

OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE ADMISSIONS AND SELECTION

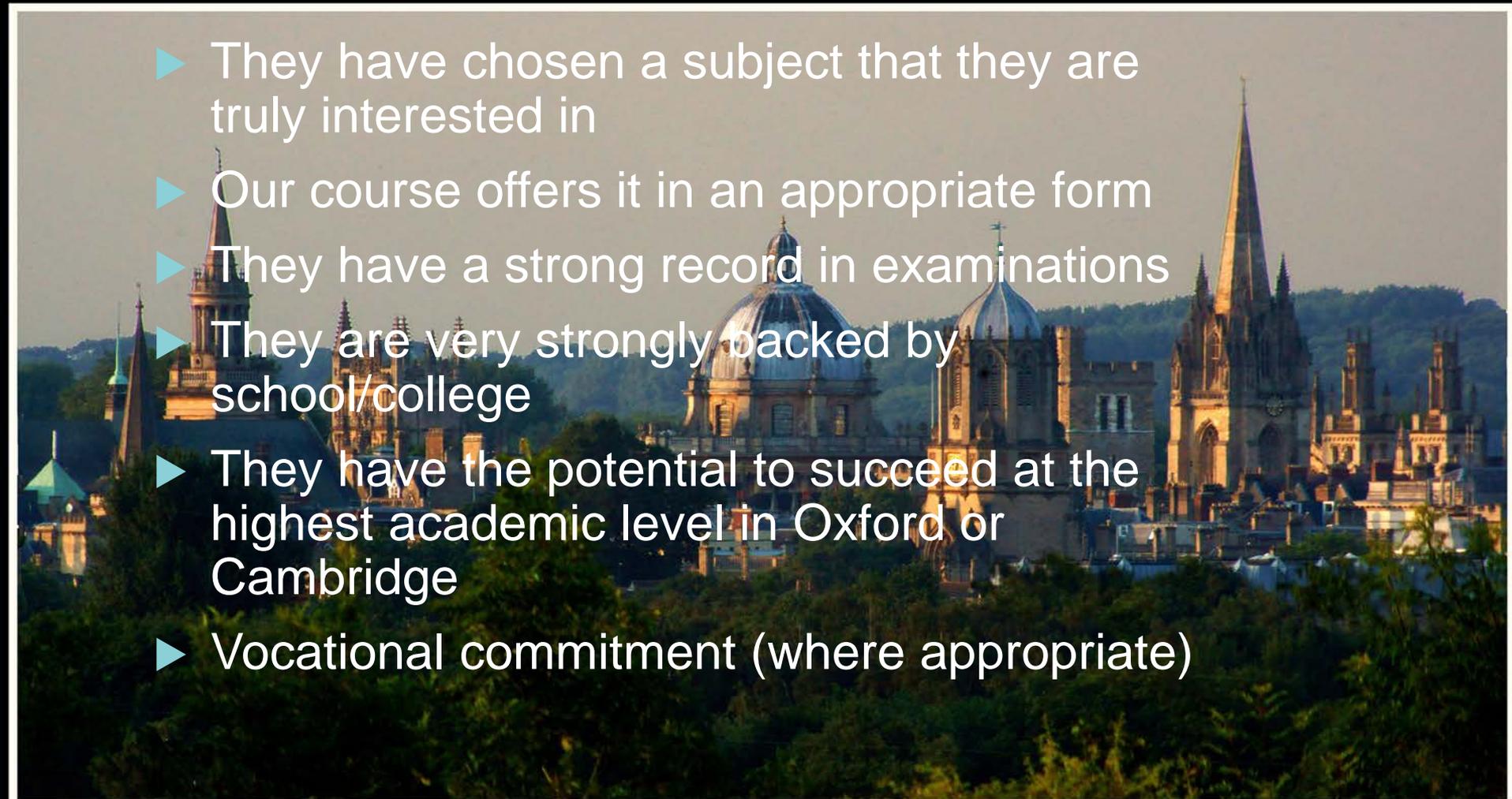
Submitting a competitive application



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

WHAT DO THEY LOOK FOR IN APPLICANTS?

- ▶ They have chosen a subject that they are truly interested in
- ▶ Our course offers it in an appropriate form
- ▶ They have a strong record in examinations
- ▶ They are very strongly backed by school/college
- ▶ They have the potential to succeed at the highest academic level in Oxford or Cambridge
- ▶ Vocational commitment (where appropriate)



SELECTION CRITERIA

Admissions decisions are based on:

- ▶ A level (or equivalent) grades and subject combinations
- ▶ AS grades and (Cambridge) unit marks
- ▶ GCSE grades
- ▶ UCAS school/college reference
- ▶ UCAS personal statement
- ▶ Submitted work (where requested)
- ▶ Test results (where applicable)
- ▶ Interview performance

WHY GO BEYOND THE UCAS FORM?

- ▶ Because they have the resources to do so
- ▶ Because choosing fairly between applicants on paper is difficult
- ▶ Interviews, aptitude tests and submitted work help us to assess:
 - ▶ Engagement with chosen subject
 - ▶ Appropriateness of the Oxford or Cambridge course
 - ▶ Potential to achieve very highly on it

EXAMINATIONS

- ▶ Appropriate subject combinations
- ▶ A levels: predicted or achieved grades
- ▶ Other post-16 examination systems
- ▶ AS unit scores (Cambridge)
- ▶ GCSEs
- ▶ Profile of an 'average' Oxbridge applicant:
 - ▶ GCSE: c. 5-8 A*s
 - ▶ AS: c. 87-92% across three most relevant, or best, subjects

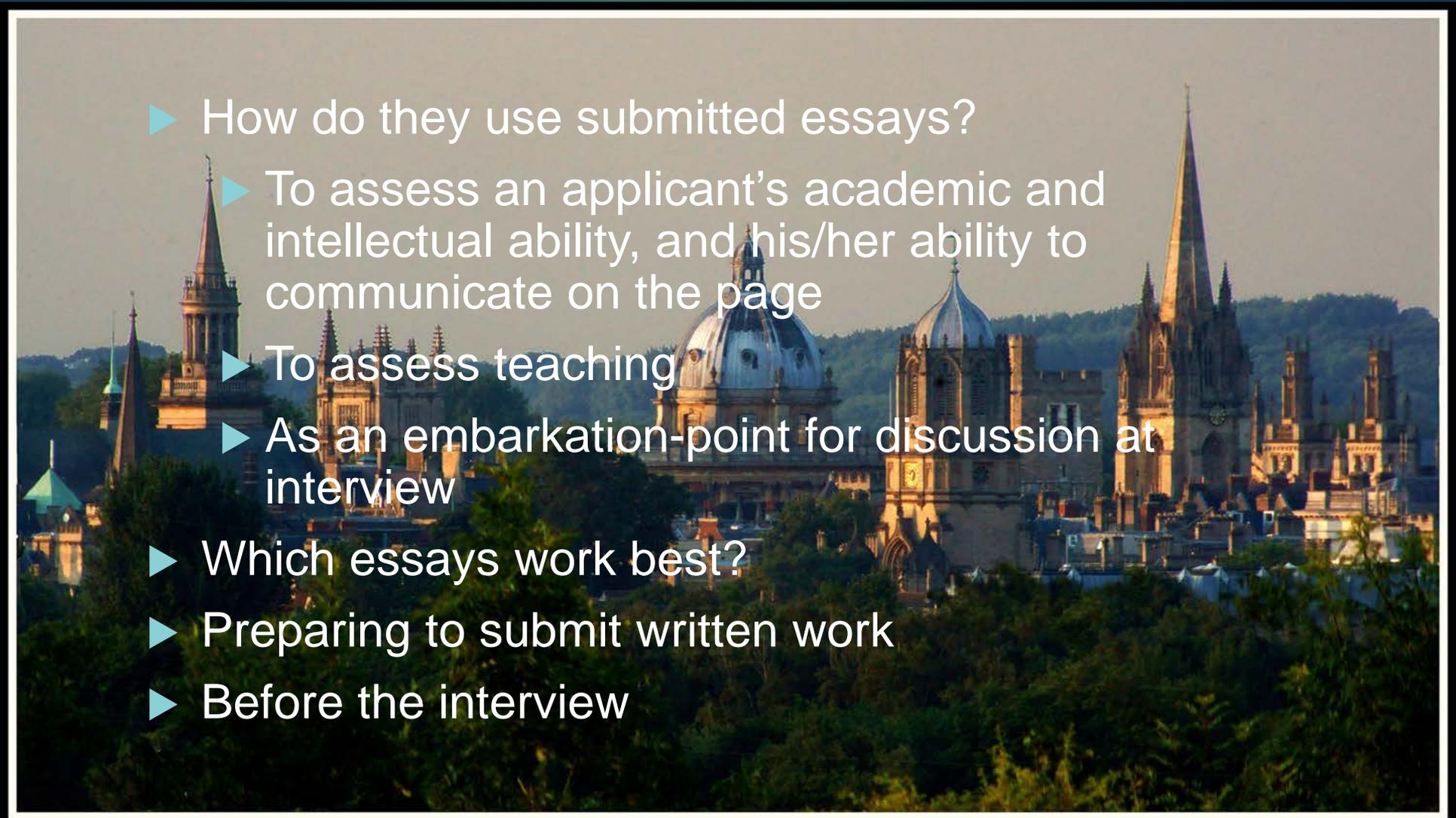
UCAS REFERENCE

- ▶ Most references describe excellent students but few describe exceptional ones
- ▶ They are especially interested in:
 - ▶ Where an applicant lies in relation to his/her peers
 - ▶ Academic and subject-related issues
 - ▶ Organisation and focus
- ▶ Extra letters

UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT

- ▶ How do they use personal statements?
 - ▶ To confirm appropriateness of chosen subject and course
 - ▶ As an embarkation-point for discussion at interview
- ▶ Subject focus
- ▶ Reading and other wider exploration
- ▶ Work experience
- ▶ Personal statements must be both honest and *personal*
- ▶ Extra-curricular activities/positions of responsibility

SUBMITTED WORK

- 
- ▶ How do they use submitted essays?
 - ▶ To assess an applicant's academic and intellectual ability, and his/her ability to communicate on the page
 - ▶ To assess teaching
 - ▶ As an embarkation-point for discussion at interview
 - ▶ Which essays work best?
 - ▶ Preparing to submit written work
 - ▶ Before the interview

APTITUDE TESTS

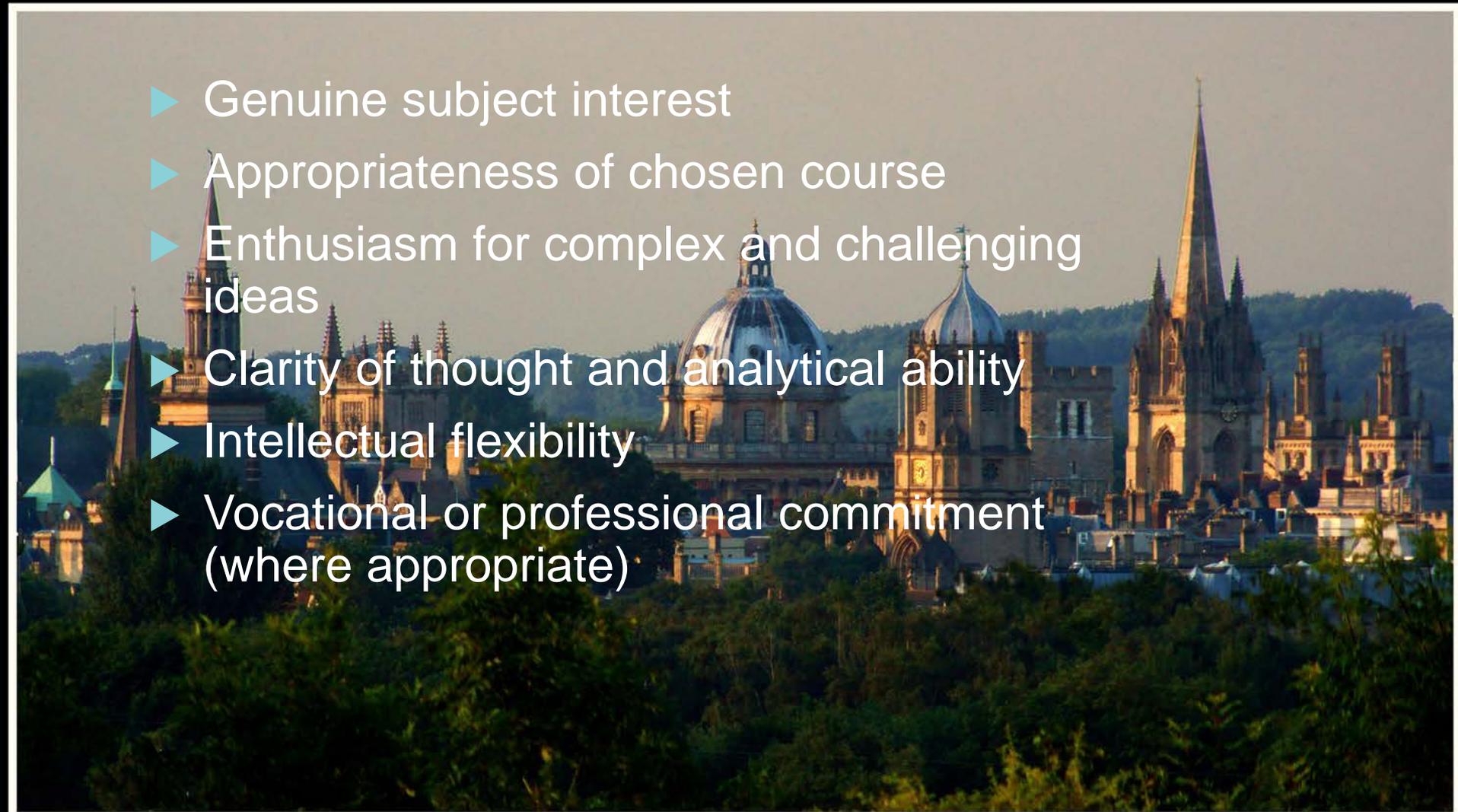
- ▶ How do they use aptitude tests?
 - ▶ To inform about ability not otherwise revealed in examinations
 - ▶ In the event that interviews ‘malfunction’
- ▶ In advance of interview: e.g. BMAT; LNAT; HAT & PAT (Oxford)
- ▶ At time of interview: e.g. TSA (Cambridge)
- ▶ More informal tests
- ▶ Preparation

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

- ▶ The vast majority of applicants are called for interview
- ▶ Interviews usually take place in December; some Cambridge applicants are called for additional interviews in mid January
- ▶ Interviews are conducted principally by the preference College (Cambridge), or by the preference College and an additional College (Oxford)
- ▶ Applicants have 1, 2 or 3 interviews, each lasting 20-45 minutes, at each College
- ▶ Interviews are conducted by lecturers and are predominantly academic and subject-focused

WHAT DO INTERVIEWERS SEEK?

- ▶ Genuine subject interest
- ▶ Appropriateness of chosen course
- ▶ Enthusiasm for complex and challenging ideas
- ▶ Clarity of thought and analytical ability
- ▶ Intellectual flexibility
- ▶ Vocational or professional commitment (where appropriate)



WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INTERVIEWS?

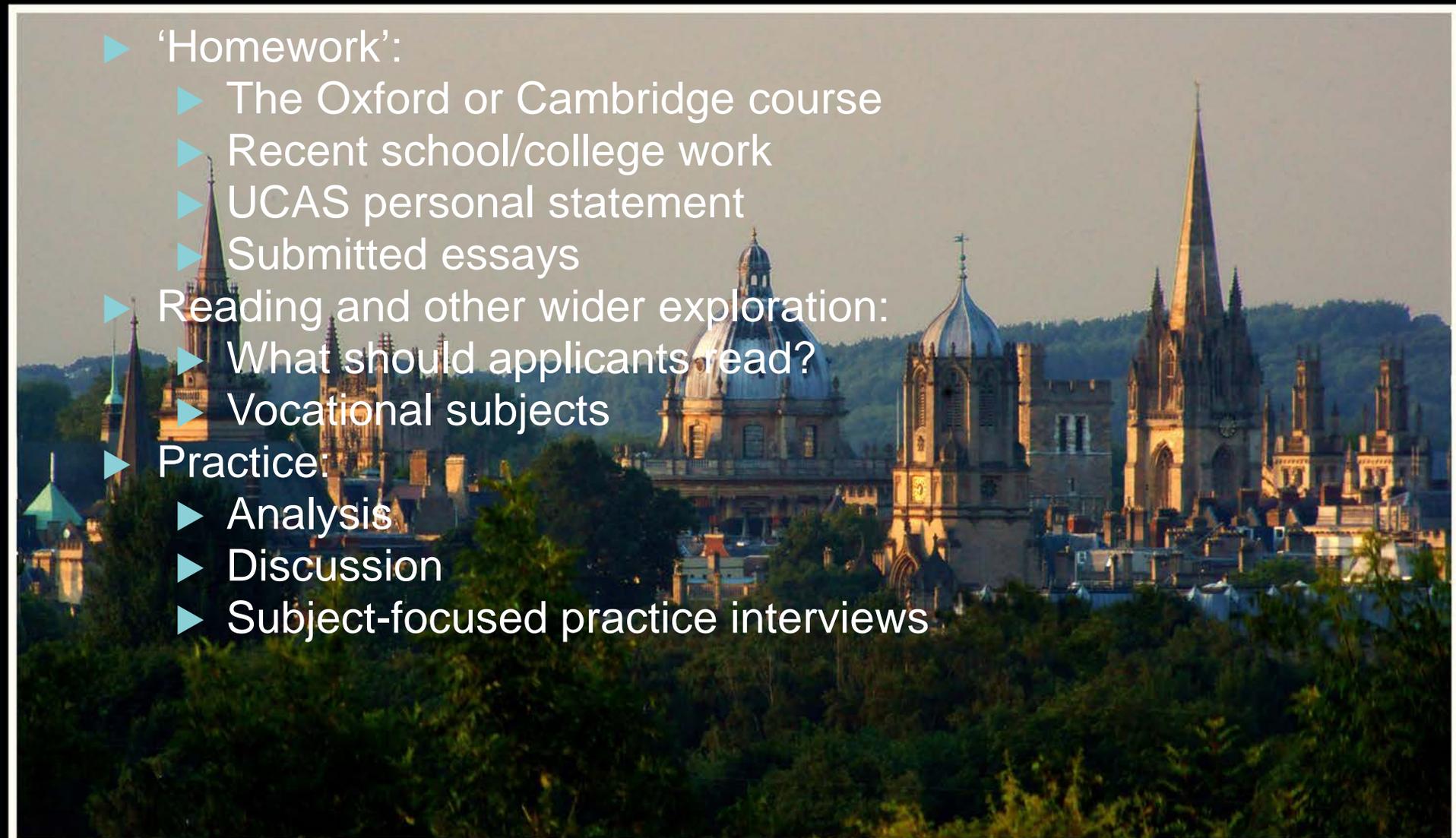
- ▶ Interviews are a discussion in which interviewers hope to see applicants thinking problems through for themselves
- ▶ They are structured but relatively informal
- ▶ They have no hidden agenda, and do not ask 'trick' questions or erect 'hurdles' for applicants to jump over
- ▶ They are not looking for a 'smooth' performance

WHAT TO EXPECT

- ▶ Focused and challenging questions, typical of teaching and learning at Oxford or Cambridge
- ▶ Applicants are usually asked to talk about:
 - ▶ Academic work completed in the last year or two
 - ▶ Relevant wider reading or work experience
 - ▶ Subject-related issues that are very readily visible in the wider world
 - ▶ ‘Prompt’ material
- ▶ New approaches to existing knowledge and problem-solving questions
- ▶ Questions to interviewers
- ▶ Prompting from interviewers

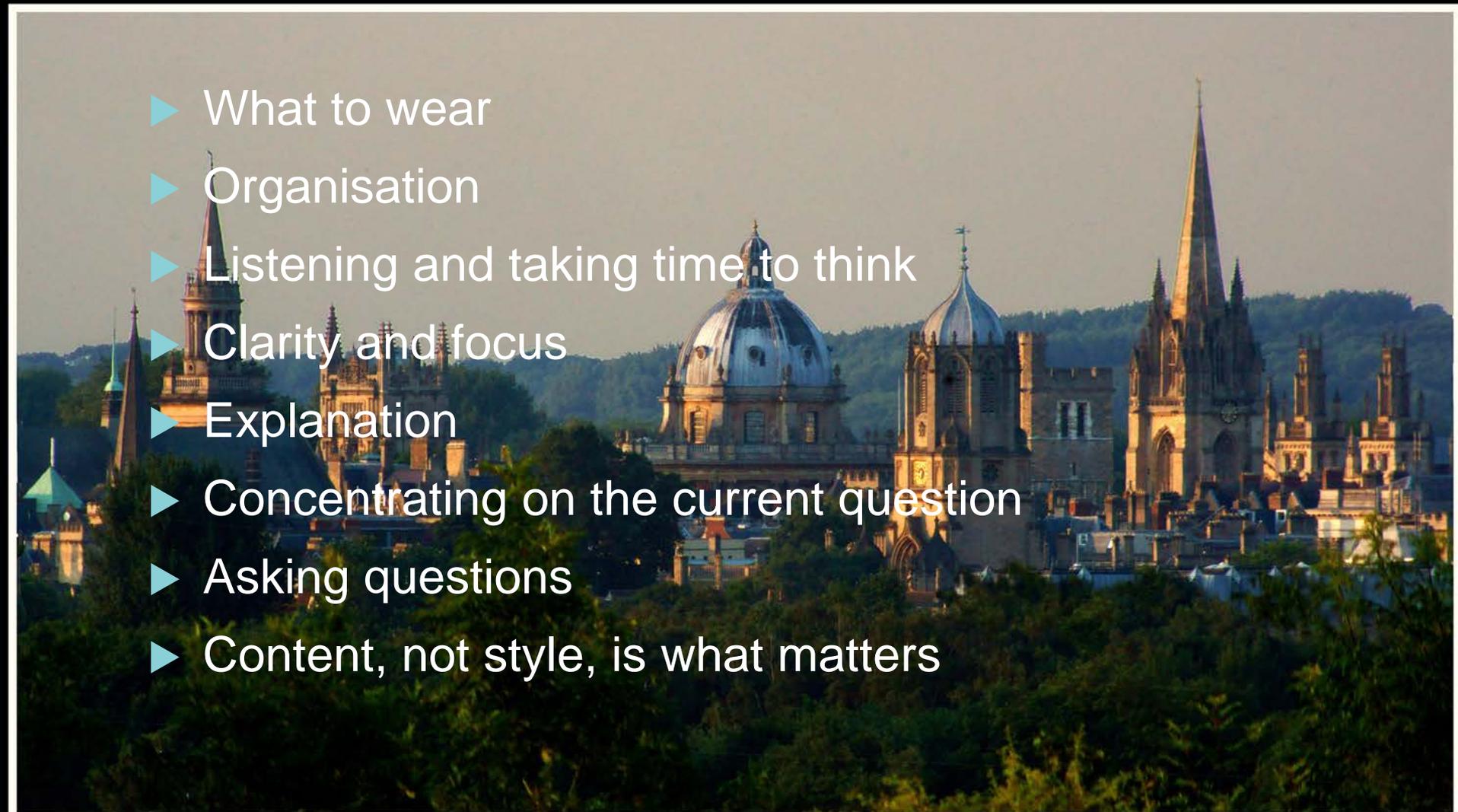
PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW

- ▶ ‘Homework’:
 - ▶ The Oxford or Cambridge course
 - ▶ Recent school/college work
 - ▶ UCAS personal statement
 - ▶ Submitted essays
- ▶ Reading and other wider exploration:
 - ▶ What should applicants read?
 - ▶ Vocational subjects
- ▶ Practice:
 - ▶ Analysis
 - ▶ Discussion
 - ▶ Subject-focused practice interviews



ON THE DAY

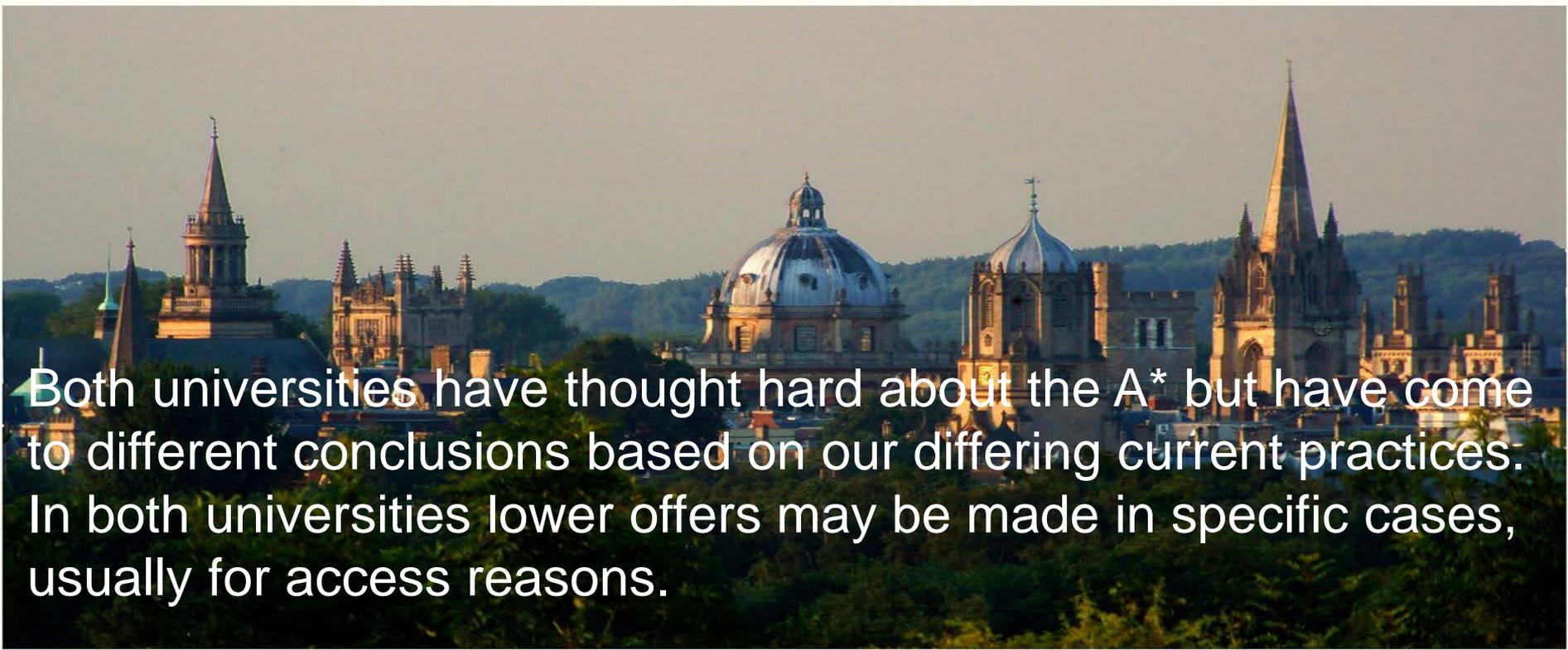
- ▶ What to wear
- ▶ Organisation
- ▶ Listening and taking time to think
- ▶ Clarity and focus
- ▶ Explanation
- ▶ Concentrating on the current question
- ▶ Asking questions
- ▶ Content, not style, is what matters



The Standard Offer

CAMBRIDGE A*AA

OXFORD AAA



Both universities have thought hard about the A* but have come to different conclusions based on our differing current practices. In both universities lower offers may be made in specific cases, usually for access reasons.

UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

- ▶ Every year c. 10,000 unsuccessful Oxbridge applicants go on to achieve three or more A grades at A level
- ▶ They could happily take many more applicants were places available
- ▶ The strength of competition makes decisions **VERY** difficult
- ▶ The 'Pool' (Cambridge)
- ▶ Feedback is available but limited
- ▶ Re-application (contact them)
- ▶ Conditional offers: they are conditional

MORE INFORMATION

Useful additional information is available in their prospectus and on their websites at:

- ▶ www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/
- ▶ www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/

If you have any remaining questions, do not hesitate to ask an Admissions Tutor or Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer