Question 5: Career Progression

Prove the sequence: a credible first step, a build with real markers, and a bounded year five that does not overreach.

200	3	2	Free
WORD LIMIT	STAGES TO COVER	WORKED EXAMPLES	TO READ & DOWNLOAD

ABOUT THE EXAMPLES.
All names, organisations and figures below are invented, to show technique. Yours must be real and defensible at interview.

01 SECTION 1

What this question actually asks

The question. "Outline how you anticipate your career progressing for the next five years after completing your studies in Oxford." In no more than 200 words.

This is a credibility test, not a vision test. The panel has already read your challenge and your motivation elsewhere in the Statement. Here they want to know whether your next five years are a **plausible sequence**, not a list of ambitions. A plan that jumps straight to a senior, system-changing role is a weaker answer than one that shows a believable first step, a scale-up, and a reason it leads somewhere.

The shape of a credible five years

STAGE	WHAT IT NEEDS
Immediate, year one	A named institution or role you will actually take up, not "a position in the sector"
Building, years two to four	How your responsibility or influence grows, with a specific marker of that growth

STAGE	WHAT IT NEEDS
By year five	A credible, not grandiose, statement of where you will be and what you will have shown works

Word plan at 200 words. Immediate step, around 60 words. The build, around 90 words. Where you land by year five, around 50 words.

02 SECTION 2

Writing it, beat by beat

The immediate step, around 60 words

Name where you go first and what you do there, in terms specific enough to be checked. If you are returning to an existing employer, say what new responsibility the Oxford year earns you there. If you are not, name the kind of institution and the first task.

The build, around 90 words

Show one or two concrete markers of increasing responsibility or influence, not a vague sense of "growing in my career". A promotion with a named scope, a programme you take from pilot to a stated scale, a body you are invited to advise. Keep the markers connected to the challenge and contribution you named elsewhere in the Statement; this is where the whole document should start to read as one plan rather than five separate answers.

> ***Weak:*** *"I will continue to grow professionally and take on more senior responsibilities as opportunities arise."*
> ***Strong:*** *"By year three I expect to be leading the unit's financing strategy rather than only its field operations, and by year five to have taken the model from one province to at least three."*

Year five, around 50 words

State where you expect to be without overreaching. The strongest answers describe a credible position of real but bounded influence, not a leap to running a ministry. A five-year plan that could only be true for one person in your entire country reads as unrealistic rather than ambitious.

Find the ceiling before you draft, then come back down

If you are struggling to set your year-five ambition, draft it once with no constraint at all: imagine you had unlimited money, time and authority, and write down what you would actually build. Most applicants find this version too large to defend at interview, which is the point. Bring it back down to the version you could credibly stand behind if asked how, specifically, year three leads to it. The unconstrained draft is a tool for finding your real ceiling; it is not the answer you submit.

03 SECTION 3

Two worked examples

All names, organisations and figures are invented, to show technique.

Example A: public health financing

> *On return I will rejoin the regional health authority as a senior policy analyst, applying the costed financing model from my dissertation to the community health worker programme that has twice failed to secure durable funding. Within two years I expect to move from analysis into leading the unit's financing strategy directly, not only producing the evidence for others to act on.*
> *By year three, I expect the model to be funded in my home province on its own budget line rather than through donor cycles. By year five, I aim to have taken it to at least two further provinces facing the same financing gap, working through the regional health commission rather than province by province alone.*
> *This is a specific, bounded extension of work I have already started, not a new direction, which is why I believe it is achievable on this timeline.*

Example B: enterprise and regulation

> *I will return to co-lead the recycling cooperative I helped found, where my first task will be negotiating the registration scheme the municipal committee agreed to in principle during my studies, using the regulatory and negotiation skills from my course and the Leadership Programme.*
> *By year three, I expect the cooperative to be operating as the registered model other municipalities point to when drafting their own ordinances, with our worker-certification system adopted by at least one neighbouring city. By year five, I aim to be advising the national solid-waste authority directly on replicating the model, rather than running it alone in one city.*

> *Each stage depends on the one before it holding, which is why I have kept this plan to what I can see a credible path toward, rather than a longer leap.*

04 SECTION 4

Dos and don'ts

Do

- Name a specific first step you will actually take
- Give one or two concrete markers of growing responsibility
- Keep year five bounded and credible, not a leap to the top of your field
- Connect this plan to the challenge and contribution named elsewhere in the Statement

Don't

- Write "I will continue to grow and take on new opportunities"
- Promise a senior title on a fixed timetable, as if titles were yours to award
- Describe a five-year plan unconnected to your challenge and contribution answers
- Aim so high the plan needs resources or authority you will not plausibly have

05 SECTION 5

Common mistakes, and the fix

MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS MARKS	THE FIX
"I will grow professionally and take on new challenges"	Says nothing checkable	Name the institution, role and first task
A promised job title	Unfalsifiable and not yours to promise	Describe the capability and scope, not the title
Disconnected from the rest of the Statement	Reads as five separate answers, not one plan	Carry the same challenge and institution through

MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS MARKS	THE FIX
Year five is implausibly senior	Reads as unrealistic rather than ambitious	Describe a bounded, credible position of real influence

06 SECTION 6

Checklist

- A specific, named first step
- At least one concrete marker of growing responsibility by years two to four
- A bounded, credible statement of where you will be by year five
- This plan uses the same institution or challenge named elsewhere in the Statement
- No promised job title you cannot plausibly guarantee
- Under 200 words