system with ease, her creative and conscientious approach to her studies stands out, while her maturity, clear individuality and kindness are highly valued by her peers. She is unrivalled in her performance in the Art History classroom, performing particularly well in a test on Visual Analysis and an essay on Identities and Renaissance, and she routinely and comfortably achieves the top mark in her year group.

Gordon's intellectual curiosity is insatiable. With a subtle tilt of her head, one can see an idea plant itself in her mind and know that she will not rest until she has explored it fully. She regularly returns to the classroom after a weekend to discuss some independent reading. Recently one of her peers made a passing comment as to whether a similarity between mountains in Chinese ink paintings and an Italian Renaissance painting were coincidental. Whilst most students would be satisfied with wondering, Gordon not only spent the weekend researching whether such a connection would be anachronistic, she even reached out to a Chinese academic to affirm her conclusions.

Gordon came to us with impressive school reports from China, and at Stowe she has proven herself capable of reaching the highest standards in all of her subjects. Her excellent performance in her Year 12 end-of year examinations, in which she achieved top grades in each of her subjects, provides a further indication of her potential. We are confident in top grades for her A-Levels, and impressed by her positive attitude and her dedicated approach to her studies. She has a keen eye for detail, her analytical skills are impressive, and she goes above and beyond curricular requirements in her research and reading. Shrewd and perceptive, she assimilates new work without difficulty, and her enthusiasm to learn and her analytical mindset make her a pleasure to teach. She is gifted in Mathematics, outperforming all other students in exams; achieving an astonishing 99% at the end of Year 1, 98% in a recent test on Year 2 functions, and a Silver award in the UKMT Senior Maths Challenge. For her EPQ, Gordon combined her many and varied interests, producing a hand-drawn, animated short film, complete with original musical score, looking at the concept of misery within Buddhism. Realised to an exceptionally high standard, her abstract film was complex, original and displayed a level of sophistication that exceeds the majority of her peers. For this project, Gordon also began a personal study of Sanskrit, which she continues alongside learning Spanish in her own time. In Art, Gordon is quite simply outstanding; brimming with artistic talent that excitingly is not limited to any media or format, and her portfolio again proves her impressively analytical mind. We marvel at how she finds the time to produce work of such quality and, moreover, at how her intentions go beyond any superficial appearance. Gordon's work offers in-depth reflections that surpass the capabilities of many adults, let alone any student.

Outside the classroom, Gordon has taken a Futurelearn course in dementia training and has used her study of the arts of Kintsugi and lacquer-work to raise money for charity. LAMDA lessons have helped her to flourish and grow in confidence. In the holidays, she writes for a Chinese producer who creates content on traditional Chinese culture and art. She has considerable poise along with a serious and mature outlook on life that make her a pleasure to be around.

Gordon is an exceptional student with a strong intellect and the capacity to excel. Her commitment and love for Art History is genuine and she is more than ready for the opportunity to study it further. We recommend in the strongest terms, and without hesitation.

Example Personal Statement – Drama

“Theatre-makers are aware of the ephemerality of what they’re making... In the end, everything is only going to exist in the memories of people”. Olivier Award-winning stage designer Es Devlin encapsulates the reality of what draws me to this field. The challenge of constructing a narrative space that will remain close to someone in their memory for years after, whether it be as permanent as Charles Holden’s monumental Senate House or as deliberately impermanent as Tom Piper’s installation ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red’, is what fascinates me about this interdisciplinary approach to creation. It’s the key difference between being the designer of a constructed space and an architect of human emotion. Taking an idea from concept to reality requires a skill-set that I have invested time learning. At twelve, I helped in a boat yard, producing designs on Google Sketch-up of underwater hotels, quirky museums and open-air theatres. I have since spent holidays learning about architecture on three separate RIBA courses, studying stage design at Central St Martins, and designing a cityscape during UCL’s Bartlett School of Architecture Summer School. In 2017, I was accepted as a member of the National Youth Theatre, where I worked as a scenic constructor. With this track record, in 2018, I was offered work experience at Set-up Scenery, deployed as a constructor on the colossal set for Royal Opera House’s production of Lohengrin. I have applied this invaluable knowledge in Drama A level, designing concepts for Antigone: a News Room Studio, capturing action using live feed; A Taste of Honey: a bare concrete council flat in the shape of industrial square bee hives; and for Top Girls: a private room in a Mayfair restaurant with parallels to The Last Supper. For this, I found the Mechanics Module and elements in the Pure Module, in Maths A Level crucial to the planning process. My approach to Art A Level has also been construction based with my theme of Underlying Structure, both in physical spaces and within the dissection of the narrative environment. I strongly believe that creativity does not have to be limited to one sphere. I wrote a five-act play based on the Epilogue of ‘The Tempest’ for my EPQ. It begins with an actor playing Prospero who is not “released from his bands” when a school audience fails to applaud. In film, I have experimented with production, directing a short thriller and creating a trailer for my EPQ. I have worked as a student technician and lighting designer and am also passionate about acting. I have appeared in many school productions, including playing the lead role of Winston in 1984, and have achieved Grade 8 with Distinction in Musical Theatre, playing roles including Lumiere in ‘Beauty and the Beast’ and Thenardier in ‘Les Miserables’. I have undertaken three acting masterclasses for the National Youth Theatre, including one on Performing Shakespeare and have attended lectures by Simon Russell Beale and Simon Callow to better understand the creative process from the actors’ point of view. When choosing universities, I took advice from people working in architecture, film, television and theatre. I am aware that successful designers can end up working across genres. Eve Stewart, whom I met after a lecture, is an example of someone who started in theatre and increasingly works on film. And the Bartlett School’s alumni include legendary Production designer Ken Adams who studied Architecture, while director Christopher Nolan studied English at UCL. My experience working as part of a production team means that I find it natural to work collaboratively. I was selected as a leader in my group for the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award and I am a school prefect. Being bilingual in English and Croatian, I am used to working with people from diverse and international backgrounds. I also founded the first society to support LGBT+ pupils in the 100 year-old history of my school. Twice winner of the Academic Drama prize I have also been awarded two major school prizes (Stoic awards) for my contribution to Drama.