Current UCAS Structure

1. Why do you want to study this subject?
2. How have your qualifications & studies prepared you?
3. What else have you done outside formal education & why was it useful?



What strong personal statements show

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

STRONG CONTENT

- A specific academic interest
- Relevant evidence from study or exploration
- Reflection on what the student learned
- A clear connection to the degree
- A few examples explored in depth

STRONG WRITING

- Clear and direct language
- The student's own voice
- Accurate, truthful claims
- No repetition between sections
- Every sentence earns its space

The UCAS personal statement rules

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

THREE QUESTIONS

1. Why this course or subject?

2. How have your studies prepared you?

3. What have you done outside formal education, and why was it useful?

CHARACTER LIMIT

4,000 characters in total, including spaces.

Each answer must contain at least **350** characters.

The answers do not need to be equal in length.

ONE SHARED STATEMENT

All choices receive the same answers.

Admissions staff read the three answers together.

Avoid naming a university or repeating the same example.

Course-specific selection criteria still matter. Check every university and course page.

Personal statement dos

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

ACADEMIC EVIDENCE

- Identify a specific subject interest
- Select relevant assignments or projects
- Discuss supercurricular exploration
- Explain one or two ideas in depth
- Show how your thinking developed

PERSONAL EVIDENCE

- Use genuine experiences
- Explain your individual contribution
- Reflect on challenges and limitations
- Connect transferable skills to the course
- Be ready to discuss every claim

Personal statement don’ts

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

AVOID GENERIC CLAIMS

- ‘I have always been passionate’
- ‘This subject affects everyone’
- ‘I learned many valuable skills’
- ‘I am the perfect candidate’
- Dictionary definitions and quotations

AVOID UNHELPFUL CONTENT

- Lists of books with no reflection
- Repeating grades and qualifications
- Naming one university
- Exaggerating work experience
- Inventing activities or using copied text

The evidence, reflection and relevance test

HIGHFLIERS ACADEMY

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

1 EVIDENCE

What did you study, read, investigate, create, observe or do?

2 REFLECTION

What did you learn, question, compare or reconsider?

3 RELEVANCE

How did this prepare you for the proposed degree?

THE SENTENCE TEST

If a sentence only says that something was ‘interesting’, add the idea encountered and explain what it made you think about.

Section 1: Why do you want to study this subject?

UCAS SECTION 1

WHAT TO SHOW

Show a specific academic interest, how it developed and what you want to explore further.

COMMON MISTAKE

Avoid relying on childhood stories, career status or unsupported passion.

Motivation needs evidence.

Section 1 example: Medicine

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"I have always wanted to become a doctor because I enjoy helping people. Doctors save lives, and I am caring and hardworking."

STRONGER VERSION

"Observing a community health clinic showed me that explaining a treatment can be as important as identifying it. Exploring health literacy helped me understand how evidence and trust influence patient care."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The applicant moves from observation to further enquiry and shows a realistic understanding of medicine.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Scientific curiosity, judgement and patient communication

Section 1 example: Engineering

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"I have loved engineering since childhood and enjoy building things. I am good at maths and want to create solutions for Africa."

STRONGER VERSION

"While testing a small water-pump prototype, I found that a working mechanism was not necessarily an efficient one. Changing the pipe diameter made me examine how friction, material choice and maintenance constrain design."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The example shows testing, learning and an understanding that engineering involves practical trade-offs.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Problem-solving, iteration and practical constraints

Section 1 example: Economics

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"Economics affects everyone. I want to understand inflation and use my degree to improve my country's economy."

STRONGER VERSION

"Rising food and transport prices made me question why inflation affects households differently. Reading about monetary policy led me to explore the tension between controlling prices and protecting employment."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

A current issue becomes a focused economic question involving competing outcomes.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Analytical curiosity and willingness to test assumptions

Section 1 example: Politics

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"Politics matters because there is corruption and bad leadership in Africa. I want to become a leader and change society."

STRONGER VERSION

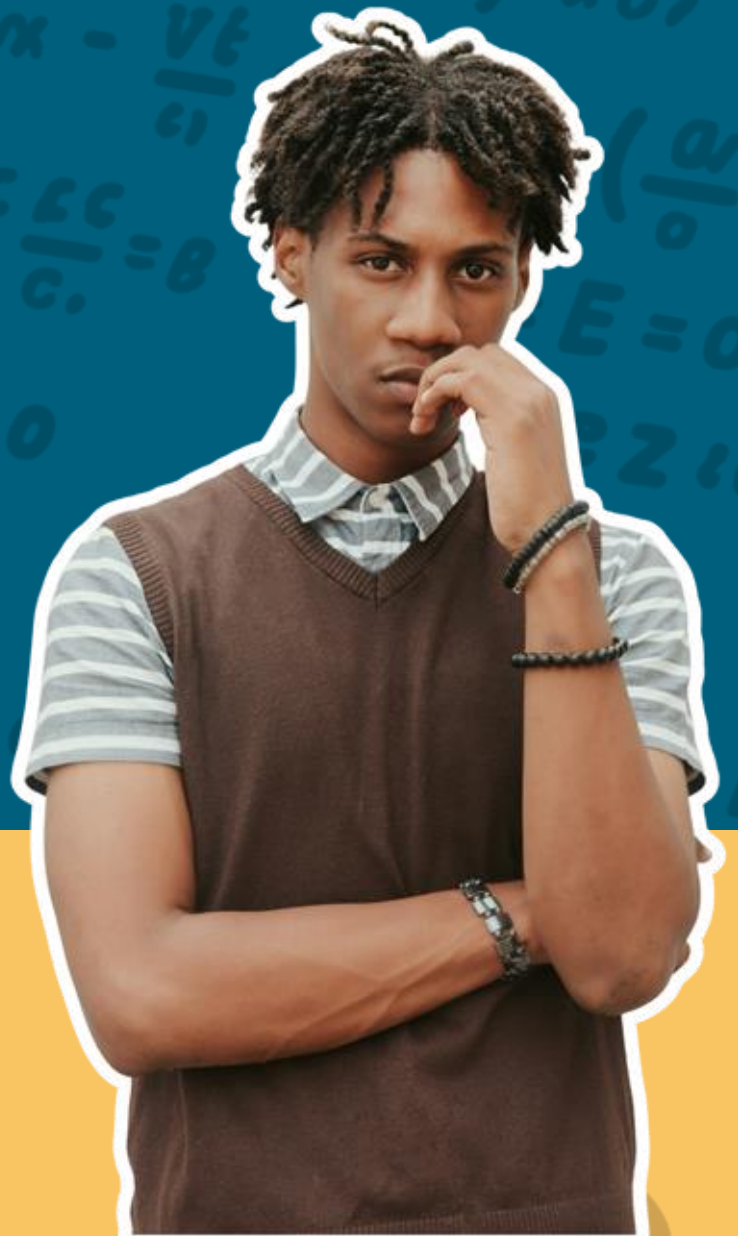
"A debate on restrictions to online speech led me to compare individual liberty with public safety. I became interested in who defines harm and how institutions justify limits on political rights."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The applicant replaces a broad opinion with a contested question and balanced enquiry.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Engagement with ideas and competing interpretations



ACTIVITY



Section 1 activity: why Engineering?

PAIR ACTIVITY

STARTING TEXT

"Engineering appeals to me because I enjoy solving problems and building things. It is a respected degree with many career options, and I think I would be good at it."

Rewrite it so the reason for choosing Engineering is specific and supported by evidence.

1 FIND THE TRIGGER	2 EXPLAIN THE THINKING	3 SHOW COURSE FIT
Which problem, project or idea sparked the interest?	What did the student investigate, test or learn?	Why does this lead to Engineering?

Section 2: How have your studies prepared you?

HIGHFLIERS ACADEMY

UCAS SECTION 2

WHAT TO SHOW

Select recent and relevant learning. Explain how it developed subject knowledge or academic skills.

COMMON MISTAKE

Avoid listing subjects, grades or generic skills that appear elsewhere.

Explain what the learning enabled you to do.

Section 2 example: Medicine

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"Biology has taught me about the body; Chemistry has taught me about reactions and Mathematics has improved my calculations."

STRONGER VERSION

"Studying enzyme activity showed me how changes in conditions alter a biological process, while Chemistry helped me understand the molecular interactions involved. Designing an investigation also taught me to control variables and recognise limitations in experimental results."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The applicant connects subjects, describes an academic method and identifies the limitations of evidence.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Scientific reasoning and experimental discipline

Section 2 example: Engineering

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"Mathematics and Physics are important for engineering. Design Technology has also helped me become creative."

STRONGER VERSION

"Applying force calculations to a model bridge showed me how load distribution affects stability. When the model failed near one joint, I compared the calculations with the physical result and identified an assumption I had made about equal loading."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The student applies theory, encounters failure and diagnoses the assumption behind it.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Mathematical application and critical evaluation

Section 2 example: Economics

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"Economics taught me supply and demand. Mathematics improved my analytical skills, while Geography taught me about development."

STRONGER VERSION

"Mathematics helped me represent economic relationships precisely, but a Geography investigation into transport access highlighted variables that a simplified model could exclude. I learned to value models while questioning whether their assumptions fit the circumstances examined."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

Several subjects connect around one intellectual issue rather than appearing as a list.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Quantitative reasoning and model evaluation

Section 2 example: Politics

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"History taught me about governments and English improved my essay writing. Economics helped me understand political decisions."

STRONGER VERSION

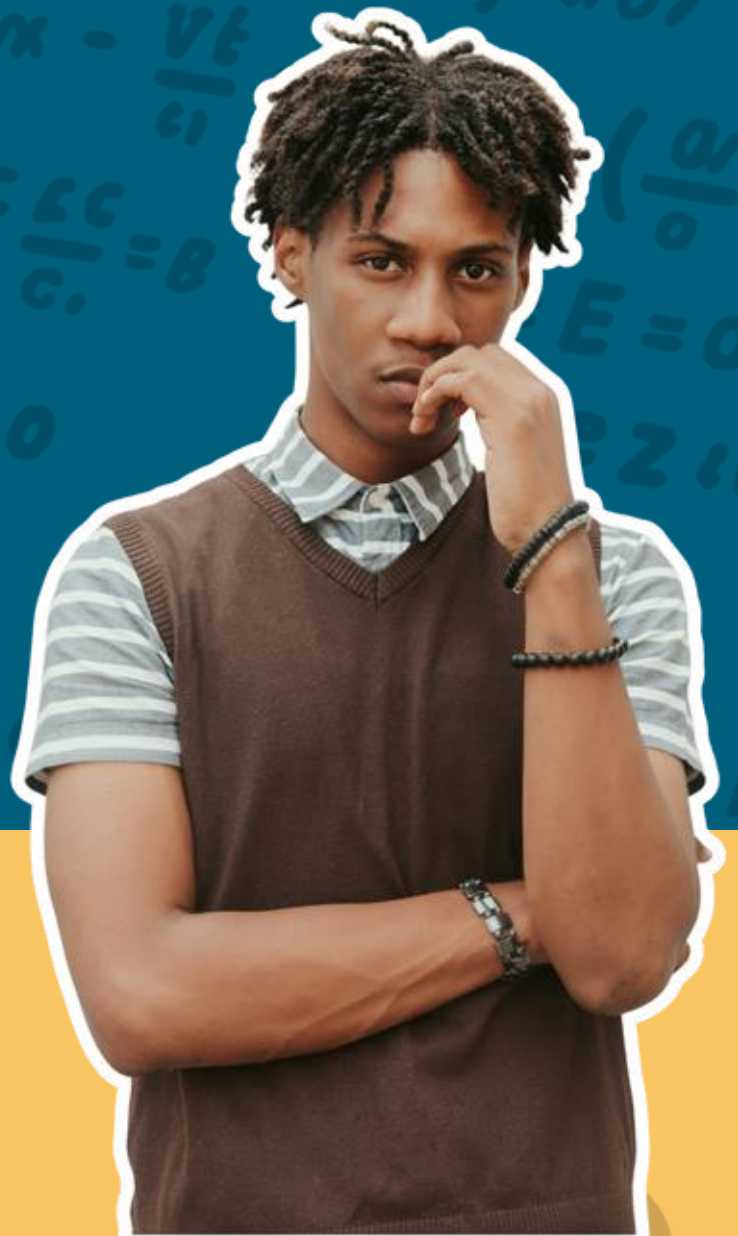
"Comparing historians' interpretations of decolonisation showed me that disagreement can arise from how evidence is selected and weighted. Constructing arguments in English required similar attention to language, perspective and counterinterpretation."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The student demonstrates what critical thinking looks like rather than merely claiming to possess it.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Evidence, interpretation and structured argument



ACTIVITY



Section 2 activity: study skills for Law

PAIR ACTIVITY

STARTING TEXT

"History and English have prepared me for Law because they developed my research, analysis and communication skills. These skills will help me succeed at university."

Rewrite it using one specific example from the student's current studies.

1 CHOOSE AN EXAMPLE

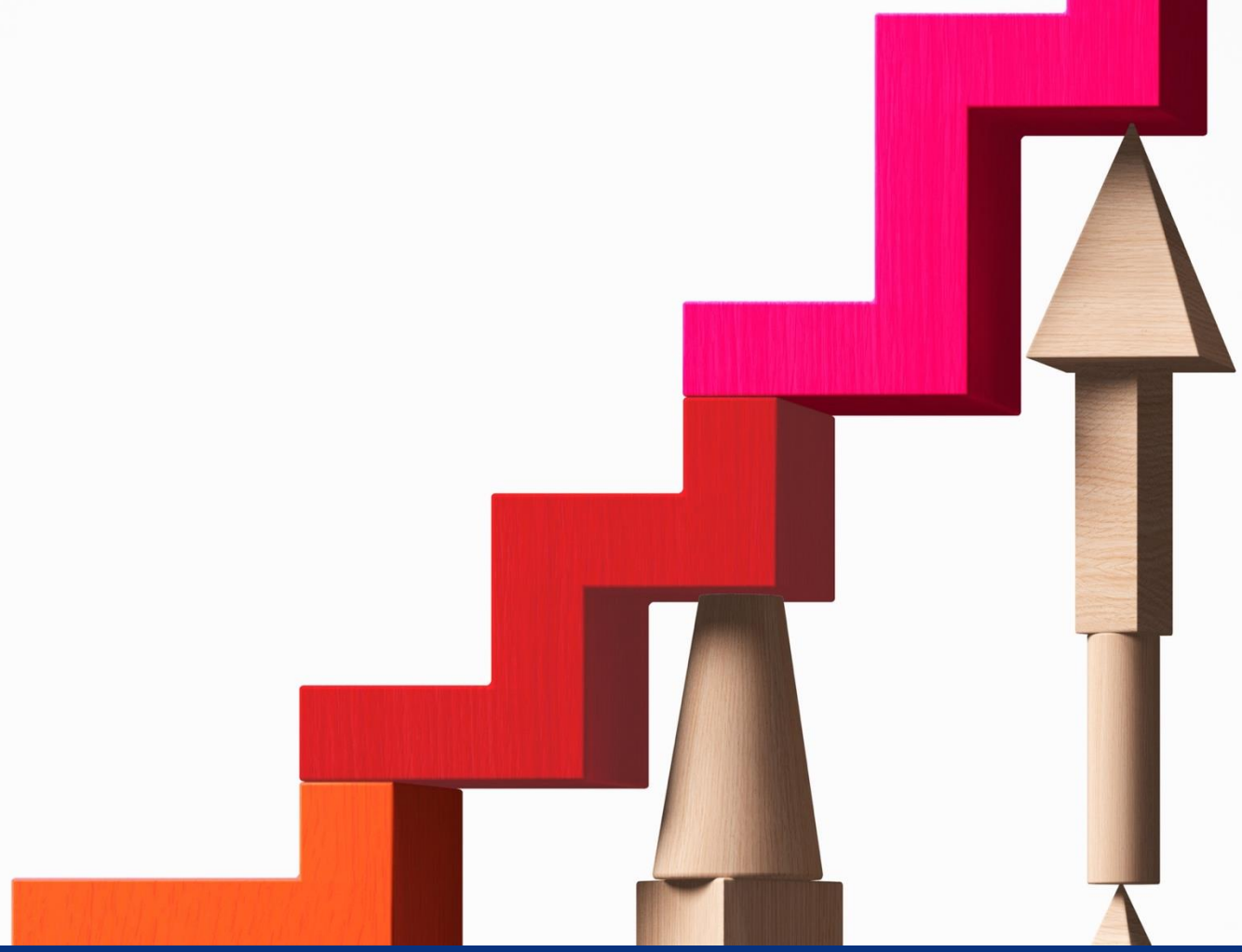
Which topic, essay or source will the student use?

2 SHOW THE SKILL

How did the student analyse evidence or build an argument?

3 LINK TO LAW

How will this help with legal study?



Supercurricular Examples

Section 3: What have you done outside education?

UCAS SECTION 3

WHAT TO SHOW

Use reading, projects, employment, caring, volunteering or work experience. Explain why it mattered.

COMMON MISTAKE

The activity is not the evidence on its own. Reflection creates the value.

Experience becomes useful when you interpret it.

Section 3 example: Medicine

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"I volunteered at a hospital and shadowed a doctor. I observed many patients and learned a lot. Volunteering also proves that I am compassionate."

STRONGER VERSION

"Supporting younger pupils in a reading programme taught me that repeating the same explanation did not help every learner. Adapting my approach made me reflect on the patience and flexibility required when communicating with someone who feels uncertain."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The applicant reflects on accessible caring experience without exaggerating clinical responsibility.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Communication, adaptability and insight into caring

Section 3 example: Engineering

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"I watched engineering videos, completed online courses and joined a science competition. These developed teamwork and problem-solving."

STRONGER VERSION

"An open lecture on flood-resistant infrastructure challenged my assumption that larger drains always provide the best protection. Case studies showed how maintenance, waste disposal and land use can undermine a technically sound design."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

Independent learning changes the student's assumptions and develops a more realistic view of design.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Self-directed exploration and systems thinking

Section 3 example: Economics

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"I read The Undercover Economist, follow financial news and listen to economics podcasts. I also won a business competition."

STRONGER VERSION

"Reading about scarcity made me question whether consumer choice always indicates preference. Where income is limited and alternatives are few, an apparent choice may reveal constraint rather than satisfaction."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The applicant explores an idea instead of name-dropping books and activities.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Critical engagement with economic concepts

Section 3 example: Politics

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

WEAK VERSION

"I am president of the debate club and take part in Model United Nations. These developed leadership, teamwork and confidence."

STRONGER VERSION

"Representing a position I did not initially support at Model United Nations taught me to distinguish between explaining an argument and endorsing it. I learned to present a position fairly before challenging its evidence and assumptions."

WHY THE STRONGER VERSION WORKS

The activity produces an intellectual lesson that connects directly with political study.

ADMISSIONS LENS

Fair-minded analysis and evidence-based challenge

Two courses, one personal statement

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

RELATED COURSES

Focus on the academic territory they share.

Economics + Politics

"Economics explains how incentives shape choices, while politics examines who has authority to make those choices. I am interested in how governments balance economic outcomes with public priorities."

VERY DIFFERENT COURSES

A statement divided between unrelated subjects may appear unfocused.

- Reconsider whether the list is coherent
- Identify any genuine common ground
- Contact the outlying university
- Ask whether it accepts an additional statement
- Never send one unless invited

Joint degrees should address both disciplines. All UCAS choices receive the same answers.

One applicant across all three sections

ECONOMICS EXAMPLE

1 MOTIVATION

Rising food and transport prices made me question why inflation affects households differently.

Reading about monetary policy led me to explore the tension between controlling prices and protecting employment.

2 STUDIES

Mathematics helped me represent economic relationships precisely, while a Geography investigation highlighted variables that a simplified model could exclude.

I learned to use models while questioning their assumptions.

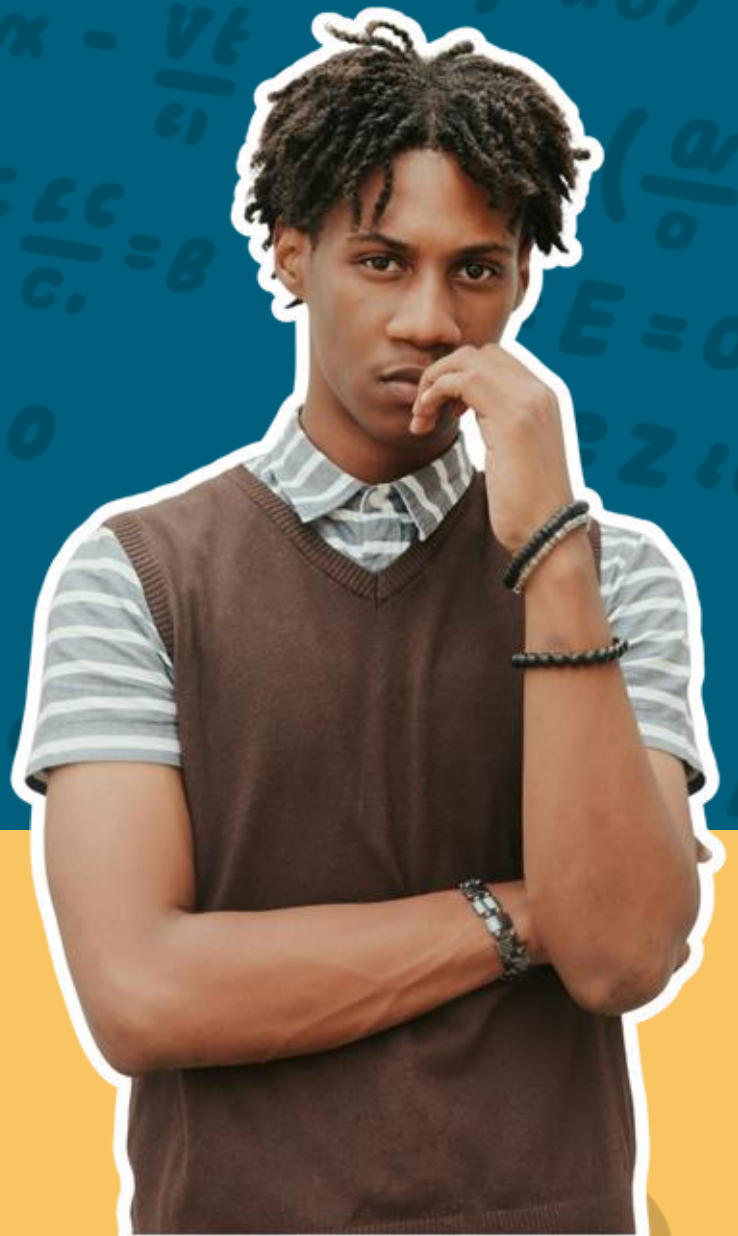
3 OUTSIDE EDUCATION

Reading about scarcity made me reconsider whether every market decision represents free preference.

Comparing food-price reports from two countries showed how household spending patterns can alter the effect of the same headline rate.



Q&A



ACTIVITY



Clinic activity: improve the evidence

PAIR ACTIVITY

STARTING TEXT

"I attended a webinar about climate change. It was very interesting and increased my knowledge. I also developed research and communication skills."

Rewrite it using only facts that the student could genuinely evidence.

1 NAME THE IDEA

What exactly did the student encounter?

2 EXPLAIN THE THINKING

What did it make the student question?

3 LINK TO THE COURSE

Why is the insight relevant?

Final personal statement checklist

PERSONAL STATEMENT CLINIC

CONTENT

- ✓ Each section answers its question
- ✓ Examples are specific and relevant
- ✓ Activities include reflection
- ✓ The course link is clear
- ✓ Different sections do not repeat evidence

ACCURACY AND VOICE

- ✓ Every claim is truthful
- ✓ The student could discuss it at interview
- ✓ No university is named
- ✓ Language sounds natural
- ✓ Spelling and grammar are checked
- ✓ The total fits the UCAS limit