

# Interview Workshop

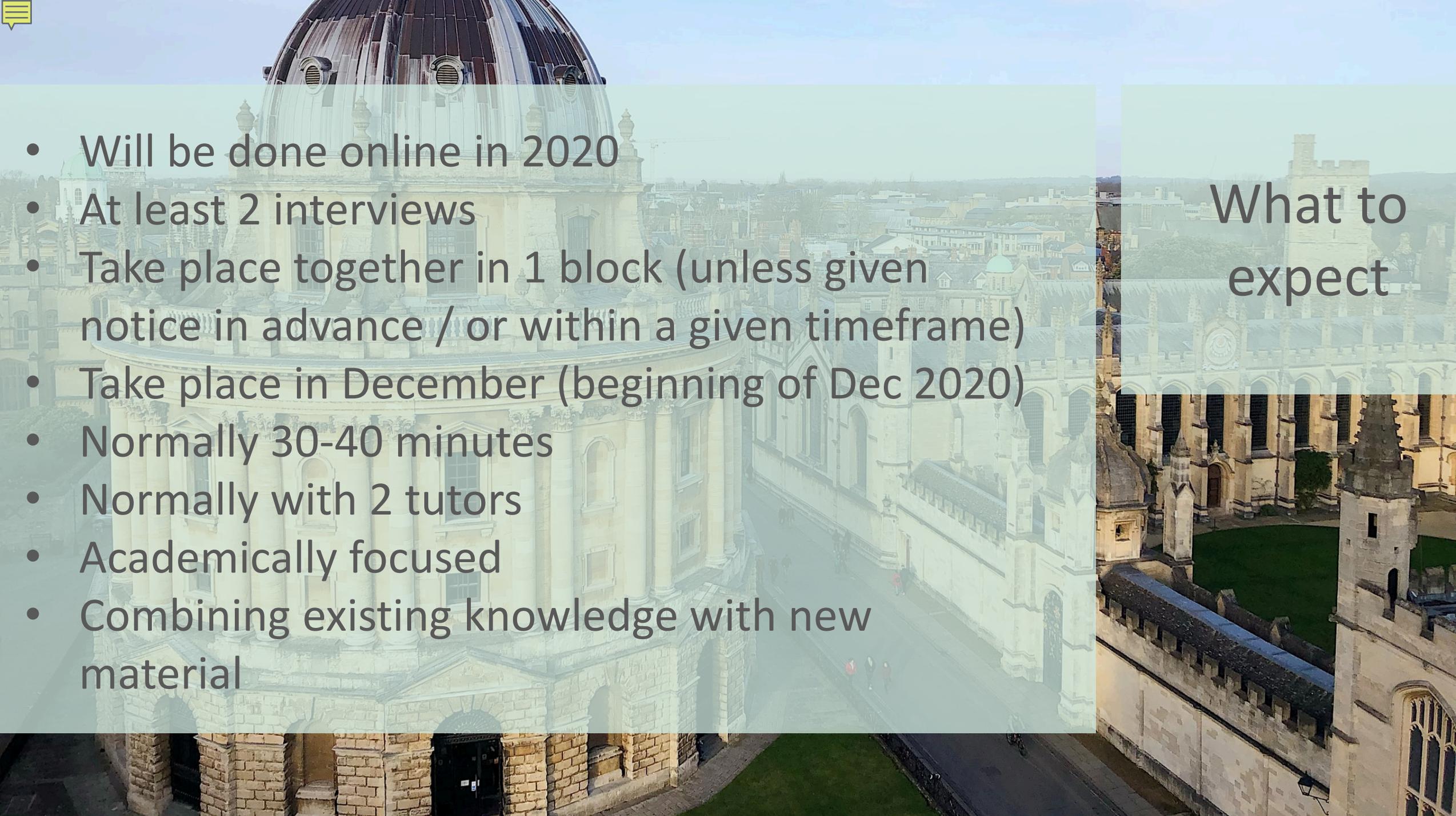
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Wadham College, University of Oxford



- Will be done online in 2020
- At least 2 interviews
- Take place together in 1 block (unless given notice in advance / or within a given timeframe)
- Take place in December (beginning of Dec 2020)
- Normally 30-40 minutes
- Normally with 2 tutors
- Academically focused
- Combining existing knowledge with new material

What to expect



A background image showing two hands shaking over a laptop keyboard, symbolizing an agreement or interview. The image is partially obscured by text boxes.

# Interviews

- Academic ability and potential to succeed
- Self-motivation, commitment and enthusiasm for the chosen course
- Ability to think independently and critically
- Subject-specific selection criteria
- Will go beyond your current knowledge

# INTERVIEWS

“Interviews tell us important things about a candidate which are not captured by grades or test scores.

We can **see how candidates think**, rather than merely parrot information.”

“I interview to find what we call ‘**potential**’ and disentangle it from either poor schooling or coaching.”

“Fundamentally the questions are: can we teach this person in a tutorial situation and will they **thrive** in this environment?”



First they will break the ice...



Why do you want to study the subject?

With the person next to you, decide who is person A and who is person B

Person A: explain to Person B why you'd like to study the subject in 1 min

Person B: is this explanation convincing? Swap!

# Written Work and Personal Statements

“I wrote about the ‘grassroots independence movement in Scotland’ on my personal statement. A large part of my interview was around what ‘*grassroots*’ meant.”

Jack, PPE

“I had mentioned an article in Nature on my personal statement. At interview I got asked follow up questions about it.”

Rosie, Biology



## *What questions could you ask about the below statement?*

“Wanting to learn more about genetics, I read *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins, but instead found myself immersed in his chapter on ageing, and the Medawar theory of late acting genes. While it is true that selective pressures to remove late acting genes from the gene pool are few, I couldn't imagine how conditions could exist that would only express genes late in life. I instead aligned more with the free radical theory of ageing, explained by Nick Lane in his book, *Oxygen*.” - Biochemistry

## *What questions could you ask about the below statement?*

“Wanting to learn more about genetics, I read *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins, but instead found myself immersed in his chapter on ageing, and the Medawar theory of late acting genes. While it is true that selective pressures to remove late acting genes from the gene pool are few, I couldn't imagine how conditions could exist that would only express genes late in life. I instead aligned more with the free radical theory of ageing, explained by Nick Lane in his book, *Oxygen*.” - Biochemistry

Q: Tell me about the free radical theory of ageing?

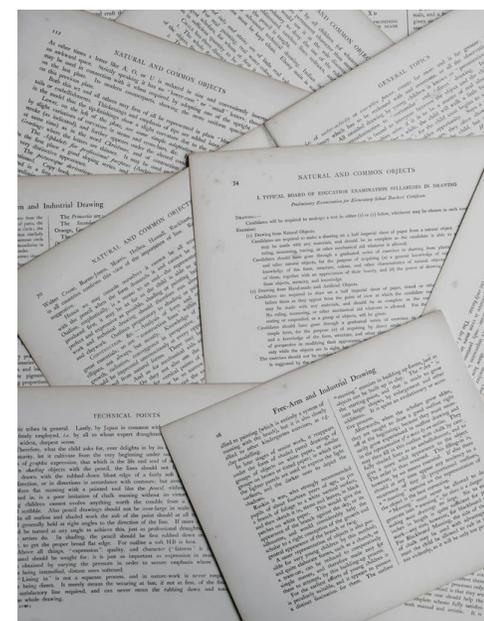
Q: What conditions wouldn't allow genes to express in later life?

Q: Why did you think the free radical theory of ageing was superior to the Medawar theory?



- Before some interviews, you might be given a resource to look at
- During some interviews, you might be given a resource to look at

# Unseen material



## Unseen material

**Earth Science**  
Tell me what  
this rock looks  
like



## English

Read this poem

Don't ask us for the word to square  
our shapeless spirit on all sides,  
and proclaim it in letters of fire, to shine  
like a lost crocus in a dusty field.

Ah, the man who walks secure,  
a friend to others and himself,  
uncaring that high summer prints  
his shadow on a peeling wall!

Don't ask us for the phrase that can open worlds,  
just a few gnarled syllables, dry like a branch.

This, today, is all that we can tell you:  
what we are *not*, what we do *not* want.

## Law

Consider this scenario



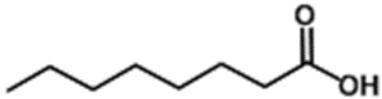
If the punishment for  
parking on double yellow  
lines were death, and  
therefore nobody did it,  
would that be a just and  
effective law?



## Biochemistry

Put these in order of solubility of water

AgCl



NaCl

CuSO<sub>4</sub>·5H<sub>2</sub>O

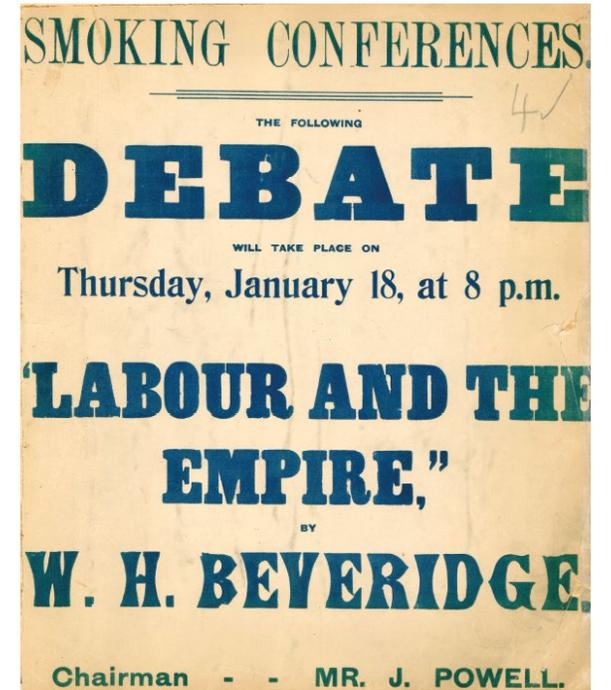


## Experimental Psychology

Consider this scenario

There is a theory that children's language development is more advanced between the ages of 5-6 than it is between the ages 6-7. How would you design an experiment that investigated this theory?

Unseen material



## History

Look at this image



ARTS AND  
HUMANITIES



SCIENCE,  
TECHNOLOGY,  
ENGINEERING AND  
MATHS



# HOW TO PREPARE

## Watch some general videos:

- [www.ox.ac.uk/interviews](http://www.ox.ac.uk/interviews)
- [www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/interviews](http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/interviews)

## Watch some subject specific videos

- Engineering (Trinity Cambridge)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3IYdO0XYL4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3IYdO0XYL4)
- Chemistry (Jesus Oxford)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_Ulc5q2bvl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_Ulc5q2bvl)
- Computer Science (Queens' Cambridge)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7XwKVCBPfM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7XwKVCBPfM)
- Biology (Zoology and Plant Sciences Oxford)  
[www.biology.ox.ac.uk/our-students](http://www.biology.ox.ac.uk/our-students)
- Physics (LMH Oxford)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBwNyEDVQGw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBwNyEDVQGw)
- English (English Faculty Oxford)  
[www.english.ox.ac.uk/what-it](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/what-it)
- Languages (Jesus Oxford)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCvxFNYSMkg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCvxFNYSMkg)
- Law (Law Faculty Oxford)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTMEwoTDJlg&t=410s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTMEwoTDJlg&t=410s)

Look at the Admissions Criteria for your course.  
What are they looking for?

**For example, Philosophy, Politics and Economics:**

- **Application and interest:** capacity for sustained study, motivation and interest, an independent and reflective approach to learning;
- **Reasoning ability:** ability to analyse and solve problems using logical and critical approaches, ability to assess relevance, capacity to construct and critically assess arguments, flexibility and willingness to consider alternative views;
- **Communication:** willingness and ability to express ideas clearly and effectively on paper and orally; ability to listen; ability to give considered responses.

Get used to thinking problems through out loud

Get used to speaking to others about what you're interested in

Work through some examples with a teacher

How to  
prepare...  
talk

## Medicine:

Put these countries in order by their crude mortality (deaths per thousands of the population):

Japan

UK

South Africa

Bangladesh

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Put these countries in order by their crude mortality (deaths per thousands of the population):

Bangladesh

UK

Japan

South Africa

**Earth Sciences:**  
Tell me what this  
rock looks like.



**1: Organise your  
observations**

**2: Be obvious- what  
do you see?**

**3: Why might it  
look this way? Link  
in what you know.**



# Question Examples

**Biology:** ‘Why do some habitats support higher biodiversity than others?’

**Chemistry:** ‘How many different molecules can be made from six carbon atoms and twelve hydrogen atoms?’

**Economics and Management:** ‘If Oxford is deciding what tuition fees to charge, how should I do this?’

**English:** ‘JK Rowling has just published a book for adults after the hugely successful Harry Potter series. In what ways do you think that writing for children is different to writing for adults?’

**Geography:** ‘If I were to visit the area where you live, what would I be interested in?’

**History:** ‘Imagine we had no records about the past at all, except everything to do with sport – how much of the past could we find out about?’

**Law:** ‘If the punishment for parking on double yellow lines were death, and therefore nobody did it, would that be a just and effective law?’

**Mathematics:** How many ways are there to cover a  $2 \times n$  rectangular grid with  $2 \times 1$  tiles?

**Medicine:** ‘Why does your heart rate increase when you exercise?’

**Modern Languages:** ‘In a world where English is a global language, why learn French?’

**Philosophy:** ‘What exactly do you think is involved in blaming someone?’

**Psychology:** ‘A large study appears to show that older siblings consistently score higher than younger siblings on IQ tests. Why would this be?’

**Theology and Religion:** ‘Is someone who risks their own life (and those of others) in extreme sports or endurance activities a hero or a fool?’

# DURING THE INTERVIEW

## *Good idea...*

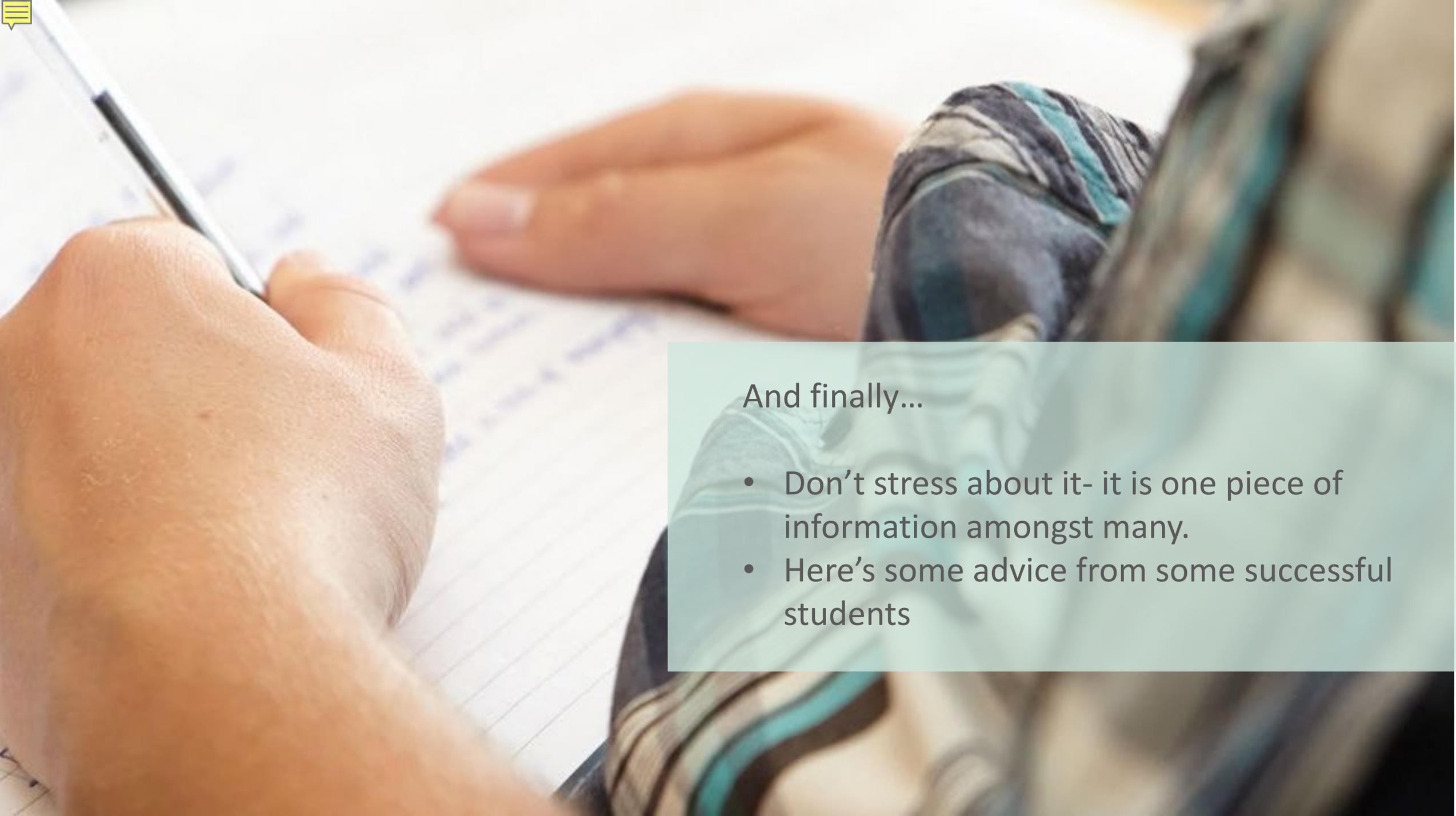
- Listening to the questions you've been asked
- Asking if you don't understand something
- Taking time to think
- If you're working something out, doing it out loud

## *Bad idea...*

- Staying silent
- Refusing to change your mind if the evidence is overwhelming
- Making things up
- Not listening to interviewer feedback

**Use the language of reflection:**

- "What I am thinking is..."
- "I might start with..."
- "If we assume x then y..."
- "What we do/don't know here is..."



And finally...

- Don't stress about it- it is one piece of information amongst many.
- Here's some advice from some successful students

- Research
- Read
- Revise
- Talk

*What are your  
next steps?*

SUMMING  
UP

# Get in touch



Email

[access@wadham.ox.ac.uk](mailto:access@wadham.ox.ac.uk)



Twitter

[@WadhamAccess](https://twitter.com/WadhamAccess)



Website

[wadham.ox.ac.uk](http://wadham.ox.ac.uk)

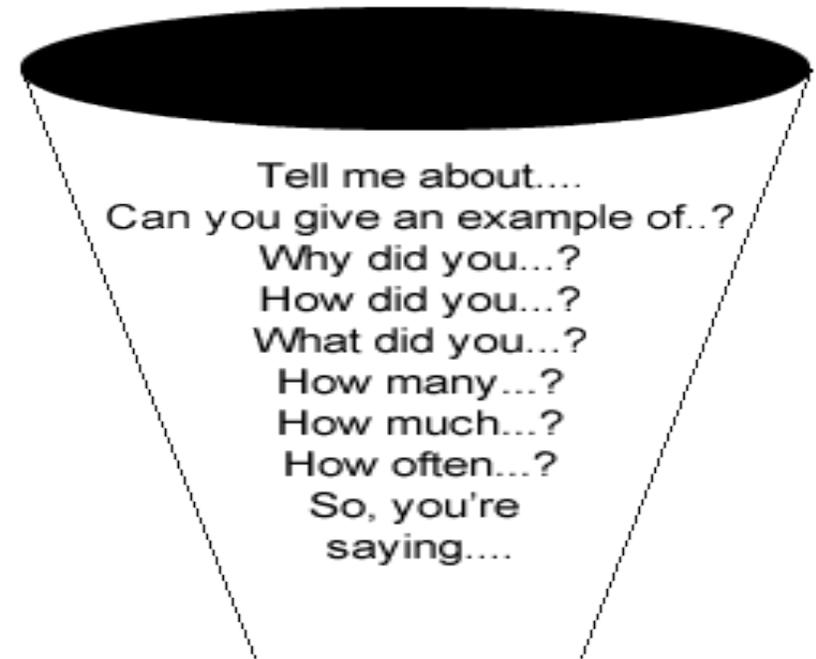
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# Personal Statement questions

Look at your personal statement, and identify two questions you might ask.

Use the question funnel to design two mock interview questions.

## The question funnel



Example

# Political, Philosophy and Economics:

Is violence always  
political?

## Example

**PPE:** Is violence always political?

Follow up may use one of the following:

- Clarification (checking understanding)
- Coherence (checking it makes sense)
- Criticism (what about another point of view?)