APPLYING TO OXBRIDGE
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>p3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Advice from Oxford's Head of Marketing &amp; Enterprise</td>
<td>p5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford vs Cambridge</td>
<td>p6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College System</td>
<td>p8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Specific</td>
<td>p10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interview Stage</td>
<td>p11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Tips from an Oxford Graduate</td>
<td>p12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

WE’RE NOT GOING TO LIE TO YOU – MAKING AN APPLICATION TO STUDY AT OXFORD OR CAMBRIDGE IS A BIG (AND CHALLENGING) STEP. THE COMPETITION WILL BE FIERCE, AND AS WELL AS NEEDING TOP-NOTCH GRADES AND A WINNING PERSONAL STATEMENT YOU’LL ALSO HAVE TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE INTERVIEW PROCESS – AND YOU’LL HAVE LESS TIME TO DO IT IN!

On the other hand, if you do end up securing yourself a place you’ll have a ticket to one of the top universities in the country (not to mention the world). This guide will take you through the Oxbridge application process step-by-step, and – while we’re by no means guaranteeing you a place – should help you maximise your chances of success…

SO HOW DOES THE PROCESS WORK?

Despite the fact that all potential students apply through UCAS, the Oxbridge application process does differ in some ways to the application process of other UK universities. As well as choosing and being accepted onto a specific course, for instance, most students will also apply directly to an individual college. The college will become both your home and the centre of your academic life, so it’s important to take this into consideration when deciding which one to apply to (although if you’re really not sure you can also make an open application to the uni, which isn’t specific to any college and will mean you simply get assigned to one by a computer).

The first stage of the application process will involve filling in your UCAS form. As well as your personal details and your university choices you will also be expected to provide academic references, evidence of your predicted grades (if you haven’t already passed your exams) and a personal statement. For tips on how to do this (and for advice on crafting your personal statement), have a read of our UCAS application guide.

IMPORTANT:

Given the competitive nature of the course, and the lengthier applications process, the deadline for Oxbridge applications is considerably earlier than the applications deadlines for the majority of Universities (mid-October as apposed to mid-January).
CAN I APPLY TO BOTH UNIVERSITIES?
Unfortunately, both Oxford and Cambridge are inundated with applications (Oxford interview around 10,000 students each year, roughly 3,500 of which get a place), so in order to reduce the number of applicants, potential Oxbridge students can only make an application to either Oxford OR Cambridge (not both). The best way to decide which one you’d prefer is to go on an open day and visit the universities for yourself. You’ll be able to look around the grounds and the colleges, speak to current students, and – perhaps most importantly – get a true feel for the place.

WILL I HAVE TO SIT EXTRA TESTS?
In order to further whittle down their applicants, many subjects will require potential undergraduates to sit additional tests (these can either take place before, or during, the interview stage). The tests will be subject-specific and will give admissions tutors an indication of your natural aptitude for the subject in question, as well as giving them an idea of whether or not you’ll be able to cope with the course content. We’ll go into these test in more detail later on (don’t worry, they’re not as scary as they sound).

WILL I NEED TO ATTEND AN INTERVIEW?
You certainly will. If you do well in your application and the university is considering making you an offer, you will be invited to an interview at your chosen college. Usually this will happen in November or December, the year before your course is due to commence. It may sound nerve-racking (and you might have heard rumours about the type of questions you’ll be asked), but don’t panic – the interview stage is an amazing opportunity to demonstrate your passion for the subject and to highlight why you would be the ideal student!

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?
After you’ve completed the applications process, sat any required tests and been for an interview, then it is simply a case of waiting for the university to make a decision. You should hear back in the December/January before the course is due to start.

Okay, so applying to Oxbridge might not be the easiest or the quickest process in the world, but don’t let that put you off – in the long run, the benefits of having an Oxbridge degree will significantly outweigh the hassle of the application process.
APPLICATION ADVICE FROM OXFORD’S HEAD OF MARKETING AND ENTERPRISE

SO HOW DOES THE OXBRIDGE APPLICATION PROCESS ACTUALLY WORK? AND WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAXIMISE YOUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS? WE SPOKE TO HELEN CHARLESWORTH, HEAD OF MARKETING AND ENTERPRISE AT OXFORD UNIVERSITY, TO FIND OUT…

WHO READS THE APPLICATIONS SENT IN BY PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS?
Applications to Oxford University are read by tutors who teach undergraduates. Those tutors look at all the information provided in the applications: the academic record, personal statement, academic reference and any predicted grades, along with any written work or written test required for that course. Those tutors then draw up a shortlist of students who will be invited to interview.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN AN APPLICANT?
We look for a high academic achievement and potential, along with passion and commitment for the chosen degree programme. You can see the full details of the selection criteria for each course at www.ox.ac.uk/criteria.

WHAT SHOULD APPLICANTS MAKE SURE THEY INCLUDE IN THEIR PERSONAL STATEMENTS?
We recommend that students focus on their academic interests and achievements, and also explain why they have chosen the subject or subjects that they want to study.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON MISTAKES STUDENTS MAKE IN THEIR APPLICATIONS?
Sadly some students don’t read the requirements for their chosen course, so don’t realise that they need to register to take a test as part of their application. Another common mistake is that students think that they need to tell us about lots of extra-curricular activities. We welcome extra-curricular activities but they aren’t considered during the admissions process unless they relate directly to the selection criteria for the course.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WOULD PUT YOU OFF A STUDENT’S APPLICATION?
We consider each application on its individual merits, taking every aspect of the application. Of course if someone does not meet the basic entrance requirements, they are very unlikely to be shortlisted. It’s also concerning for us if the personal statement does not seem to relate to the course that the student has applied for.

IF AN APPLICANT IS SUCCESSFUL, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THEM IN REGARDS TO INTERVIEW PREPARATION?
We have lots of advice about interviews on our website, including sample questions and videos of mock interviews. Please see www.ox.ac.uk/interviews.
AH, THE AGE-OLD RIVALRY BETWEEN OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE. THESE DAYS YOU’LL PROBABLY SEE THEM THRASHING IT OUT IN THE ANNUAL BOAT-RACE AND FIGHTING FOR THE TOP SPOT IN VARIOUS LEAGUE TABLES, BUT THEIR RIVALRY ACTUALLY GOES BACK CENTURIES.

They’re the two oldest universities in the UK, they both have extremely high reputations both in the UK and world-wide, and each year they receive thousands of applications for a limited number of places. In order to reduce the level of applications students are only allowed to apply for either Oxford OR Cambridge, so the big question is – which should you choose?

LOOK AT THE COURSE
The most important thing to consider when making a decision is to consider the subject you are looking to study and the courses offered within that specific field. Even where the same subject is offered at both universities, there will most likely be different module options available, so consider which ones are the best fit with your own personal interests.

If you want to study two subjects at degree level, then it is worth remembering that only Oxford runs combined honours programmes. Cambridge may allow you to study the odd module in another subject (where there’s a cross-over), but your degree itself will be in a single subject. If you’re looking to study two subjects with equal weighting towards your degree then you may want to take this into consideration.
LEAGUE TABLES
As you’ll know, Oxford and Cambridge are always at the top of the league tables (another issue which causes infamous rivalry between the two establishments). However, it is important to check which university is the very best in your specific subject area, as each of the two has its own merits. Cambridge has a (slightly) better reputation than Oxford for sciences, medicine and technology, for instance, whereas Oxford’s reputation in the social sciences, arts and humanities is marginally stronger.

LOCATION
The location of both universities is pretty spectacular, and they’re both only a (fairly) short commute away from London’s city centre. Of the two, Cambridge is considered to be quieter and more rural whereas Oxford is a little livelier. From a social perspective you should really take this into consideration when making a decision, as it may have a significant impact on your student experience. You’ll be studying at your chosen university for a minimum of 3 years, so it is important to study in a region that will enrich your student experience and make you happy.

FAMILY TIES
If you have family members that have studied at either Oxford or Cambridge, you may find they’re keen for you to follow in their footsteps (and they’ll probably enjoy telling you all the ways in which the one they went to study at is so much better than the rival choice). The key here is to make your own mind up. Sure, it’s fine to listen to what people have to say – and it’s fine to factor their advice into your final decision – but if you do find yourself drawn to the university they didn’t go to, that’s okay too!
THE COLLEGE SYSTEM

You’ve probably heard that Oxford and Cambridge are both collegiate establishments, but what does this actually mean? Well, one way to think of it would be to imagine lots of little micro-universities grouped under the ‘Oxford’ and ‘Cambridge’ banners – each with its own student halls and team of academic staff.

These micro-universities are known as colleges, and each will have between 300-500 students, studying a cross-section of subjects (meaning class sizes are significantly smaller than those at non-collegiate universities). This set-up will give you access to a small, ready-made community – perfect for settling in to university life, and even better for allowing lecturers to give you plenty of academic support throughout your studies. So, with a number of different colleges available to you, how on earth do you decide where you want to study?

1) YOUR SUBJECT

This is one of the most important things to take into consideration when deciding upon which college to apply for. While most subject areas will be covered at multiple colleges in various forms, the course content will differ depending upon on teaching staff and their specialist study areas. You should have a look at the courses offered by each college in terms of module options and see whether or not they suit your own personal interests.
2) THE TEACHING STAFF
One of the great things about studying at an Oxbridge University is that they attract some world-leading teaching staff who are experts in their field. If you have a passion for a specific field or you already have a strong indication of what you’re looking to do for a career, then you may want to investigate who will be teaching you. If your interests are similar to the interests of your tutors it will be an advantage in the long-run, as they’ll be able to help nurture your academic growth (and may be able to provide networking opportunities at a later stage).

3) REPUTATION
All of the Oxbridge colleges have a phenomenal reputation and a history of producing some of the world’s greatest thinkers. However, some colleges will have a history of producing a number of innovative graduates in a specific field, so it is important to take this into consideration when making an application. If you’re looking to pursue a career in politics, for instance, then you may want to study somewhere like King’s College (Cambridge) or Balliol College (Oxford). Both these colleges are well-known for being politically active, and have produced many graduates who have had lucrative careers within parliament.

4) SOCIAL LIFE
Whichever college you decide to attend, it is important to remember that this will become your home for the next three years. Before you make a final decision you should examine the different activities offered as part of the college social life and look at the size of the student body. If you’re a social butterfly who thrives on mixing with a large number of people on a constant basis, then you may struggle to adjust to life in one of the smaller colleges.

You should also watch out for any entry criteria specific to the individual college. Some colleges are single-gender institutions, for example, so you should double check this before making your application.

5) LOCATION
The location of your chosen college will have a huge impact on your student experience. Apart from your second year, when you’ll be encouraged to rent rooms from a private landlord with friends, you’ll spend the majority of your time living and working within your college – so its location is very important. Do you want to live near to the town centre? Or is a rural setting more appealing?

Of course, even once you’ve taken all of the above into consideration, you still might not know where to apply. If this is the case – don’t worry. You can submit an open application and the admissions tutors will forward your details on to a relevant college on your behalf (and applying this way will not have an impact upon your chances of success).
SUBJECT SPECIFIC TESTING

UNFORTUNATELY WITH AN OXBRIDGE UNIVERSITY IT ISN’T AS SIMPLE AS FILLING IN YOUR UCAS FORM AND WAITING FOR A RESPONSE. AS WELL AS PROVING YOU CAN MEET THE ENTRY CRITERIA AND WRITING A WINNING PERSONAL STATEMENT, CHANCES ARE YOU’LL ALSO BE EXPECTED TO SIT SOME TESTS AS PART OF YOUR APPLICATION (WHICH WILL EITHER BE BEFORE, OR DURING, THE INTERVIEW PROCESS).

CAMBRIDGE SUBJECT TESTS
There are four main tests used by Cambridge University in order to establish whether or not a student has the essential skills required to succeed on the course…

The Cambridge Law Test
If you’re applying to study Law at Cambridge, most colleges will require you to take the Cambridge Law Test. The results of this test will be used alongside your predicted grades (and your interview) to gauge your suitability for the course. You will take the test while you’re at college for your interview and you’ll be expected to answer one question in an hour. No previous knowledge of law is required.

Bio-Medical Admissions Test (BMAT)
All medical and veterinary students will be expected to sit the BMAT test (a test of scientific aptitude) before being offered a place on their chosen course. The BMAT test itself will take place in November, but applicants should have registered to sit the exam by the start of October.

Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA)
If you’re studying on a course that is more mathematical or scientific in nature, then your college may require you to sit the Thinking Skills Assessment (not all colleges and subjects will ask you to sit this, but they’ll let you know in advance if it’s required). The Thinking Skills Assessment is 90 minutes long and aims to test your problem solving and critical thinking abilities over 50 multiple choice questions.

School/College Essays
For subjects in the arts, humanities and social sciences, you may be required to submit a school/college essay to demonstrate your analytical skills and intellect. These sample essays will be read by the college tutors and may be discussed at the interview stage (so make sure you re-read them prior to your interview).

OXFORD SUBJECT TESTS
For Oxford applicants, the majority of tests required are more subject-specific. Most subjects will require students to sit a written test which demonstrates that they have an aptitude for the subject area. The majority of written tests will take place in early November, although for tests such as the LNAT (law) and the BMAT (biomedical sciences) you will be expected to register for the exam by the beginning of October.
THE INTERVIEW STAGE

IF YOU’VE MANAGED TO MAKE IT TO THE INTERVIEW STAGE THEN CONGRATULATIONS – YOUR UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE OF CHOICE CAN CLEARLY SEE THAT YOU HAVE POTENTIAL!

Before you get your conditional offer, though, you’ll have to navigate your way through the interview process. All Oxbridge applicants will be predicted high grades (As and A*s at A-level), so the interview process aims to find out a little more about the candidates and to establish whether or not they will benefit from a place on the course. But what exactly are admissions tutors looking for?

1) Strong analytical and reasoning skills

One of the key things that an Oxbridge university looks for in applicants is the ability to engage with texts and information in a new and critical manner. In this sense, some of the questions you are asked may seem a little unusual – (Why might it be useful for an English student to read the Twilight series? If you could invent a new musical instrument, what kind of sound would it make?) – but it is important to remember that there is no right or wrong answer for these questions. All tutors want to see is that you are able to engage with questions in a logical manner and that you can apply your own independent reasoning to reach a conclusion.

2) Passion for the subject

On the plus side, the interview allows you the opportunity to demonstrate your passion for the subject and prove that you have the potential to be an attribute to your chosen college. Before you attend the interview, you should thoroughly investigate the course content so that you have a firm understanding of why you want to pursue this line of study and what you can bring to the course.

3) Ability to engage in discussion

Another essential aspect of the interview process is to allow tutors to see that you not only have the required knowledge to study on the course, but also that you’re able to engage in debate and discussion. Some colleges may have asked you to submit a school/college essay in advance, in which case they will discuss the arguments you put forward as part of your essay in further detail. (Even if you haven’t had to write an essay in advance, discussion with tutors will play an integral part of the interview process.)
INTERVIEW TIPS FROM AN OXFORD GRADUATE

TOM HICKISH RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM A DEGREE IN MEDICINE AT WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND HAS JUST STARTED WORK AS A JUNIOR DOCTOR AT ST THOMAS’ HOSPITAL. WE CAUGHT UP WITH HIM ABOUT HIS OWN OXFORD INTERVIEW EXPERIENCE...

HOW MUCH PREPARATION DID YOU DO FOR YOUR INTERVIEW?

The Oxford interview process is unique in that you will be interviewed by the same tutors who will teach you for the entirety of your degree. This means the interview is more of a mock tutorial, where the tutors explore your potential and see if you suit their style of teaching. Each tutor has their own individual style and thus each interview is necessarily unique and personal. The interviews, like a tutorial, are a discussion in which a problem is explored, rather than a formal question and answer session. This may sound daunting, but equally it takes the pressure off learning rote answers to ‘expected questions’ and gives you an opportunity to clear your mind and think logically.

The tutors recognise the difference between knowledge and intelligence, and thus the burden of revising and preparing in the traditional sense is removed. The best demonstration of intelligence is to be able to deal with problems without necessarily having specific knowledge about them, and as such they will continue to push you until you’re on unfamiliar ground. The best preparation is simply to be inquisitive and engage with your studies. The worst thing you can do is have lots of prepared things to say or lots of facts clogging up your head: this will only make you nervous trying to remember it all, and you will end up not listening to the question because you are worrying about what to say.

The essence of the Oxford interview is that they are not testing what you know, but rather how you think. On the day, all you need to do is relax and clear your head. Make sure you listen to the question, pause and think logically, and then say your thought processes out loud. The rest will flow from there!

PLEASE CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE INTERVIEW PROCESS?

There is no standard format for an Oxford interview; it depends on the subject you’re applying for, the individual
tutor, and the college. However, in general you will have multiple 20 minute interviews, all aimed at giving you the best chance to show your potential. I had two at the college I applied to (Magdalen), and then two at another randomly allocated college (Wadham).

Incidentally I didn’t get an offer from Magdalen, but did from Wadham – only going to show how the very different teaching styles suit different applicants. As I said before you will be interviewed by your potential future tutors. Each interview will have at least two interviewers and often one other person just listening. The interviews are generally spread over two days, which means one of the colleges will put you up for the night and provide dinner in the hall.

This is a great opportunity to enjoy your surroundings and try to relax, and there will be loads of first years on hand to answer questions and help you get settled in. It’s impossible to predict what questions you will be asked, but in general the science subjects will be based around solving a problem, which often involve working through graphs or equations, or designing a theoretical experiment.

This may seem daunting, but the interviews are extremely interactive and the tutors will constantly guide you in the right direction. The arts interviews can be more diverse, but may involve discussing a text or working through a social or political concept. In any case, the same principles apply: they are not testing what you know, but rather, how you think.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOUR INTERVIEW?
After the interview there was not really any feedback but you are told that they will let you know how things went in a few weeks. I think some colleges send letters to all their applicants, but at Wadham the tutors like to give the successful applicants a phone call. As I said before, the tutors are hand-picking their own students, and each college may only have a handful of students for each subject in each year – there were 5 of us studying Medicine at Wadham – so the whole process is very personal.

Oxford is a wonderfully friendly, engaging place to study, and I would hate any rumours to get in the way of anyone thinking of applying. Oxford is one of the fairest universities to be interviewed at. From the moment you step into the room all they care about is you. They don’t care where you’re from, what school you went to, who your parents are, how much money they earn, or anything else. They just care about your potential. Don’t be afraid to apply – go for it and enjoy!

THEN WHAT?
After you’ve been for your interview, you should hear back from the university by January of the following year, when you’ll find out whether or not you’ve been successful.

If you do get a letter confirming that you have been granted a place, you should make sure that you read it through carefully. If you get a conditional offer – which is the usual type of offer made to students completing their A-levels – it means your Oxbridge place is conditional on you achieving a certain set of grades.

Of course, if you already have your A-level results before applying (for instance if you’ve taken a gap year and are only just applying) then your offer will most likely be unconditional.

After that, all you have to do is spend the rest of the year focussing on your exams!