



CRANFORD
HOUSE

OXBRIDGE APPLICATION GUIDE

Parent and Student Booklet 2021/22

Oxbridge application guide

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Preparation for Applications to Oxford or Cambridge

1. Check the A Level Subject requirements for the course you want to study:

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>

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

2. Read around your subject:

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: they are likely to studying independently upwards of 40 hours per week once on their course.

3. Acquire relevant experience for subjects like Law, Medicine, Vet Medicine, Dentistry.

Visit the UCAS website <https://www.ucas.com/advisers/which-for-teachers/help-your-students-get-into-uni/work-experience-getting-onto-degree-courses>. Start organising work experience placements for those courses for which it will be necessary like Medicine and Vet Science and for those for which it will be desirable like Law.

4. Research the course that is right for you

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: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate> .

5. Attend open days

Look at www.ucas.com and www.opendays.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. Also 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. Oxford Open Days:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/college-virtual-tours> plus Twitter for up to date information.

Cambridge Open Days:

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

6. Plan open days carefully

- Don't leave your open days planning till May or June in Year 12, the best dates may have been and gone.
- Make sure that you have some clear aims and key questions before you attend an open day.

- 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.

Making a Preference for 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 around 400 students and Peterhouse, Cambridge, has around 250. Students live in college and it is the base for tutorials/supervisions. All colleges offer places in most subjects (but not all). There are more similarities than differences between college and Oxford advises: 'Our advice is not to worry too much about choosing a college' and 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 also suggests that you don't make applications based on the age of the college, the travelling time or application statistics, such as selecting a college attracting fewer applications or making an open application will increase the chance of an offer. Also avoid 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. Moreover, contrary to what some people believe, the research specialisms of a college, 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 university has a short video on choosing a college: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/do-you-choose-a-college?wssl=1> <http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/colleges/choosing.htm>

Open Applications

You do not need to make a preference for 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

Writing your Personal Statement

1. Make sure that when you write your UCAS Personal Statement early in Year 13.
2. At least 75% of your statement should be about issues related to the subject you are choosing and the course.
3. Check the course requirements and selection criteria and this will give you a good idea of what is being looked for

4. Check the course details: many students do not do this and make false assumptions about what they will study on the courses they have chosen.
5. Try to be original and specific to your own thinking, learning, experience and values
6. It is better to write about fewer things but in more depth
7. You may want to write about a particular area or interest within your subject or a particular text or author that has grabbed your interest. Make sure you have something to say about if asked at interview.

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 A Level (or equivalent) courses (which helps our interviewers decide which questions to ask). 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:

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

Cambridge Personal Statement Advice:

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

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.

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 relevant teachers before you sit the test.

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/guide/admissions-tests> At

Cambridge, 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. It might be 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:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/tests/> to check which tests might apply at Cambridge.

Submitted Work

At 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>

At 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.

UCAS Oxbridge Deadline

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

The Interview

Read the interview advice at Oxford: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/guide/interviews>. Oxford University have included some sample questions with suggested approaches and short video clips about 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 and lots of information can be found at:

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/interviews>. Past Cambridge interview questions can be found at: <http://www.cambridgeinterviewquestions.com/>

How Can I Prepare for the Interview?

1. You can get a very useful ebook 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. 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/>

2. Practice questions using *Do You Think You're Clever? Oxford and Cambridge Questions* by John Farndon and Libby Purves gives many examples of Oxbridge questions and discusses possible approaches
3. Check for interview pointers on college websites as well as the main university websites.
4. Think about answers to the obvious questions
5. Read widely in your subject
6. Take a critical view of ideas and arguments
7. Re-read your personal statement and written work submitted. Bring copies to the interview
8. Spend a minimum of 20 hours preparing for your interview
9. Be able to talk about what you got from the books you have read, from work experience, conferences or field work. What insights?
10. Prepare clear examples to illustrate your answers about yourself and what you have read, done and think
11. Make your interview a conversation and don't see it as a grilling
12. Pause before you answer and don't speak too quickly
13. Think out loud. Show how you think about a problem
14. Show the different angles/alternatives to a question
15. Don't be afraid to ask for pointers if you get really stuck
16. Rehearse interview skills and serious intellectual 'talk' with other students in your subject
17. Remind yourself about the selection criteria for the course
18. Arrange a practice interview
19. Dress in whatever you feel comfortable in.
20. 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. The tutor will be seeking to stretch you in order to assess your potential. They will be judging academic potential, self-motivation and commitment, not your manners, etiquette, appearance or background.

Super-curricular Activities

Tutors are increasingly looking for depth not breadth. Admissions tutors stress the importance of 'super-curricular' work not 'extra-curricular' activities. Super-curricular activities include: '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 interests outside your subjects. Cambridge have a super-curricular guide at:

https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/files/publications/super-curricular_suggestions.pdf

There is a suggested reading list for most subjects for Oxford:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/suggested-reading-and-resources> The Read subject magazines and journals to keep in touch with the latest developments.

Also check:

<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. <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

Find out about all the latest Oxford research at <http://www.ox.ac.uk/research/> and Cambridge Research News Website <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.

Be clear why the subject is important and worth studying. Think about what the subject has to offer. Serious academic debate revolves around argument or attempts to persuade others to your point of view using evidence and examples to support your case.

Familiarise yourself with terms such as argument and counter argument and be aware of the dangers of misrepresenting, insufficient or unrepresentative evidence

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 which 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 blogs, Twitter and websites productively. Use the media to keep in touch with issues and debates relevant to your subject: news, documentaries, arts programmes, reviews.

Do an Extended Project Qualification. 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.

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. Do not believe all that you are told: learn to be sceptical and constantly question views, theories and opinions that you are faced with.