

APPLYING TO OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE



A STEP BY STEP GUIDE 16-19



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Key Pointers

Oxford or Cambridge? You can only apply to Oxford or Cambridge in a particular year, not both. There are many similarities between the two universities. To find out some of the differences go to this link:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/teachers/oxfordandcambridge.html>

What Sort of People go to Oxbridge? Go to this *Wall of Faces* link to look at the diversity of people who get places and work at these two universities:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/videowall/index.html>

How many Applicants? Typically Oxford has just over 17,000 applicants for 3,000 places, Cambridge nearly 18,000 applicants for around 3,500 places.

Am I Being Realistic? Applications are very competitive indeed and getting more competitive every year as the number of applicants rises faster than the increase in places. Applications to Oxford, for example, have risen by nearly 50% in ten years. Subjects vary dramatically in level of competitiveness with medicine being particularly competitive.

Cambridge have an interactive graph generator on their website so that you can view basic undergraduate application and admissions statistics using criteria that you define yourself.

<http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/apply/statistics>

Summer Schools to Encourage Applicants There are many able students in state schools who do not consider applying to Oxford or Cambridge. The Sutton Trust organise Summer schools to encourage state school applicants to apply to competitive universities. Details at this link:

<http://www.suttontrust.com/students/uk-summer-schools/>

GCSEs Successful applicants will have mainly grade 7 (grade As) and grade 8 and 9 (grade A*s) at GCSE with a high proportion of grade 8/9 depending on subject. However, there is no minimum A* requirement

A Levels Grades Oxford At A-Level you will need AAA for arts courses but AAA* for science subjects and maths and A*A*A for a small number of subjects

A Levels Grades Cambridge Cambridge will ask AAA* for some subjects A*A*A for others especially science and Maths. Some applicants may be set lower offers or more challenging ones, eg to achieve more than one A*. UMS scores at AS have been very important for short-listing although this will be complicated by the new A levels which start in 2015

High Marks Needed Grades are not enough you need to be achieving at a high level in terms of your marks.

Exam Grades Are Not Enough As well high grades and marks you also need to have the ability to think for yourself, apply your subject knowledge to new situations and the ability to think on your feet. The selection criteria are purely academic and subject specific

How Hard Will I have to Work? There are 3 x 8 week very intensive terms at both universities when you will have to work very hard. There will be far more

assignments and higher work expectations than at most other universities. Students produce 2 – 3 times as much written work as their counterparts on comparable courses elsewhere. Typically, however, if you work a 40 hour week you will make the grade. There is a very heavy focus on independent study and learning

Tutorials and Supervisions. Both universities offer tutorials (Oxford) or supervisions (Cambridge) where you will get unique individualised teaching from your college subject tutor alongside conventional lectures, lab work in science. Exams will be taken at university/department level. No other university in the UK offers this opportunity for teaching with such a personalised focus.

Oxford YouTube Link This YouTube link has a series of videos about Oxford

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=oxford%20university&sm=1

Cambridge YouTube Link Go to the Cambridge YouTube page for a series of videos about life at Cambridge

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=life%20at%20cambridge%20university&sm=1

Step by Step Application Guidance

In Year 11



A Level Choices Think carefully about your A level choices for the Sixth Form it can have a crucial impact on the subjects you can study at university. The Russell Group (most of the leading universities including Oxford and Cambridge) advice on A level choices can be found in this the document and video on the Russell Group website. The *Subjects Required for Particular Degree Courses* is particularly important and useful:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/188915625/Informed-Choices>

Oxford A Level Requirements

For the A-Levels required for specific Oxford courses go to:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/admission-requirements/admission-requirements-table?wssl=1>

Cambridge A Level Requirements

For the A levels required for specific Cambridge courses go to the courses page and click on individual courses:

https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/files/publications/the_subject_matters.pdf

Read

Someone who is going to be a strong applicant for Oxford or Cambridge is someone who genuinely enjoys reading about and studying their subject and does so because they want to not because they have to. Start to become this sort of person if you are not already.

Start Getting Relevant Experience for subjects like Law, Medicine, Vet Medicine, Dentistry. Organise relevant placements to build up your background knowledge

Early in Year 12



Begin to Gather Key Information Visit the UCAS website and begin to familiarise yourself with it.

<http://www.ucas.com/>

Work Experience Start organising work experience placements for those courses for which it will be necessary eg Medicine and Vet Science and for those for which it will be desirable eg Law

From January of Year 12:



Choosing a Course Choosing the course that is right for you is one of the most important decisions you have to take about your UCAS applications. Cambridge has a useful video that will help you with this at:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/>

Information to help you to choose an Oxford course can be found at:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/courses/

Open Days Look at www.ucas.com from January in Year 12 as the Open Days often go live from this point. You can secure the most favourable dates e.g. weekend dates so that you don't miss lessons. Missing lessons means it will be harder to get the grades. OpenDays.com is a very useful website for co-ordinating open days for your five UCAS choices. It provides an open days calendar as well as advice on choosing your visits. Check the university web sites as there can be a delay between the date the open day is listed on the university web site and the dates uploaded to other general sites such as opendays.com

<http://www.opendays.com/>

Oxford Open Days. There are full university open days, college open days and subject department open days. Go to this link for details:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/open_days_events_and_visiting/open_events_and_visiting/

Cambridge Open Days There are full university open days, college open days and subject department open days. Go to this link for details:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/events/opendays/cambridge/>

What Will Get Me Ahead of the Game?

Plan Open Days Early Don't leave your open days planning till May or June in Year 12, the best dates may have been and gone.

Clear Aims Make sure that you have some clear aims and key questions before you attend an open day.

Record Keep a record observations and insights in a journal/diary as well as questions you might want to ask at the time or at interview.

Choosing a College at Oxford or Cambridge

- Colleges vary by size, age, location, wealth, facilities
- There are around thirty colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge
- They are small communities within a large university, for example, Christ Church College, Oxford has 391 students, Peterhouse, Cambridge 251.
- Students live in college and it is the base for tutorials/supervisions
- All colleges offer places in most subjects (but not all) Check!
- There are more similarities than differences between colleges
- There is no simple formula for college choice
- Oxford: 'Our advice is not to worry too much about choosing a college.'
- Cambridge: 'Don't agonise too long over choosing a College. They have many more similarities than differences and most students quickly settle in and really enjoy their College, wherever they end up!'

Cambridge: How NOT to Choose a College

Cambridge give some good advice on this, much of which would also apply to Oxford:

- Based on application statistics – some think that choosing a college attracting fewer applications or making an open application will increase the chance of an offer. For equally well-qualified applicants, this does not affect the chance of a place.
- Travelling time Cambridge is a very compact city
- Discounting single-sex Colleges – Lectures, practicals and seminars, are mixed and attended by students from all Colleges. Male friends are welcome in women's Colleges at all times.
- Age of the College – Colleges range from over 700 to 30 years old. No matter how old or young a College is, it will provide the facilities that you'd expect to find, together with high quality supervision and support
- Specialism of College Fellows – contrary to what some people believe, the research specialisms of a Colleges Fellows won't dictate what you can study. If a Fellow of your College is an expert in the aspects of the course you've chosen, you may be supervised by them. If you want to study a different area, arrangements will be made for you to be supervised by an expert in that area at another College.
- Each of the university has a short video on choosing a college at the links below:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/colleges/how_do_i_choose_a_college/index.html

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/colleges/choosing.html>

Open Application You do not need to choose a college and can make an open application to Oxford or Cambridge instead. Open applicants will be allocated to a college with fewer applications in that year. Making an open application does not affect your chances of getting an offer of a place. Colleges will not know that you are an open applicant

Early June in Year 12

UCAS APPLY OPENS UCAS Apply system becomes available online.



July to September in Year 12: The Personal Statement

HOW DO YOU WRITE A
UNIQUE PERSONAL STATEMENT?



students do not do this and make false assumptions about what they will study on the courses they have chosen.

Start Early Make sure that when you write your UCAS Personal Statement early in Year 13 that you have something relevant and interesting to write about by this time in your A level career. At least 75% of your statement should be about issues related to the subject you are choosing and the course.

Check the course requirements and selection criteria: This will give you a good idea of what is being looked for

Check the course details: many

Cambridge Personal Statement Advice You can find this at:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/teachers/personalstatements.html>

The Cambridge SAQ (Supplementary Application Questionnaire) Shortly after submitting your UCAS application, you will be asked via email to complete an online Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ). In order to make a valid application to the University of Cambridge, you must submit your SAQ by the deadline set.

The purpose of the SAQ is: ‘to ensure that we have complete and consistent information about all applicants. It also enables us to collect information that’s not part of the UCAS application but is helpful when assessing applications, such as the topics you’ve covered as part of your AS/A Level (or equivalent) courses (which helps our interviewers decide which questions to ask).’

Optional additional personal statement on the SAQ Cambridge will already have received a copy of your UCAS personal statement. If you wish to add anything specific about your application to Cambridge you are able to do so on the SAQ. They are particularly interested in knowing:

- Which aspects of the Cambridge course attracted you
- Whether you have any specific career plans?

- How you have kept up your interest in the subject you have applied for?
- There is a guide to completing the SAQ at this link:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/saq.html>

What Will Get Me Ahead of the Game?

Avoid Clichés Don't begin your personal statement with clichés. Ask yourself whether this is something anybody could have written. If so write something original.

Do Not List It is better to write about fewer things but in more depth

Area of Interest You may want to write about a particular area of interest within your subject, a particular text or author maybe that has grabbed your interest. Make sure you have something to say about if asked at interview.

From July in Year 12: Selection Tests



Oxford Selection Tests Depending on subject, over 70% of Oxford applicants are now required to take a selection test. This will contribute to the decision about whether to offer you an interview at this university

Use the link below to find out whether and when you will need to take a test for your subject and to look at sample tests. It is vital that you familiarise yourself with and practice these tests before you take them and that you get feedback from your relevant teachers before you actually sit the test.

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/applying_to_oxford/tests/

Cambridge Admission Tests Depending on the course and College you apply to you may be required to take a test either when you attend for interview or beforehand either a subject-based test organised by your College or one of the following:

- The Thinking Skills Assessment Test (TSA)
- Biomedical Admissions Test BMAT
- The Cambridge Law Test (Cambridge do not Use LNAT)

- Use the link below to find out whether and when you will need to take a test for your subject and to look at sample tests. It is vital that you familiarise yourself with and practice these tests before you take them and that you get feedback from your relevant teachers before you actually sit the test.

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/tests/>

Submitted Work Oxford ‘Written work is required in some subjects to give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their analytical, reasoning, language and writing skills, as appropriate for their chosen degree course. Go to this link for details:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/written-work>

Submitted Work Cambridge You may be asked to submit one or two school/college essays, which may then be discussed at interview. Go to this link for details:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/tests/essays.html>

Your College will advise you if you need to send any work in or sit a test and the arrangements for this.

October in Year 13:

UCAS Oxbridge Deadline If you are applying to Oxford or Cambridge for English make sure you have finished your application well before the 15 October deadline for submitting Oxbridge applications so that your advisers can check it and write a reference.

October to March in Year 13: The Interview



Oxford Interview Guidance Read *Interviews at Oxford* at this link:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/applying_to_oxford/interviews/index.html

Oxford Sample Questions Oxford University have some sample questions with suggested approaches at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/guide/interviews>

Short video clips about interviews on the Oxford website at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/interviews>

On the Oxford YouTube page there are a series of clips with tutors talking about the various stages of the interview process:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL08790B9C3A47D250>

Cambridge Interview Guidance The 25 minute film *Interviews in Action* about Cambridge interviews is at this link:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/interviewsinaction.html>

Other information and video material about interviews can be found on the Cambridge site at:

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/interviews>

Cambridge Interview Questions You will find some examples at this link:

<http://www.cambridgeinterviewquestions.com/questions/arts/english/>

How Can I Prepare for the Interview?

You can get a very useful fbook from the Oxford Applications website called *So You Want to Go to Oxbridge?* which has excellent advice on the applications process, admissions tests, interviews (with a full list of typical interview questions) etc. Oxford Applications has nothing to do with the university and is a commercial company which provides guidance to applicants at a price. However, there is a lot of very good free information on their site and it is well worth looking at:

<https://oxbridgeapplications.com/books-and-publications/>

Do You Think You're Clever?: Oxford and Cambridge Questions by John Farndon

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| B001H6QCYO | 184831132X |
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 and Libby Purves is well worth getting hold of. It gives many examples of Oxbridge questions and discusses possible approaches

http://www.amazon.co.uk/You-Think-Youre-Clever-Cambridge/dp/184831132X/ref=sr_1_10?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1392025246&sr=1-10&keywords=libby+purves

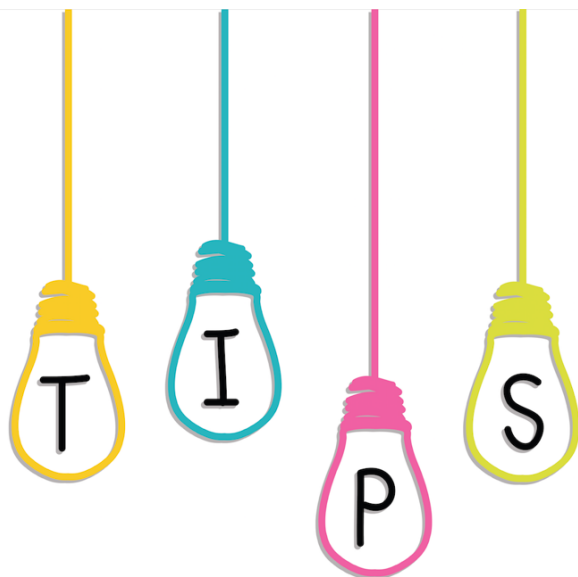
- Check for interview pointers on college websites as well as the main university websites
- Think about answers to the obvious questions
- Read widely in your subject
- Take a critical view of ideas and arguments
- Re-read your personal statement and written work submitted. Bring copies to the interview
- Spend a minimum of 20 hours preparing for your interview
- Be able to talk about what you got from the books you have read, from work experience, conferences or field work. What insights?
- Prepare clear examples to illustrate your answers about yourself and what you have read, done and think
- Make your interview a conversation and don't see it as a grilling
- Pause before you answer and don't speak too quickly
- Think out loud. Show how you think about a problem
- Show the different angles/alternatives to a question
- Don't be afraid to ask for pointers if you get really stuck
- Rehearse interview skills and serious intellectual 'talk' with other students in your subject:
- Remind yourself about the selection criteria for the course
- Arrange a practice interview
- Dress: '...whatever you feel comfortable in. Most tutors do not dress formally.'

- Professor Thomas Noe of Oxford says that: ‘Students who stick up for themselves stand out. What we are looking for is a student who can address issues in a logical fashion, reason from premises to conclusion. Even if a student is hesitant or shy, how well they think will still be evident.’

At the Interview

- There may be two or more interviewers at a time
- You might well be given something to read before interview especially in arts subjects
- Like a ‘mini tutorial’ or supervision
- Tests the ability to apply logic and reasoning to new ideas or problems
- ‘The tutor will be seeking to stretch you in order to assess your potential.’
- Judging academic potential, self motivation and commitment ‘not your manners, etiquette, appearance or background’
- ‘....not seeking to make you feel ignorant or catch you out.’

What should I be doing: Subject enrichment activities in Year 12 and beyond



Super-Curricular Activities

Competitive universities are increasingly looking for depth not breadth. Admissions tutors stress the importance of 'super-curricular' work not 'extra-curricular' activities. Trinity College Cambridge define super-curricular activities as: ‘research, taster courses and work experience relevant to your chosen university course’. This

means focusing on depth not breadth in your sixth form study: exploring and reading around your key subjects rather than having broad interest outside your subjects.

How can I show my commitment to a university subject I want to Study?



- **The first priority** is to be on top of the subjects you are studying at A level (or equivalent) because without achieving the required you will not get a place at university. You need to be:
 - Up to date with assignments
 - Cover the specification thoroughly
 - Clear about the assessment criteria for each subject
 - Have a good revision programme in place
- **The second priority** is to enrich the A level subject you wish to study at university and any other related A levels by engaging in a range of activities to broaden and deepen your knowledge and to persuade university selectors of your commitment.
- If the subject you want to study is not one of your current courses, Engineering or Vet Science for example, the same applies. Engage in activities to show that you have made a substantial effort to find out about the subject and that you have a genuine commitment to it.
- **Read widely** Textbooks quickly get out of date and have a narrow focus. Read more about topics you are studying and about other areas of the subject that interest you. Get a breadth of understanding beyond what is in the specification

Oxford Suggested Reading List: Oxford say that: ‘We always recommend that students read widely around their subject, deepening their knowledge and understanding, to help prepare for their application. Tutors will be looking for evidence of students' academic potential, as well as their commitment and motivation for their course, so will be looking for evidence that a student has really engaged with their subject, and has a passion for studying it’. There is a suggested reading list for most subjects at this link:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/suggested-reading-and-resources>

Cambridge Suggested Reading Cambridge does not have a comprehensive suggested reading list for the university as a whole but some of the college websites are very useful. This is the King’s College reading list:

<https://share.trin.cam.ac.uk/sites/public/Tutorial/Cambridge-wider-reading-suggestions.pdf>

There is suggested reading for the Cambridge Natural Sciences Tripos (degree) at

<http://www.natsci.tripos.cam.ac.uk/prospective-students/reading>

Read subject magazines and journals to keep in touch with the latest developments.



- Philip Allen Updates subject review magazines are worth subscribing to and will keep you up to date with new research and ideas in most A level subjects:
<http://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/magazines/Print-Magazines>
- Oxford Sparks Online Public Science Oxford Sparks is an excellent website for engaging with the latest science taking place across Oxford University. There are hundreds of resources, including videos, science trails, activities to try at home, mobile phone apps, games, podcasts, and virtual tours. There are also links to other relevant science websites:
<http://www.oxfordsparks.net/>
- YouTube Edu This site has a host of lectures from top universities from all over the world on a wide range of subjects:
www.youtube.com/edu
- Oxford Research News Website Find out about all the latest Oxford research at this website
<http://www.ox.ac.uk/research/>
- Cambridge Research News Website This is the place to go to find out about fascinating new research being carried out at Cambridge University:
<http://www.cam.ac.uk/research>

Find out about the historical development and scope of the subject

- It helps to know how your subject has developed over time and how people approached it in the past. This will give you a better sense of what it is about and a clearer insight into how it has reached its current position.
- Understand that in all subjects there is not just one way of looking at things. There will be different perspectives, schools of thought, different views about how the subject should be studied. Be clear where you stand in relation to these debates.
- Oxford University Press (OUP) have a very useful series of books called *Very Short Introductions* which give you excellent background to academic subjects and topics within subjects:
<http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/category/academic/series/general/vsi.do>
- Wikipedia also has some useful articles on different academic subjects, their scope and historical background.

Be clear why the subject is important and worth studying Think about what the subject has to offer:

- It may help to bring economic and technological benefits to society.
- It may help us to understand how humans behave.
- It may simply be worth studying in its own right

Understand the importance of argument and evidence



- Serious academic debate revolves around argument or attempts to persuade others to your point of view using evidence and examples to support your case. It is important to:
- Ask yourself how convincing is the evidence you are using to support your views
- Ask others what evidence they have to support theirs and challenge it.
- Familiarise yourself with terms such, as argument and counter argument and be aware of the dangers of misrepresenting, insufficient or unrepresentative evidence
- Understand the common fallacies in argument that others might use such as correlation not causation or restricting the options.

- Be aware of the criteria we should use to decide whether sources of evidence are reliable.
- If you are not already studying Critical Thinking which deals with these issues, any Critical Thinking A level textbook will help you with all this or the website:
<http://www.criticalthinking.org.uk>

Get Relevant Experience

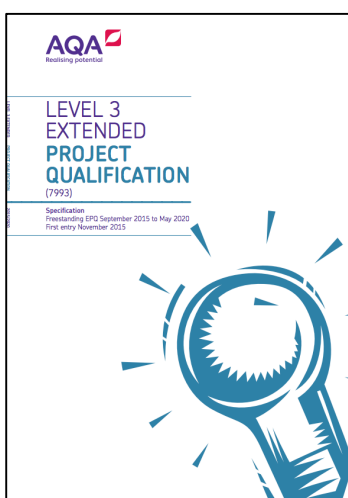
- This will depend on the subject you want to study. Some subjects like Medicine or Vet Science will require extensive work experience. For other subjects you should try to gain relevant experiences in the world outside school such as theatre visits for English, industrial and business experience for subject such as Economics and Engineering.

Use radio, television, newspapers and their websites productively

- Use the media to keep in touch with issues and debates relevant to your subject: news, documentaries, arts programmes, reviews.
- Radio and television programme and newspaper websites will have archives of programmes and articles which you can search for relevant material. Radio 4, for examples has extensive archives of broadcasts relevant to a wide rang of academic subjects.

Do an Extended Project Qualification

- The EPQ offers the opportunity to study a topic in depth to AS level and produce a self-directed 5000 word dissertation.



- Although the EPQ will not usually form part of a university offer for a place on a course, it gives you the opportunity to develop independent and advanced research skills and to extend your knowledge of a subject that interests you.
- If you choose a topic that is related to a course you want to study at university this will strengthen your application, give you something to talk about in your Personal Statement and at interview and help you develop skills that will be useful at university.

Useful link:

<http://www.aqa.org.uk/qualifications/projects/extended-project-epq.php>

- **Involve yourself in serious talk and debate** Be enthusiastic about debating with and expressing your ideas to other students. It is only in discussion and debate with others that we really clarify what we think.
- Test your views against others.
- Do not be defensive and get used to being relaxed about having your views challenged by others.

Above all do not believe all that you are told: learn to be sceptical

- Constantly question views, theories and opinions that you are faced with.
- Test every idea to destruction so that you can tell which ones really stand up.
- Understand that what we currently think is only the best knowledge we have at the time.
- Don't be too easily persuaded.

