

DEGREE COURSE APPLICATION GUIDES: O X B R I D G E

Applying to Oxford & Cambridge
Interview Guide
Personal Statement Guide


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STEP BY
STEP
GUIDE

Degree Course Applications – Oxbridge

A step-by-step guide 16-19

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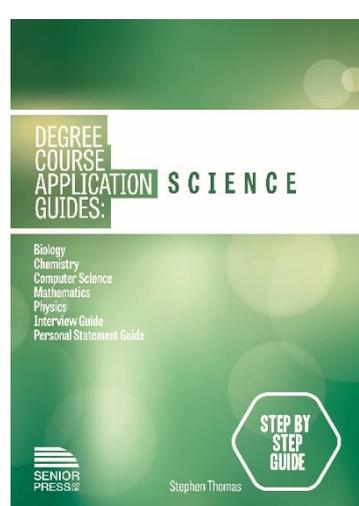
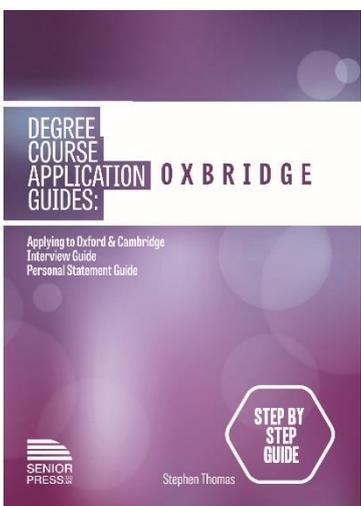
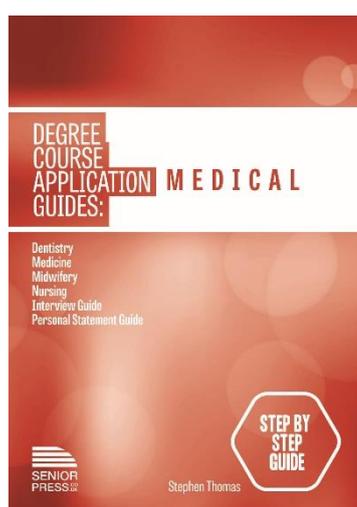
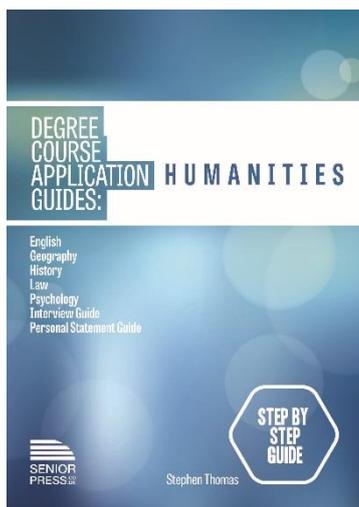
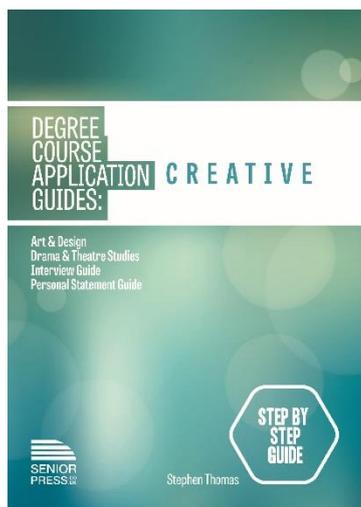
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Degree Course Applications

A step-by-step guide 16-19



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APPLYING TO OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE 16-19



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 and UNIQ organise Summer schools to encourage state school applicants to apply to competitive universities. Details at:

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

<http://www.uniq.ox.ac.uk/>

GCSEs Successful applicants will have mainly As and A*s at GCSE with a high proportion of A*s 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. In AS exams over the past few years, successful Cambridge applicants, for example, were getting 'comfortably over 90% on average' in their AS marks. The pattern will be similar for Oxford.

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.

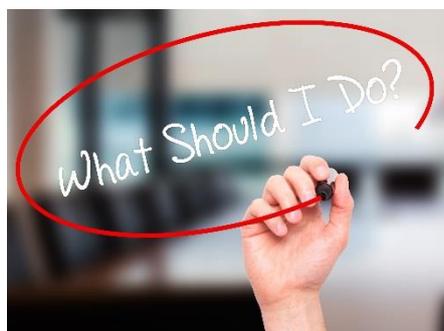
Oxford YouTube Link This YouTube link has a series of videos about Oxford

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

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:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/entrance-requirements/table-entrance-requirements>

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

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

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.

<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/>

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

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

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>

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 it 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/>

Test Support Oxbridge Applications offer courses for those taking selection tests:

<http://www.oxbridgeapplications.com/our-support/admissions-test-support/elat/>

One the above website there is also a free down-loadable book about applying to Oxford.

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_courses/applying_to_oxford/interviews/sample_questions.html#amedicine

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:

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

Cambridge Mock Interview Videos Mock interview videos on Cambridge website at:

<http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/apply/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 free book 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:

<http://www.oxbridgeapplications.com/tell-me-about-a-banana/>

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

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:

<http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/offerholders/reading-lists/>

Trinity College site has suggested reading as well as other enrichment suggestions at:

<http://trinityaccess.soc.srcf.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/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>

- The Faculties Website provides an excellent library of short films and podcasts of university lecturers talking about a range of academic subjects directly relevant to topics you will be studying at A level. The content is free to stream:
<http://www.thefaculties.org/>
- 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>
- Free Online Courses Mooc List is a website bringing together thousands of free online courses which could be used to explore areas of your subject or new subjects further:
<http://www.mooc-list.com/>

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 example has extensive archives of broadcasts relevant to a wide range 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

Find out about Post-Graduate Employment



To get some sense of where you might be going with your chosen degree, the following websites are very useful:

Prospects.ac.uk website

<http://www.prospects.ac.uk/>

Click 'Careers advice' link then click 'Options with your subject' link which will give you information on:

- skills the degree will give you
- job options related to your degree
- jobs for which your degree would be useful
- links to each of the jobs for further details
- career areas chosen by those with your degree
- where the jobs are
- other possibilities after your degree.

The icould website

<http://icould.com/>

has over a thousand videos of individuals talking about their careers with hundreds of supporting articles giving an insight into:

- what each career involves
- what people who follow the career actually do

- what it is like
- how they came to be where they are
- their plans for the future.

National Careers Service website:

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance to help you make decisions on learning, training and work opportunities. The service offers confidential, helpful and impartial advice, supported by qualified careers advisers.

The service is freely available for people living in England. Links to organisations offering targeted advice for people living in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales are provided on the website.

Help and support is provided to show you how to:

- develop your CV
- search and apply for jobs
- understand the job market
- search for courses and training schemes
- find funding to support any learning
- identify your key strengths and skills
- explore your career options
- choose training routes that fit your lifestyle
- develop an action plan to help you achieve your goals.



PLANNING AND WRITING AN OUTSTANDING UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE



Key Pointers

How Important is it? The Personal Statement is a very important part of your university application which will be made in the first term of Year 13. Many courses do not interview so the Personal Statement may be your only chance to impress selectors. The London School of Economics (LSE) say: ‘The Personal statement is the most important way we decide between applicants.’

Many universities will score you statement because they are looking for quite specific things.

How Much Do I have to Write? It is around an A4 side in length.(47 lines maximum, 4,000 characters maximum, 1,000 characters minimum, 12 point

Times New Roman font)) In most cases it will be written between July of Year 12 with a final version in September/ October of Year 13

What is it for? The Personal Statement gives you an opportunity to:

tell the universities and colleges why they should choose you

tell universities and colleges about your suitability for the course(s) that you hope to study.

demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all, ensure that you stand out from the crowd

Start Early If you get the big picture of the application process early and understand what will be needed for the Personal Statement you can begin to collect experiences, evidence of reading and other activities which can be written about when the time comes to write your statement? These are the things you need to start thinking about, doing and keeping on the back burner to make your eventual application a stronger one

Give Yourself an Edge It will give you a head start compared to many students who are applying nationally and will give you a competitive edge over other students who have left things till the last minute

In Year 11



Know Where You are Going? If you think you know where you are going with possible university course choices in Year 11 it will help if you to begin to collect experiences and engage in enrichment activities so that you have something significant to write about when the time comes.

Super-curricular activities are particularly important, things which show you have taken the initiative to find out more about and deepen your knowledge of subjects in which you have a particular interest or which are going to be important for your future course choices

From January of Year 12:



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.

Activities to Get Involved in

- Attend summer schools
- Work experience
- Public lectures
- Voluntary work
- Read (serious) newspapers
- Read journals (eg scientific)
- Enter academic competitions

Above All 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.
- 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 your subject:
<http://magazines.philipallan.co.uk/>

Get relevant experience

- This will depend on the subject you want to study. Some university subjects like Medicine or Vet Science will require extensive work experience and it is also expected for subjects such as Nursing, Teaching or Social Work. Watch this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-Fkrz8ms5w>
- 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, Business Studies and Engineering, voluntary work for caring careers
- A useful website is:
<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/Workandcareers/Workexperienceandvolunteering>.

Early June in Year 12



UCAS APPLY UCAS Apply system becomes available online.

You can now start thinking about the sort of things you will want to write about in your Personal Statement

July to September in Year 12:

You now need to begin to think about the Personal Statement in earnest and start writing preliminary drafts.

What Should go into the Personal Statement?

Some of the best advice on the Personal Statement comes from UCAS who suggest that **at least two thirds of your personal statement should relate to the course you wish to study at university and your suitability for it.**

For a mind-map and worksheet to help you use the links:

<http://www.ucas.com/documents/statement/mindmap.pdf>

<http://www.ucas.com/documents/statement/worksheet.pdf>

UCAS also give the following important pointers about how you should include in your Personal Statement:

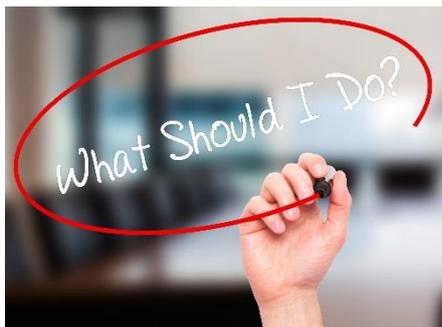
(1) Why you are applying for the course you have chosen?

- Why does the subject interest you?
- Include evidence that you understand what is required to study the course
- What got you interested in the subject?
- What have you learnt about the subject?
- Any activities that demonstrate your interest in the course(s)

(2) Why you are suitable for the course:

- Which skills and experience do you have that will help you succeed on the course.
- What have you done to develop your knowledge of the subject?
- What evidence is there that you have read, studied, gained experiences outside the confines of your A level courses?

From July in Year 12



Important Things you Should Do

Make sure that you check to see if the universities you are thinking of applying to have any particular requirements for the Personal Statement.

Useful Personal Statement Advice

This section of the Which University website gives specific subject focused Personal Statement advice:

<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/personal-statement-subject-guides-admission-tutor-tips>

For £5 subscribe to Personal Statement Builder on the SACU website which guides you through each section of your Personal Statement. The final re-draft section automatically scans your statement for potential issues and reports back on items including: clichés, overuse of intensifier words (Amazing! Enthralled! Captivated! etc), number of sentences starting with I, american spelling errors, repetition, overall structure.

<http://sacu-student.com/?product=personal-statement-builder-student-license>

What Makes a Good Personal Statement Videos and Podcasts

These videos and podcasts from UCAS and different universities give very sound Advice:

UCAS: <http://www.ucas.tv/ucas/video/WXSch>

Birmingham: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6wGWIIOxpw>

Imperial College: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_mlyruYQ24

Leicester: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zESqEAXqX-Y>

Kings College: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtm2xtsqMLU>

Bangor: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nH_mAYnqn0I

Oxford:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/why_oxford/podcasts/t_hird_episode_the.html

Make Sure You Know about the Course You are Applying For

Look them up on university course websites

Use the UCAS entry profiles web-pages which you will find when you begin to search for courses

Redrafting is Essential

- First, start by looking at the Personal Statement Mind-map on the UCAS APPLY website :

<http://www.ucas.com/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement>

- Use it to help you construct a mind-map focused on your personal aims and aspirations
- Second, use the excellent four page Personal Statement worksheet on the UCAS APPLY website to plan your statement in detail:

<http://www.ucas.com/students/applying/howtoapply/personalstatement>

- The worksheet gives you very clear indications about how much to write for each section Remember: at least two thirds on the course
- Next write out your statement in full and read carefully what you have written and don't be satisfied until you have re-worked it several times
- Your Personal Statement will need **to go through many drafts** before it is right. Read it to others to see what it sounds like and get them to comment on it too.

Do Not Use Pretentious Language Write in a natural way using vocabulary you would normally use but don't be chatty either. You are not texting.

Avoid Cliché Opening Sentences

UCAS say the 10 most common opening sentences are such things as:

1. I am currently studying a BTEC National Diploma in...
2. From a young age I have always been interested in ...
3. From an early age I have always been interested in ...
4. Nursing is a very challenging and demanding career...
5. For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated with
6. Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only ...

7. Nursing is a profession I have always looked upon with ...
8. For as long as I can remember I have been interested in..
9. I am an International Academy student and have been studying since....
10. Academically, I have always been a very determined ...

Avoid Empty statements about Yourself

- I have been interested in philosophy all my life (all???)
- I feel global warming is a really important issue (which aspects?)
- I feel that genes are fundamental in shaping human behaviour (say something original about genetics)
- You need team work and communication skills and I have got them (where is the evidence?)
- Maths is important for helping us understand all sorts of things (give examples)

Avoid Mentioning Cliché Books

- Show that you have explored beyond the obvious in your reading and say something original about the books you do mention. Everyone will write about Fermat's Last Theorem' for Maths or 'A Brief History of Time' for Physics, for example
- Make sure they are books you can talk about if interviewed
- Anticipate the interview question: 'What have you read since you wrote your Personal Statement?'

Avoid Exaggerated Language

For example, Maths is.....

'amazing'

'incredible'

'fantastic'

'unbelievably interesting'

'captivating'

Say something more thoughtful

What Sort of Language should I use?

- Persuade them that you are like this don't just claim it?
- 'This shows that I am/can.....'
- Use evidence from work experience
- Use evidence from achievements
- Use evidence from voluntary activities BUT not, for example 'I am a good at team work because I play in a team'.

Writing About your Work Experience

- Include details of jobs, placements, work experience or voluntary work, particularly if it's relevant to your chosen course(s). Try to link any experience to skills or qualities related to the course
- Make it clear how long was spent on each placement
- Think about how they demonstrate your personality, skills and abilities. Try to link them to the skills and experience required for your course(s).
- UCAS give this example:

NOT

'I spent two weeks working at a department store. I enjoyed speaking to customers and helping them with their enquiries'

BUT

'I spent two weeks managing customer enquiries at a department store. I learnt how to interact with customers and handle complaints. The experience highlighted the importance of positive communication between a business and its customers, and taught me how to manage difficult enquiries effectively. I would like to develop this skill further by studying a degree in public relations.'

For some good advice on how to write about your work experience go to:

<http://university.which.co.uk/advice/personal-statements-how-to-make-your-work-experience-really-count>

Skills you May Need to Write About

Depending on the nature of the course you may need to write about skills such as the following:

- Practical
- Problem solving
- Caring

- Enthusiastic
- Teamwork
- Good communicator
- Using own initiative
- Work under pressure
- Self motivated
- Working to deadlines
- Organisation
- Leadership
- Self-expression
- Scientifically literate
- Artistic/creative

Writing about Interests and Activities Relevant to the Course

The Assistant Registrar for Undergraduate Admissions from University of Warwick says that:

‘The strongest applicants are those who can link their extra-curricular activities to their proposed course of study. Your statement will be more convincing and personal if you write about why an experience, activity or interest makes you a good candidate for the course. Include enough additional information to make it interesting and to demonstrate your own interest.’

- Don't just list them
- Say what you got from the activity
- Use telling examples
- Be precise about time was spent on the activity
- Show how it helped to develop your thinking
- Emphasise skills and qualities you developed eg team work, commitment, caring
- Mention particular insights gained

The EPQ

- If you are involved in this mention it in your
- Personal Statement
- Show how it has helped you to develop intellectually with examples
- Show how it has helped you learn new study and research skills
- Show how you think it has helped you prepare for university

Applying for Multiple courses and Joint Degrees

- You only write one personal statement to all your choices. Try not to mention a university by name, even if you are applying to only one university - your personal statement cannot be changed if you apply to a different place later.
- If you're applying for a joint degree you will need to explain why you are interested in both aspects of this joint programme.
- If you're applying for different subjects or courses, you need to identify the common themes and skills that are relevant to your choices.

Do Not Plagiarise

One year 234 UCAS personal statements contained the following: 'Ever since I accidentally burnt holes in my pyjamas after experimenting with a chemistry set on my eighth birthday, I have always had a passion for science.'

BEWARE UCAS Copycatch Plagiarism Software

- Your PS is checked against 1,500,000 statements past and present on the UCAS website, those on other websites and in books
- 30,000 students 'caught' in a typical year
- 10% were identical to other applicants personal statements or online examples eg Student Room
- Universities applied to informed so that they can take appropriate action
- Student told by email with details on Track
- Flagged up on Adviser Track for school staff as well

The Most Common Reasons for Unsuccessful Applications According to UCAS

- Your personal statement does not strongly support your desire to study your chosen degree.
- Your personal statement did not show sufficient understanding, relevance or knowledge about the course you are applying for.
- You failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and interest in the subject in your personal statement.
- There is a lot of competition for places on this course and your personal statement and experience was not as strong as other applicants this year.
- Application form (including personal statement, reference and predicted grades) does not evidence accurate understanding of or motivation for subject.
- Not expressed a strong enough interest in the subject .

Using Example and ‘Model’ Personal Statements

- The danger of model answers is that you imitate them, risk plagiarism, sacrifice originality and get caught out
- There are similar issues with commercial websites which offer to ‘coach’ you It stops being your work.
- The Student Room website has a library of personal statements:

http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/personal_statement_library

- Be very careful with this website
- Uploaded by students some will be good some bad
- **No monitoring by Student Room** although some have been commented upon
- Not model statements
- Don’t copy. You will be caught!
- Best approach: use them to analyse with other students
- Most useful section of this website is the **Reviewed** Personal Statement Advice for different subjects section

http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/wiki/category:reviewed_personal_statements

5 key Characteristics of an Excellent Personal Statement

- At least two thirds should be about the course(s) and your suitability for it.
- Make it personal and original
- Do not plagiarise
- Provide evidence and examples to back up claims you make about yourself
- When you write about things you have done show what skills you have gained and what they demonstrate about your character and/or personality

Applying to Oxford: Personal Statement Advice

- Remember that tutors will be most interested to read about your academic achievements and your commitment and motivation for your chosen degree course.
- Extra-curricular activities may help demonstrate how well you have managed your time, but they do not form part of the selection criteria in any subject.

- Do bear in mind that your UCAS personal statement will be seen by all the universities to which you are applying
- Extra-curricular is secondary
- Honesty is key! Anything included could be a talking point in the interview
- Read PS aloud.
- Students could read each other's statements in pairs
- Read the last paragraph first
- Starting early in Year 12 keep a notebook for anything relevant: books, programmes, lectures, conversations that inspired them about the subject.

Applying to Cambridge: Personal Statement Advice

- Students are advised to follow the UCAS advice Admissions decisions are based solely on academic criteria (ability, commitment and potential). We are looking for an applicant to:
 - explain their reasons for wanting to study the subject
 - demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment for chosen course
 - express any particular interests within the field
 - outline how they have pursued their interest in the subject in their own time
 - Such information is often used as a basis for discussion at interview.
 - Students are advised to follow the UCAS advice Admissions decisions are based solely on academic criteria (ability, commitment and potential).
 - Applicants can if they wish make additional comments particularly relevant to their Cambridge application on their Supplementary Application Questionnaire . This is an opportunity to highlight particular features of the Cambridge course that attracted them. This additional personal statement is optional.

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

- Applicants will not be disadvantaged if they add nothing to this section of the SAQ but should not to repeat information in their UCAS personal statement

Extra-Curricular Activities and Cambridge

- Participation (or not) in extra-curricular activities is not taken into account (unless relevant to the course) and does not affect the chances of an offer.
- We look at how extra-curricular activities demonstrate characteristics that will aid students' transition to life at university, such as the balance of academic and personal commitments, and the development of skills or qualities (perseverance, independence, leadership or team-working).
- However, other university may place more importance on extra-curricular activities.
- Cambridge are much more interested in **super-curricular activities** which show how you have deepened your knowledge and understanding of the subject you want to study.

UNIVERSITY INTERVIEWS: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE



Key Pointers

Chances of an Interview More universities and university courses do not interview than do, so the **Personal Statement is even more important** if the university you are applying to does not interview. Some universities will interview every serious applicant, others none. Some will interview borderline applicants only. Check when you are choosing your universities.

Some Top Universities do not Interview In the case of two of the top universities, for example, LSE do not interview at all and Durham only interview for medicine and Education.

Who is More Likely to Interview? The following interview or are more likely to than not to interview **BUT this is not a definitive list:** Oxford and Cambridge, Medicine and medical professions, Vet Science/medicine, Dentistry, Teaching, Nursing and midwifery, Architecture, Classics, Computing, Drama and Theatre Studies, Engineering, Journalism, Music, Social work

Is a University Interview Always Selective? Interviews come in two main forms.

The 'selection' interview: A genuine attempt to assess suitability for a course: interviews for medicine and Oxbridge, teaching, nursing, midwifery are examples.

The 'recruitment' interview: The university has decided to make an offer and the interview is encouragement to accept. Interviews for less popular courses are examples of this. BUT be on your guard and present yourself as well as possible, it is not always as simple as this

From January of Year 12:



General Interview Technique Find out as much as you can about what is good interview techniques. Look at these examples of a poor and a good economics interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snol9dIz6Ds>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzwxQ164FE0>

Begin to mull over the ways you would answer possible questions you might get asked in an interview and do this more systematically as the year goes on:

Typical General Questions

- Tell me about yourself?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Tell us about your current courses?
- What are you best at?
- What are your main interests?
- Do you have any weaknesses
- Prepare by thinking about:
 - Your key personality characteristics
 - Your general and study interests
- Try and be relevant and talk about those personality qualities and interests that match the course

Questions about your motivation for the course and the university

- Why do you want to study for a degree?
- Why did you choose this course?

- What do you think university can offer you?
- What else, apart from study, interests you about this university?
- Why do you want to study at this university?
- Why do you want to study in this town/city?

Find out What to Expect at the Interview If you know what course you want to apply for find out as much as you can from university websites about how likely you are to be interviewed, the form the interview will take, what sort of questions are likely to be asked and whether or not some sort of test or challenge will be presented to you at the interview.

Oxford or Cambridge Interviews

Go to the Oxbridge Step by Step Guide

Medical Interviews

Go to the Medicine Step by Step Guide

Dentistry Interviews

Go to the Dentistry Step by Step Guide

Vet Science Interviews

Go to the Vet Science Step by Step guide

<http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/apply-for-teacher-training/help-with-your-interview>

Other Subject Focused University Interview Guidance Interview Preparation

Mental Rehearsal Mull over answers that you would give to questions that topically come up at interviews:

Subject related questions

- Why do you want to study this subject?
- What do you know about the course? (very important that you prepare for this)
- What attracts you to this course?
- Are there particular aspects of the course that attract you ? Why?

- What have you read recently that is relevant to your interest in this course?
- What experiences /work experience/ visits/ independent study have you done which is relevant to this course?

Topical questions Interviewers may ask your opinion on something topical, that is in the news or related to your subject.

- Prepare for the interview by looking in the media to see what is current
- You can reading the national serious newspapers online or in hard copy and pick out current stories that seem linked to your subject.
- Collect them in a folder and think about how you could respond to a question on these topics.
- Watch TV documentaries related to the subject

Hypothetical situation or problem solving questions

- Be prepared to have to think on your feet and do not over rehearse prepared answers
- Give me an example of a time when... you dealt with a problem, or overcame some obstacles, or worked in a team to achieve an outcome etc
- If you were asked to....do something creative aboutwhat would you do?

Course-related questions: Aston University encourage applicants to think about the following:

- What are the employment prospects for graduates?
- What is the content of the second year module x?
- Is the focus of the course more practical or theoretical?
- Is there preparatory reading I can do?
- How many contact hours per week should I expect?
- How much independent study is expected?
- How much choice do I have with module selection?

Video Look at this video about interview techniques

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMYD6c9Z3z8>

Early June in Year 12



UCAS APPLY UCAS Apply system becomes available online.

July to September in Year 12:

Look at the excellent advice on Interviews from UCAS:

- The when's and where's: Make sure you know where you need to be and when. Make any travel and accommodation arrangements in advance. Visit university website for maps and directions.
- Knowledge is power: Read the prospectus and look on the university's or college's website. Make a list of questions you'd like to ask, things the prospectus doesn't tell you.
- Know your application: This is all your interviewer knows about you so far.
- Be familiar with 'hot topics' in your subject area
- Practice: A mock interview is a good idea.
- Dress appropriately: Show you are taking things seriously by dressing smartly (smart trousers and shirt or blouse)
- Arrive in good time: Take contact numbers in case you get delayed.
- Body language: Don't slouch or yawn; sit up and look alert. Make sure you are giving off all the right signals.
- Stumped? Ask for question to be repeated.
- Expect the unexpected: A surprise test or exercise isn't unheard of so stay calm and think clearly.
- Ask questions: Use the interview as a chance to find out about things not on website or in prospectus.
- Sit up straight, and lean slightly forward in your chair to projecting interest and engagement. Aligning your body's position to that of the interviewer.
- Keep an interested expression. Nod and make positive gestures in moderation.
- Establish a comfortable personal space between you and the interviewer. Invading personal space (anything more than 20 inches) makes the interviewer uncomfortable.

If you have more than one person interviewing briefly address both with your gaze and return attention to the person who asked the question.

- If interruptions happen refrain from staring at your interviewer while they address their immediate business. Show willingness to leave if they need privacy.
- According to research at Harvard **striking an expansive posture** with open limbs rather than one with crossed arms and legs raises testosterone levels by an average of 20% and lowers cortisol, the stress hormone by a similar amount.

September in Year 12:



Look at this UCAS video about university interviews:

<http://www.ucas.tv/ucas/video/pwHtR>

Get a Mock Interview! with a member of staff who knows about the subject you are applying for.

Explain to them what you can expect for the interviews you are going for because they may not know.

Get them to really challenge what you are saying with questions such as:

- What evidence is there for that?
- I disagree with that because.....?
- You are not taking account of?
- Doesn't that contradict what you said earlier.....?
- Wouldn't x's ideas/theories argue against that?
- Would you be able to apply that kind of thinking to.....?
- Can you explain how you came to that conclusion?
- On the other hand, couldn't you say that.....?
- The problem with what you are saying is.....?
- There are limitations to that argument aren't there.....

What should I be reading?

University Interviews Guide, Andy Gardner and Barbara Hamnett

Which websites will be useful?

The University of Kent Careers Service offer some very good general advice about different types of interviews. It is aimed at undergraduates but is still useful to those applying to university or for a variety of careers.

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/applicn.htm>

Which University? There are some interview tips on this website:

<http://university.which.co.uk/search/advice?utf8=%E2%9C%93&a%5Bq%5D=interviews&commit=Go>

Sample Questions This site has many examples of university interview questions and discussion of possible answers

<http://www.studential.com/interviews>



READ MORE **DEGREE COURSE APPLICATION GUIDES**

