

# Scholars Guide for Applicants – Canada

**Disclaimer:** This guide is **NOT** an official communication from the Rhodes Trust. It was prepared by current and alumni Rhodes Scholars with the hope that all candidates have equal access to sufficient guidance for preparing for the Rhodes Scholarship application.

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## GENERAL ADVICE

- **Take a chance on yourself and just apply.** If you meet the basic eligibility criteria—nationality, education/residency, age, academic achievement, English language, and number of application attempts—we encourage you to just apply and give it your best shot. Many Scholars enter the application process highly unsure of their chances only to be pleasantly surprised later.
- **Embrace the process of discovery that comes with applying.** The process of applying for the scholarship itself can be extremely rewarding as it provides the opportunity to both learn about yourself, your values, and your past experiences. You will also get the chance to hone important skills such as writing essays, requesting recommendation letters, and telling your personal story.
- **Be gentle with yourself.** Applying for a competitive scholarship can be a daunting and anxiety-inducing process. It is normal to feel self-doubt or inadequacy during the application process but remember: *your worth is not defined by the outcome of your application*, and that everyone has both strengths and weaknesses. A common self-invalidating misconception is that a Rhodes Scholar has everything figured out. This is untrue—it is more important to recognize your starting

point, the road you have taken, and the experiences that have shaped you and your aspirations. Focus on what you do have—not what you don’t—and focus on the next steps you have control over—the next word, the next document, the next person to talk to.

- **Reach out to a mentor or anyone who is invested in your growth.** You will likely find it encouraging to speak to a mentor about your intent to apply for the scholarship. A mentor could be a lecturer, a supervisor, a coach – someone who you can seek advice from and is genuinely invested in your growth. They can provide you with insights, resources and connections that may not otherwise be readily available to you. When you vocalize your motivations, they can help by providing an external perspective on aspects of your experiences that you should enhance or omit from your application. Ultimately, seek out support and remember that you do not have to go through this daunting journey alone.
- **Read the [“Information for Candidates”](#) document very carefully:** These are the official guidelines from the Rhodes Trust. Make sure you understand all the requirements listed and all the documents you need to submit.
- **Give yourself ample time to prepare your application.** There are four main sets of documents to submit—a personal statement (*an opportunity to share one or two compelling personal reflections or experiences*), an academic statement (*an opportunity to share about the course(s) you are interested in studying and how it relates to your current and future ambitions/vision*), recommendation letters (*an opportunity for others to validate and share specific aspects of you from their perspectives*), and a CV (*a short list of achievements to add more colour*). That’s a lot to do, so make sure you start early, plan ahead and break down the work into small and manageable tasks over a good period.
- **Think about how the individual application components can complement each other to form a cohesive story.** You will be submitting academic transcripts, a CV, recommendation letters, an academic statement, and a personal statement when applying for the Rhodes Scholarship. If you are nominated and become a finalist, you will also attend a final interview. Think of each of these components as ingredients for a larger story, which will demonstrate to the Selection Committee how you holistically meet the outlined criteria for the scholarship. As such, you should prepare each component with this in mind, as they will all have a role in conveying who you are, where you have been, and what you stand for. What story would you like to tell? How would you like to tell it? What story does each component tell? If your CV or recommendation letter (sometimes one can guess what they would say) talks about a particular experience, you might not want to repeat it again in your personal statement if it doesn’t add value to the reader. Or if you do, you ought to elaborate and deepen that information so that it adds value. Remember there is a word-count limit for the statements and a limited time to engage with interviewers, so use the space wisely.

- **Proofread and ensure linguistic and grammatical accuracy:** It would be a shame for the assessors to be distracted from your main message by grammatical errors.

*“I gained a lot from the application process. Once you treat it as an exercise of self-reflection and a way of discovering who you are, it becomes much easier and more rewarding to put together a strong application. And, it gives you a strong sense of what the right next step is for you, regardless of the application outcome.”* **Sarah Mackenzie, Prairies & Green Templeton 2021**

**Constance Bourguignon (Québec & Lady Margaret Hall 2020) and Virginie Simoneau-Gilbert (Québec & Pembroke 2020)** share their reflections on the application process: <https://universityaffairs.ca/career-advice/graduate-matters/becoming-rhodes-scholars-preparing-the-application/>.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

*If after reading the Information for Candidates you still have questions on topics such as what course is covered, the required GPA et cetera, we suggest you read the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section of the Rhodes Trust website [here](#). If you still have further questions that aren't addressed in this section, do not hesitate to send an email to: [scholarship.queries@rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk](mailto:scholarship.queries@rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk), or the Canadian secretariat: [Canada.Secretary@rhodestrust.com](mailto:Canada.Secretary@rhodestrust.com).*

### Other questions that scholars receive frequently:

- **Can I see your personal statement?** Maybe. The response to the request will vary from scholar to scholar. If they say no, it is less about gatekeeping and more about the fact that the personal statement is... personal. As outlined in the Information for Candidates document, your personal statement should be 100% your work. It is a piece of writing that represents your most authentic self, so don't get too caught up in reproducing what others have done.
- **How do I stand out?** Be AUTHENTIC, and as honest as possible throughout the process.
- **I did not graduate from one of the top universities in my Constituency. Can I still apply?** Students from all universities are encouraged to apply. The most important thing is that you are meeting the eligibility criteria for your constituency (this includes the entry requirements for [your chosen course of study at the University of Oxford](#)).
- **Do applicants need to be well-rounded in various fields?** The selection committee considers the applicant's background and personal achievements, across [four main selection criteria](#). They look for evidence of effort and accomplishments in the context of the applicant's environment.

We hope applicants will not be discouraged from applying due to a perceived lack of skills or qualities in certain areas.

- **Do you have a strong preference for applicants studying liberal arts and social science? Are women or men (or applicants of other gender/ethnic profiles) at an advantage in the selection process?** The Rhodes Scholarship selection process is designed to identify and select outstanding individuals based on their individual merits and achievements, without giving undue advantage to any specific group. The goal is to ensure a fair and equitable evaluation for all candidates, regardless of gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin, color, religion, social background, caste, disability, or field of study. Current Scholars and Alumni come from a wide variety of backgrounds. You can find their profiles [here](#).

## REFERENCE LETTERS

*The Application for the Canadian Scholarships requires six references: a minimum of three 'Academic' References and two or more 'Character' References (please refer to the Information for Candidates for full details).*

### On Referees - Who?

- **Build relationships early.** To have a referee, you need to proactively cultivate relationships with your supervisors, professors, or others in supervisory positions as you go through your academic and/or work journey. This is not to say that you build relationships for the sole purpose of a recommendation letter. Rather, foster genuine relationships with them so they might write a recommendation letter that reflects your character and the depth of that relationship. In the event where you have already graduated and are worried about whether the professors will remember you, it would be recommended to reach out to them and remind them of who you are, provide a CV and some reference material (if relevant), and ask to meet and discuss your intentions if necessary.
- **Your referee should be someone who knows you well and has a high regard for you.** For example, if it is an academic referee, they should know more about you than simply the grade you received in their class. Can they speak to your strengths and weaknesses? Can they comment on your readiness for further study? Can they speak to your leadership skills?

- **Your referee should be someone with considerable experience that they can benchmark their reference against; however, their rank is not as important as the quality of their recommendation.** If your referee has supervised hundreds of students and notes you are among the top 1% of students they have seen, then that is much more meaningful than a referee who has not seen as many students. Similarly, someone with deep knowledge of your field might be more well-suited to comment on how you fit into that field. That said, if they do not know you well and can only write a brief and impersonal letter, this is unlikely to help your application even if they are quite senior.
- **Your referees should complement each other.** Ideally, they should know you from different contexts and be able to comment on different aspects of your personality and abilities.
- **Your referee should be a reliable person** who you can count on to submit the reference letter in a timely manner. Ensure that you check in and remind them if the submission date is approaching - it is your responsibility to ensure that your application is complete.
- **Be prepared to pivot.** This is one part of the application that is relatively out of your hands. As the deadline nears, providing an early checkpoint or reminder (rather than a day or two before the closing date) to your referees could be helpful, as they may juggle other responsibilities. This also provides sufficient and appropriate time to approach new potential referees, should you encounter unforeseen difficulties.

### **References - How?**

- **We recommend contacting your potential referee** in person (or online) six to eight weeks (preferably more) before the deadline to let them know of your intention to apply for the Rhodes and gauge whether they are inclined to support your application. Ideally, they would be excited for you!
- If you feel like they would be a good referee, **follow up with an email** requesting their letter. Be direct and clear (e.g., “Would you be willing and able to write a **strong** reference letter on my behalf?”). Suggest that you would be interested in meeting them to discuss things further if it would help enhance their reference.
- **Provide your referees with all the information they would need to write the letter.** This information might include:
  - Formal [Guide for Referees](#) by the Rhodes Trust.

- A detailed copy of your CV so that they are aware of the activities you were involved in during your studies.
  - Your transcript.
  - Papers you had written in their class (if relevant).
  - Clear instructions on how the reference letter needs to be submitted.
- **We strongly recommend against ghost-writing or editing the letter for your referee.** First, the selection committee is experienced enough to determine whether a letter is genuinely written by the referee. Ghost-writing might also result in your voice, rather than the voice of your referee, awkwardly seeping through. Usually, your referees will be able to write a much stronger reference for you than you could write yourself. Second, having many different voices in your application is generally a good thing. It helps paint a more holistic and three-dimensional picture of you. Third, and most importantly, these requests generally contravene most policies around academic honesty.

## CV/RESUME

Please follow the guidance provided in the [Information for Candidates](#).

- **Use bullet points.** Try to keep each bullet line to one or two sentences. Remember that the more you include in the CV/Resume, the more you risk diluting your key messages.
- **Employ action verbs.** Action verbs make sentences more tangible (e.g., *Designed, Administered, Revised, Composed, Persuaded*).
- **Describe your responsibilities and impact concretely.** Try to be as accurate as you can about your role(s): it's as important to not exaggerate what you did as it is to not downplay your part in something. What were you responsible for? What did you achieve? You could consider using the popular STAR (Situation, Task, Action, and Result) method. With every bullet point or work experience, you would try to cover all four items. You would describe a situation at your community, workplace, or university (Situation), the challenges you faced (Task), the steps you took to address the issue (Action) and the results of your action (Results).  
Example: *Raised X amount of money in 24 hours (Result) to fund life-saving surgeries for refugee victims injured by the earthquake (Task/Situation) through a well-crafted campaign with social media influencers (Action).*

- **Use clear and simple headers for readability.** If you are unsure what fits best for you, some common headings might include: *Education, Experiences (could be subdivided e.g., into work, leadership, volunteer/community, etc.), Awards, Publications (if relevant).*
- **Do not shy away from speaking confidently about your achievements.** List your extracurricular activities and do not hesitate to detail these activities: How long, at which level, any leadership role held, or prize(s)/award(s) won etc. Your extracurricular activities illustrate your ability to use your talents to the full which is a key selection criterion for the scholarship.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

*The Personal Statement is one of the most important components in the application process. It is an opportunity for you to tell your story in your own voice and show the selectors who you are.*

- **First and foremost, make sure you have read the 'Personal Statement' section of the Information for Candidates** – it contains useful guidance and details the three prompts as well as what is expected of you.
- **Start your drafts as early as possible and keep revising and polishing them.** Many applicants find it challenging to organize answers to the three questions on the first attempt. The key is to explore various dimensions of your answers and the underlying logic connecting the prompt's three aspects: individual, community, and world. Talking to friends and people you trust can help you reflect and improve.
- **Begin however you can, but don't be discouraged if you don't immediately come up with ideas/answers.** Let the process take its time. Also try things out, write your ideas out and see where they can take you. Don't be afraid to delete or discard drafts!
- **Write down some of your most formative experiences** at work, school, or at home as well as your favourite hobbies and then further ask yourself:
  - Why these experiences or activities matter so much to you,
  - What you've learned from these experiences,
  - How they link up with the values of the Scholarship
  - What you intend to do in Oxford and beyond
- **Be introspective** and speak to the parts of your life that most touch/confuse you, don't stick to what you might think selectors want to hear. Keep asking yourself 'why' questions.

- **Reflect on your motivations.** Think deeply about why you are applying for the Rhodes Scholarship. What drives you to pursue this opportunity? How does it align with your long-term goals? Being clear about your motivations will help you convey genuine passion and commitment.
- **Think carefully about when to ‘show’ and when to ‘tell’ your experiences.** It is sometimes more effective to write 'I raised X amount of money for the less privileged through a charity event of Y number of participants' instead of simply *telling* the audience 'I care about social issues'. Numerical evidence isn't the only way of showing though. The use of quotes, anecdotes, vivid descriptive language, and strong verbs are effective ways of bringing your experiences to life. But don't overdo it.
- **Contextualize your story within the global context** (the “From your place in the world, how will you use your energy and talents to address humanity’s pressing challenges?” prompt). This is a fantastic opportunity to make a case for how standing up for your cause is fighting the world’s fight.
- The reader should be able to easily grasp **your ‘self, others and the world’** responses after reading the statement. Check if your final statement brings together these key elements and answers all the prompts. One way to evaluate the quality of your final statement is by checking if it successfully connects:
  - Your motives/inspirations
  - Your learnings Activities/passions
  - Your goals
  - The values of the scholarship together.
- **Be authentic.**
  - **While using GenAI** (e.g., ChatGPT) is not prohibited, please keep in mind that the output provided by such tools is generic. It is unable to capture nuances or create a personal narrative. Using such tools to write your essay will not allow you to stand apart from other applicants. The reviewers want to know more about you as a person. They want to understand your aspirations and what drives you. No GenAI tool will be able to capture all those things that make you unique. Make sure you read [the Rhodes Trust guidance on use of AI](#) carefully.
  - **Answer the questions as truthfully and as authentically** as possible without thinking of what would entertain the reviewer/assessor: you don't know about this at all.
- **Be reader centric.** Be kind and sensitive to your readers by making sure your final statement is:
  - Readable
  - Comprehensible
  - Concise



Is the document easy to read? Does it flow well from head to tail? Have you completed a spelling/grammar check? Is your statement within the word limit? Does it use bombastic or obscure language for the sake of trying to sound smart—i.e., could you simplify your sentences? Does every sentence say something different and useful? In the end, it is a single piece of writing, so make sure the statement is compelling and coherent as a whole instead of disconnected paragraphs.

- **Make it your goal to try rather than to succeed.** Finishing the application in and of itself could be a great motivational force.

“Something that really helped me with working through the cohesiveness of my statements was this: When I got to what I thought was the final draft of my statement, I went through it line-by-line like a copy editor and asked myself: What work is this sentence doing for me? Does it contribute to my overall story? If I were to be asked about this sentence in an interview, what would I say? And only once I was satisfied with that did, I move on to the next sentence. This exercise also really helped with interview prep.” *Canada Scholar, 2021*

## ACADEMIC STATEMENT

*The academic statement examines your motivation for further studies at Oxford, your understanding of the courses that interest you, and how the Rhodes Scholarship relates to your future academic or professional development:*

- **Carry out in-depth research about the [Oxford course\(s\)](#) you wish to take.** Read up more about the specific course(s) you want to take. Who are the professors? What is it known for? What interesting projects do they do? What is the learning culture like in the department?
- **Be concise and provide short, concrete points/examples/evidence.** You have approximately 20 sentences to convince the selection committee on paper that you will be able to gain admission to and thrive within your chosen Oxford Department. This is an exercise to convey how your academic interest fits into an area of study at Oxford and connect this to your past and future in very few words.
- **Link the proposed Oxford course(s) to your previous studies/experiences.** Demonstrate how your past studies have prepared you to excel in your proposed Oxford course(s). What acquired skills would prove advantageous? What related classes have you taken? What has motivated you to explore further? You could describe any relevant work/ experience/internships/attachments.

- **Discuss impact.** Consider how your studies at Oxford will enable you to make a broader impact. This could be in terms of advancing knowledge in your field, addressing societal issues, or contributing to solving local/global challenges. Some fields of study may not seem to have obvious impacts. You may refer to prominent figures in your field to get some inspiration.

## THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT EVENT & THE FINALIST INTERVIEW

*If you've made it to this stage, congratulations!*

### Preparation for the social event & finalist interview:

- **Be mindful of the dress code.** Whether for online interviews or in-person events, it is always important to dress professionally and present a positive image of yourself. This doesn't mean you need to purchase expensive clothing; simply ensure your attire is neat and appropriate. If you are unsure about the dress code, do not hesitate to ask the National Secretary and prepare accordingly.
- **Practice for your interviews with the people who are around you (e.g. friends, professors et cetera).** Doing so can help you vocalize and frame your answers to commonly asked questions in a concise, easy-to-grasp, and effective way. It would also help you present the best version of yourself to the panellists and identify key themes of your past experiences you may want to highlight during the interview. This can help you think through your answers out loud in a safe environment and receive feedback on how it sounds. Remember, your answers should be concise, easy to understand, thoughtful and jargon-free.
- **Know the material you have submitted VERY well and be prepared to answer questions about any of the application's components.** Think of any gaps in your CV, a low grade you received, or a pivot in direction (e.g., you completed a degree in computer science and now want to pursue biology) and sketch out an explanation for those. No need to memorize answers, but it would be good to think of the main points you would like to mention.
- **Stay up to date with current affairs in your constituency and globally.** Make efforts to keep yourself up to date with news in your constituency through various news platforms. When reading the news, don't just consume information passively, make sure you have an opinion on the issue you're reading about. While it is not possible to know about everything out there, you should be well-versed in those issues relevant to your area of interest.

- **Practice expressing what matters to you.** Some people prefer writing in a journal or recording voice notes. Additionally, having casual conversations with mentors, family, and friends can be helpful.
- **Prepare answers to some generic questions** such as the ones below (please note that these aren't guaranteed interview questions):
  - Tell me about yourself
  - How have you demonstrated leadership?
  - What are your strengths?
  - What are your weaknesses?
  - Why do you want to study at Oxford?
  - What are your plans for the future?
- **Do not over-prepare so much that you end up sounding too rehearsed.** The interview is supposed to be a conversation that flows organically, so you don't want to end up just reciting memorized answers.

#### **During the social event & finalist interview:**

- **Have fun and be curious.** One amazing thing about being a finalist is that you'll be surrounded by other incredible candidates as well, with whom you would interact during the pre-interview social. Be curious about their journey, talk to them, and ask them questions. There's lots you can learn from others! You might make some really good friends.
- **Relax and avoid comparison.** It's human to compare yourself with fellow finalists and you might feel pressured to outshine everyone. Remember all of you are unique and have made it to this stage. Focus on enjoying the event and getting to know the other attendants.
- **Use the social engagement event to get to know the selection committee.** The social engagement event presents a great opportunity to meet the committee in a relaxed setting before the interview and get to know them a bit. This can be a good ice breaker and a great way to make you feel more comfortable during the interview.
- **Be genuine.** The selection committee wants to know who you are and what you think, not what you think they want to hear.

- **Think of your interviewers as people.** It is easy and normal to feel intimidated by the selection panel, especially since it often comprises prominent people from your constituency, but one good mind trick is to think of each and every one of them as ordinary people, as human beings. Be respectful but try your best to converse with them like how you would when sharing ideas, thoughts, and perspectives with your university peers. Don't be afraid of asking the panellists questions, whether you're asking for clarification or challenging a point of view.
- **Be flexible.** The panellists are there to pick your brain, know more about you beyond your application material and assess your fit for the scholarship. Hence, you may be presented with an alternative perspective or asked to defend yours. If this happens, know that the panellists genuinely want to understand your thought process, rather than appear challenging or confrontational.
- **Make your focus not to have a "winning interview," but a meaningful one.** That's an experience no one can take away, and having this mindset will help bring about your most genuine self.
- **In the interview, do not hesitate to take time to think of your answers.** Of course, do not take ages to reply, but it is perfectly fine to pause for a few seconds and structure your answer.
- **Give concise and structured answers; do not ramble.** One useful way to do this is by *taking a second to think before answering*, then answering the question directly and explicitly before elaborating or going into an example. You could also have others time you during mock interviews to make sure you're not rambling. You want your answers to be as concise as possible because this is only a 30-minute (give or take) interview, and every panellist will want to ask you a question. By giving long answers, you end up with fewer questions when you want the panel to get to know you to the greatest extent possible
- **Once you are done answering, stop talking!** When we are nervous, we tend to ramble on and lose the point we are making. Make sure you answer the question and then stop to give the selection committee time to process what you said and ask follow-up questions if needed.
- **If you don't know the answer to something, say so.** Do not make stuff up on the spot because chances are you'll just give a confusing answer that will prompt many more follow up questions. By saying you don't know, the committee will probably move on to another topic, which would give you the chance to highlight how amazing you are.
- **Reflect on your true values.** Ensure that your answers and interactions reflect your core values and principles. Authenticity in your responses will make a stronger impact.

- **Celebrate your achievement this far.** Treat yourself to a lovely meal with friends or family after the interview to celebrate your wonderful journey to this point. Regardless of the outcome, you deserve to mark the occasion!

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### 1. Resources on the Rhodes Trust website

- **Application overview:** These are videos made in collaboration with Rhodes Scholars. They detail each step of the application and contain lots of useful advice:  
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/application-overview/>
- **Webinars and events about the Rhodes Scholarship:**  
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/events-to-learn-more/>
- **Everything to know about the Rhodes Scholarship** (what is it, what it covers, what makes it unique and life in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar):  
<https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/the-rhodes-scholarship/>

### 2. Rhodes Trust Official social media platforms

You might find it helpful to subscribe/follow to the **Rhodes Trust Social Media** platforms. There, you will find videos and posts about the eligibility criteria, methodology and tips on how to apply et cetera. There are also takeovers by scholars sharing their experiences with the application process, life at Oxford and as Rhodes Scholars and responding to Q&As.

- **YouTube** – Rhodes Trust (@RhodesTrust): <https://www.youtube.com/@RhodesTrust/videos>
- **LinkedIn** – Rhodes Trust: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-rhodes-trust/>
- **Instagram** – Rhodes Trust (@rhodestrust):  
<https://www.instagram.com/rhodestrust?igsh=MTVtaDBvMXE1OGhhZg==>
- **TikTok** – Rhodes Trust (@rhodestrust): <https://www.tiktok.com/@rhodestrust>
- **X/Twitter** – Rhodes Trust (@rhodes\_trust): [https://x.com/rhodes\\_trust?lang=en](https://x.com/rhodes_trust?lang=en)

### 3. CVs/Resume

- **Oxford's Career Services Guide:** <https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/cvs>
- **STAR Method:** <https://resumegenius.com/blog/resume-help/star-method-resume>

#### **4. Degrees at Oxford**

- **List of all graduate degrees at Oxford:**  
[www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/courses-a-z-listing](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/courses-a-z-listing)
- **If you prefer to complete a 2nd undergraduate degree:**  
[www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/undergraduate-course-search](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/undergraduate-course-search)

#### **5. Other Scholarships at Oxford**

If you are not successful with the Rhodes Scholarship and would still like to attend Oxford, there are other scholarships that you can consider: <https://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/scholarships/other-scholarship-opportunities/>