Choosing a university and course

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In this talk:

+ Choosing a course

+ Entry requirements

+ Course content

+ League tables

+ Employment opportunities and industry links

+ Course customisation and enrichment

+ Study abroad options

+ Student experience

Choosing a course

+ Have you got a career in mind?

+ What subjects do you enjoy?

+ Most employers look for a degree, not specialist knowledge

  + Transferable skills!

+ A whole new world of subjects out there

  + Oceanography, Creative Computing, Mechatronics…

+ Explore new subjects – taster lectures, online courses, social media accounts
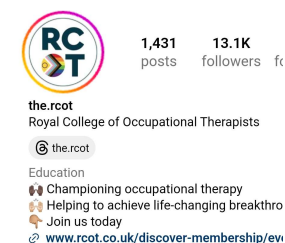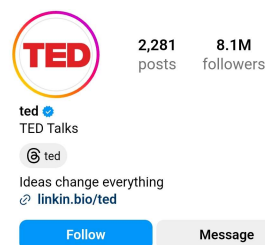
The median graduate salary is over £11,000 more than non-graduates[1]

1) https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-labour-markets/2024, accessed 20/06/2025
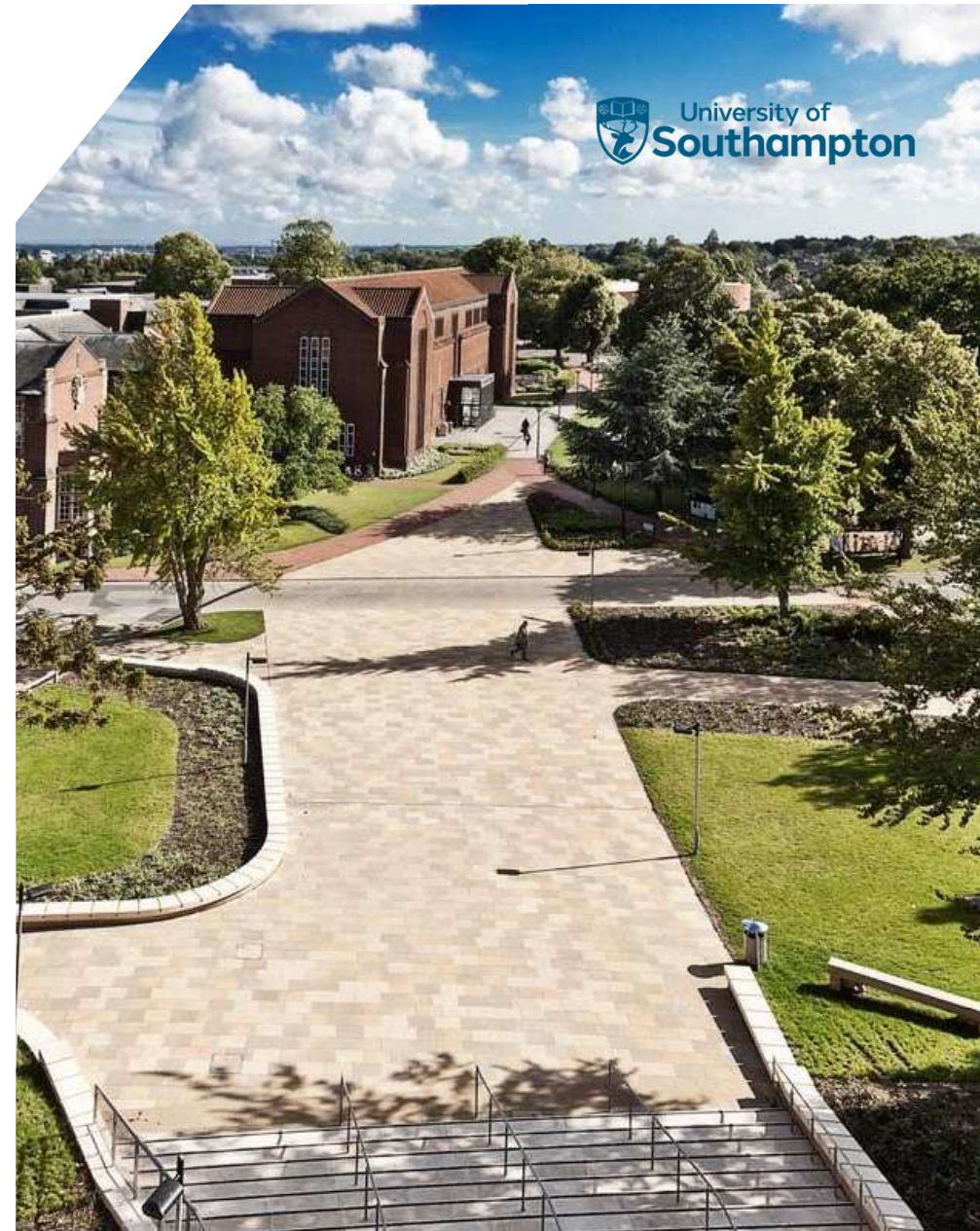
Social media *can* be helpful

Choosing a course

+ Think about entry requirements
  + Be sensible, but nothing wrong with one or two ambitious choices!

+ Course content
  + Check modules!

+ What type of degree?
  + Single or Joint Honours? Or a "with" degree?
  + Placement? Year abroad?
  + Bachelor's vs integrated Master's

+ Scope to customise?

+ Teaching and assessment

Types of courses available

+ Bachelor's degree

  + E.g., BA History, BSc Biology, BEng Mechanical Engineering

+ Integrated Master's degree

  + E.g., MLang French, MChem Chemistry, MEng Mechanical Engineering

+ Single Honours

+ Joint Honours

+ Major/minor combinations

+ Sandwich courses/Placement years

+ Degree Apprenticeship
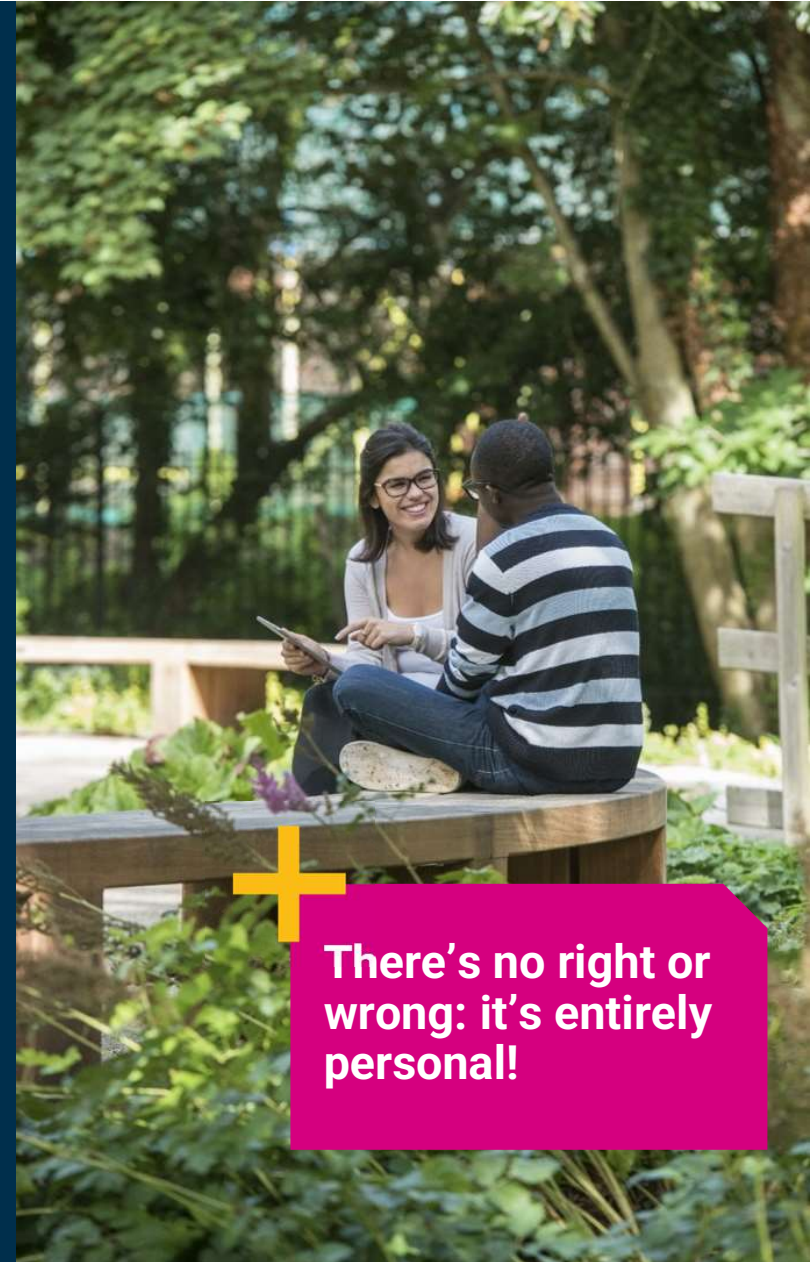
Study - Years 1 & 2

Placement Year

Study - Year 4

Choosing a university

+ What 'feel' and experience are you looking for?

+ Make sure you're happy there

    + Miserable students don't do well

    + Degree classification matters more than institutional reputation[1]

+ Campus or city?

    + Campus: Warwick, Nottingham

    + City: UCL, Edinburgh

    + Multi-campus: Southampton

There's no right or wrong: it's entirely personal!

1) Institute of Fiscal Studies, https://ifs.org.uk/news/higher-degree-classes-are-associated-substantially-higher-earnings, accessed 06/02/2023

Which factors are important to *you?*

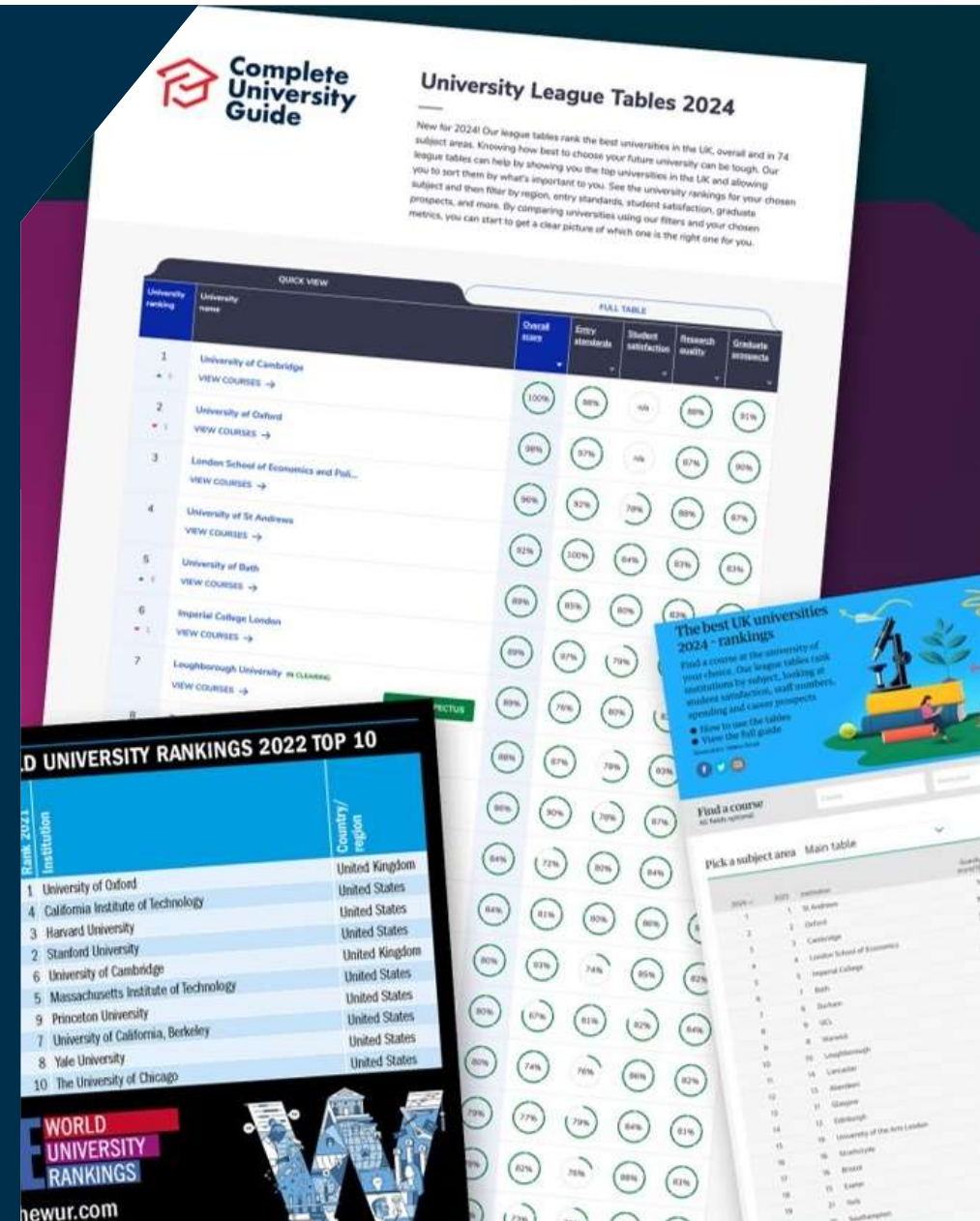| Factor	Priority
Can I live at home and study?	
It offers my subject	
University ranking	
City or campus university	
Employability statistics	
Work placement opportunities	
Working/volunteering abroad opportunities	
Social Life	
Friends going to the same university?	
Impression on Open Day	

Choosing a University: The Russell Group

Choosing a university

+ Specialist institution?

+ League tables

  + 3 main ones for the UK

    ➤ The Guardian

    ➤ Complete University Guide

    ➤ Times Good University Guide

  + Different methodologies. What's important?

  + Subject vs overall institution

    ➤ Nottingham: 62nd overall; Architecture: 11th

    ➤ Brighton: 86th overall; Education: 2nd [1]

+ Don't be blinkered! Consider lots of options

1) Guardian University Guide 2025

Reputation with leading graduate employers

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Table 4.6 Universities Targeted by Largest Number of Top Employers in 2023-2024

	Ranking in 'Good University Guide' *			Ranking in 'Good University Guide' *
1. Birmingham	22		11. Bath	8
2. Manchester	23		12. Sheffield	18
3. Nottingham	32		13. Cambridge	3
4. Leeds	24		14. London King's College	27
5. Bristol	16		15. Oxford	2
6. Warwick	9		16. Edinburgh	13
7. London University College	6		17. Glasgow	12
8. Southampton	17		18. London Imperial College	5
9. Durham	7		19. London Queen Mary	46
10. Exeter	11		20. Liverpool	29

Source – The Graduate Market in 2024

* The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide 2024

"These institutions have attracted the most top graduate employers for virtual university careers fairs, on-campus employer presentations, university-specific virtual events, careers service promotions and initiatives and other locally-run publicity during 2023-24
Source: "The Graduate Market in 2024," High Fliers Research, highfliers.co.uk, accessed 13/06/2024

Targeted by top employers

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Google IBM Shell Network Rail BBC

pwc BARCLAYS Microsoft ALDI NHS

YOUR M&S John Lewis Rolls-Royce KPMG

bp Deloitte. accenture

EY Building a better working world JAGUAR LAND ROVER BRITISH AIRWAYS AIRBUS

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It's not just about the course!

+ Student experience
  + Clubs, societies and sports
    + Activities you want to continue? Or new ones you want to try?
+ Facilities
  + Accommodation
  + Library, gyms, teaching labs etc.
+ Nightlife and social life
+ Student support
+ Careers service

SUSU

CLUBS AND SOCIETIES

ASIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY

BELLY DANCE SOCIETY

FANDOM SOCIETY

FISH ON TOAST

COMEDY SOCIETY

CHAMBER CHOIR

ROBOSOC

University of Southampton

ENACTUS

LACROSSE

ROWING

YOGA SOCIETY

MIND SOCIETY

A21 SOCIETY

BULGARIAN SOCIETY

COCKTAIL SOCIETY

THEATRE GROUP

CHEERLEADING

JAZZMANIX

MAGIC SOCIETY

POTTERY SOCIETY

MEDITATION SOCIETY

ART SOCIETY

CAMEROON CATALYST

MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

ROAD CYCLING

CYBER SECURITY SOCIETY

QUADBALL

DODGEBALL

BALLET SOCIETY

BRASS BAND

ROCK AND METAL MUSIC SOCIETY

JIU-JITSU

QUIZ SOCIETY

LABOUR SOCIETY

AIKIDO

ZUMBA +

POLO

LIGHT OPERA SOCIETY

HISTORY SOCIETY

BEEKEEPING SOCIETY

MEDSOC

CIRCUS SOCIETY

MACAU SOCIETY

SHOWSTOPPERS

HYDRO TEAM

SUB-AQUA

WAKEBOARDING

JAZZ DANCE

CHESS CLUB

CONTEMPORARY DANCE SOCIETY

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

IRISH DANCING

STEAMPUNK SOCIETY

LIVE MUSIC SOCIETY

KORFBALL

WIRELESS SOCIETY

CREATIVE WRITING SOCIETY

BANGLADESH SOCIETY

POLITICS SOCIETY

REAL ALE AND CIDER SOCIETY

WESSEX SAILING CLUB

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

HACKASOTON

FEMINIST SOCIETY

SIGN LANGUAGE SOCIETY

FIRST AID SOCIETY

PIANO SOCIETY

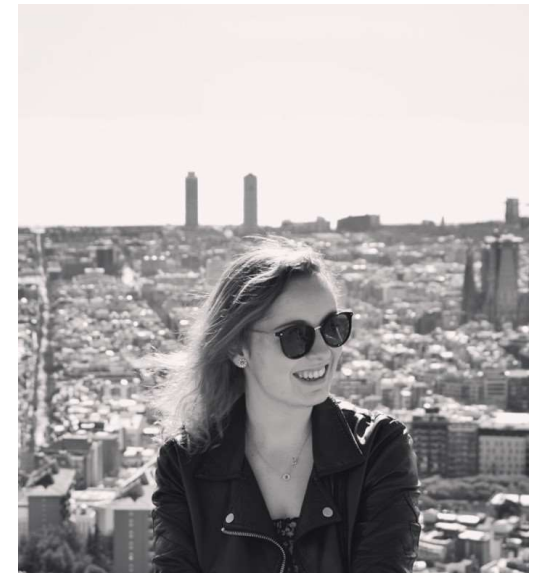TCHOUKBALL

UNION FILMS

STRING ORCHESTRA

It's not just about the course!

+ Study abroad opportunities
  + Almost 300 global partners, including Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, USA, Australia, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Denmark…
  + Length of study abroad?
  + Funding available?
+ Enhance your university experience
  + Volunteering opportunities
  + Language classes (free?)
  + Student representation

Personal statement: top tips

Why is the Personal Statement important?

+ *Is* the Personal Statement important?

  + YES!

+ Your only chance to 'talk' directly to Admissions staff

+ Many subjects *don't* interview – so your Personal Statement could effectively be an electronic 'interview'

+ If you *are* called to interview, your Personal Statement will form the basis for questioning

+ Many applicants will have the same (or very similar) predicted grades as you. Your Personal Statement is a chance to set yourself apart from the competition!

+ BUT all institutions treat Personal Statements differently – and practices can vary within institutions and departments

What do Admissions Tutors look for?

+ A rounded picture to show that you are a suitable candidate for their university, both **academically** and **socially**

Reasons for choosing the course	Subject specific skills	Enthusiasm for your subject	Any work experience, placement or voluntary work	Career plans
Gap year plans	Motivation and commitment	Transferable skills	Extra-curricular hobbies and interests	Why you? What can you offer?

The questions

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Why do you want to study this course or subject?

How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?

What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

The statement

+ Designed to prompt you to link your academic and extra-curricular experiences to your subject

+ 4000 characters in total

  + Characters, *not* words!

+ Minimum 350 characters per section

+ Sections don't have to be equal in size

+ Some things might fit into more than one section – there's no right or wrong!

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Your answers will be read as ONE piece

Q1: Why do you want to study this course or subject?

+ What was your personal motivation?

+ What interests you about it? Does it relate to society or current affairs?

+ Which aspects of the course are you looking forward to studying in more detail, and why?

+ Do you have a career in mind?

+ How have you developed your interest in this subject or course (and profession, if relevant)?

Q2: How have your qualifications or studies helped you prepare for this course or subject?

+ How do your studies **relate** to your chosen course or subject?

+ Relevant or transferable skills

+ Relevant educational achievements (competitions?)

+ Specific modules, topics, projects

+ EPQ?

+ Any qualifications outside school/college?

   + E.g., music or sport qualifications, online courses

   + Only if relevant

Focus on **most recent** and **most relevant**

Q3: What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?

+ Wider reading

+ Online lectures

+ MOOCS

+ Work experience

+ Volunteering

+ Part-time job

+ Hobbies

+ Sports

+ Duke of Edinburgh

+ Podcasts

+ Documentaries

+ Social media

+ Taster Days

+ Events

+ Gap Year

Be **reflective!**
What are the skills you've gained?

Additional experience and skills

+ Write a list of everything you've done over the last one or two years, including:

Paid employment	Volunteering	Travel	Work experience
Extra-curricular groups	Student Union	Prefect	Student paper

+ For each one, consider:

  + What did you learn?

  + Does it relate to your subject in some way?

  + What transferable skills did you gain?

  + Can it be of benefit in university life?

SELF-AWARENESS   PRESENTING   RESPONSE TO A CHALLENGE

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PROACTIVITY   COMMUNICATION   TIME MANAGEMENT   DECISION MAKING

INTELLECTUAL FLEXIBILITY   ENTHUSIASM   TEAMWORK

INITIATIVE   **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**   ATTENTION TO DETAIL

INDEPENDENT THINKING   ANALYSIS   RESEARCH SKILLS

COMMITMENT   PROBLEM SOLVING   LEADERSHIP   FLEXIBILITY

MOTIVATION   NUMERACY   CRITICAL THINKING   FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Top tips

- There's no such thing as the perfect statement!

- Start early

- Make use of UCAS resources

- If you're struggling, ignore sentences!

  - Ignore question one (for now)

  - Start with bullet points, or a mind map, or two-word phrases, *then* turn it into full sentences and paragraphs

- Draft in Word, **spell check** AND **proofread** before you paste into UCAS

- Keep a copy in case of interview

- **DON'T** plagiarise

When asked why I like Mathematics, I realised that it is all down to my personality. Being a composed, explicit person, I enjoy the challenge of questions with unequivocal answers. My character's orderly side draws me enthusiastically towards neat solutions; my creativity gives rise to my acceptance of new ideas and my positive mind results in my wish to succeed. My propensity for Mathematics is derived from its systematic, yet far from simplistic nature. Problems can, in fact must, be solved through the use of logic and intellect; solutions can never be realised through the customary memorisation of facts and definitions associated with other disciplines, yet there is a distinct and logical order to all things Mathematical which, to me, epitomises my passion for the subject. Mathematics at A Level has opened my mind to several new areas of algebra, sequences and series, and functions. Mathematics provides me with problem solving skills primarily calculus, as well as trigonometry and its identities which for me are the pinnacle in mathematics. In my opinion every query has an explicit solution; we just need to construct ways of attaining them. I have keenly welcomed the new techniques and enjoyed all aspects of the course. I look forward to investigating these topics further at undergraduate level.

In pursuing computer science I have been fascinated by technology in general and computers in particular from an early age. I possess a great thirst for knowledge and learning new disciplines and I am inspired by the subject complexity and beauty. The intricacy of computing and its applications in the world amaze me; from the breaking of the enigma code for the victory of World War II, to aiding the human genome project for scientific advances, to algorithmic trading for increasing the efficiency of financial markets all the way through to sparking the current and future digital revolution.

At school I have been given the responsibilities of being Captain of Golf. Skills I have built from this responsibility include the organisation of others, along with teamwork and the ability to represent my fellow pupils. The speeches I give to conclude every match have furthered my public speaking and confidence. I enjoy using computers as a hobby and to broaden my skills I have been on many computing courses ranging from how to build them to web design.

During my free time I keep myself informed of recent news by reading newspapers such as "The Times" and "The Guardian". I regularly attend the gym and take pleasure in participating in sports such as golf. I am working towards completing my Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award, however, at the moment I am focusing on my 'A' levels.

I trust that throughout this brief statement I have satisfied you of my interest and commitment to the study of Mathematics and Computer Science. I believe I will make a positive contribution to your university and aspire to have the opportunity to demonstrate this to you. Though driven and resilient, I am still aware of the challenges that loom ahead. Through my various work experiences and extra-curricular activities, I believe I have developed both the aptitude and qualifications to excel.

There are 16 similar sentences, which is 67% of the sentences considered.

These 6 sentences were found in a Personal Statement submitted on May 23, 2007

These 5 sentences were found in a Personal Statement submitted on Nov 30, 2005

These 5 sentences were found in a Personal Statement submitted on Nov 6, 2008

Personal statement: a checklist

+ **Don't** repeat information

+ **Don't** offer irrelevant information

+ **Don't** run it through a thesaurus

+ **Avoid** trying to be funny

+ **Don't** be vague or ambiguous

+ **Avoid** clichés

+ **DO** think about spelling and grammar

+ **DO** add comments, views and explanations

+ **DO** use your own experiences and **reflect**

+ **DO** sound like you!

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