



Oxbridge Interviews

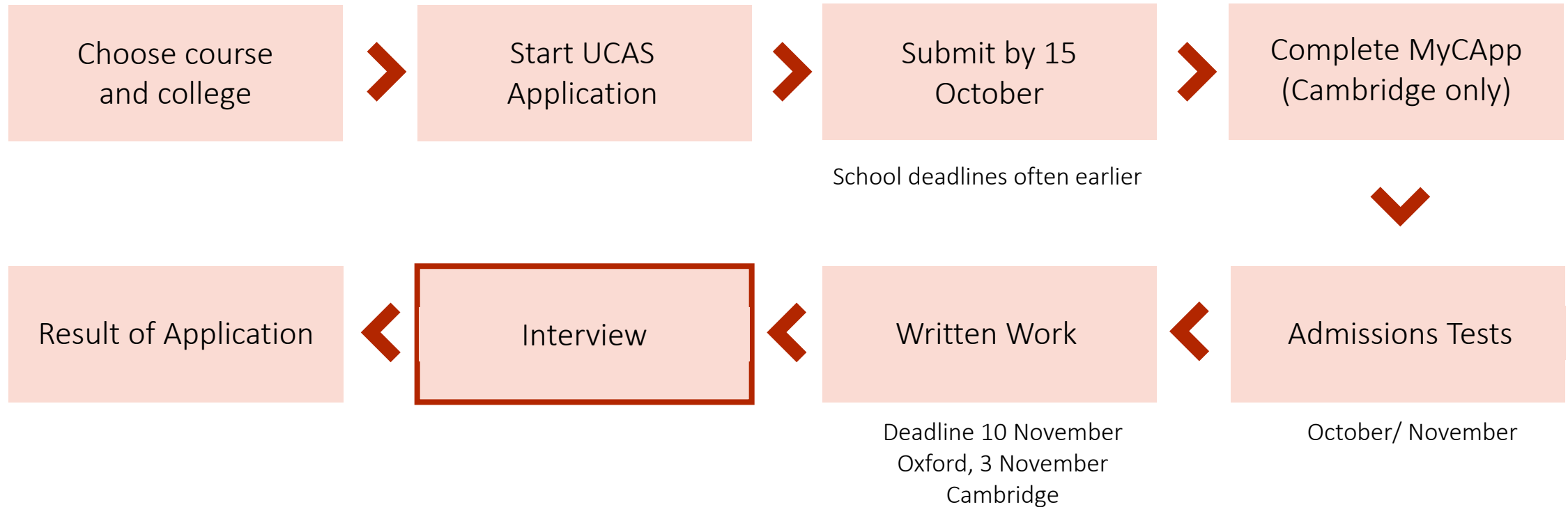
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Oxbridge Application Process



Why do Oxford and Cambridge interview?

- Many applicants have or are predicted A*AA/A*A*A (or equivalent)
- Most applicants have excellent references and personal statements
- Interviews aim to go beyond the paperwork
- An audition for a tutorial/supervision – will our learning style suit you?
- Designed to assess your academic abilities and potential not your schooling or any coaching.



Cambridge

What are we looking for?

- Enthusiasm
- Academic ability **for your subject**
- Academic potential
- Independent thought
- An enquiring mind
- Commitment to study



Oriel College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



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What To Expect - Oxford

- All online – MS Teams
- Take place wherever a candidate feels able to perform their best
- You may have more than one interview with more than one college
- Normally with two tutors
- Typically last around 30 minutes
- Academic focus
- Questions to challenge existing knowledge and present new material.



What to Expect - Cambridge

- Online (all except Trinity which is in-person) – pay attention to **YOUR** college's instructions
- Most interviews 29 Nov – 17 December
- 2 interviews with the college you applied to. About 35-50 mins total.
- 2 interviewers
- At school or home
- Academic focus
- Questions to challenge existing knowledge and present new material.



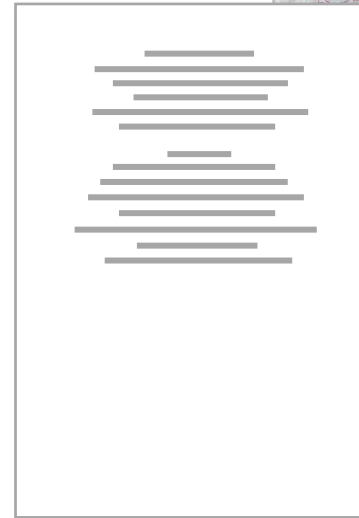
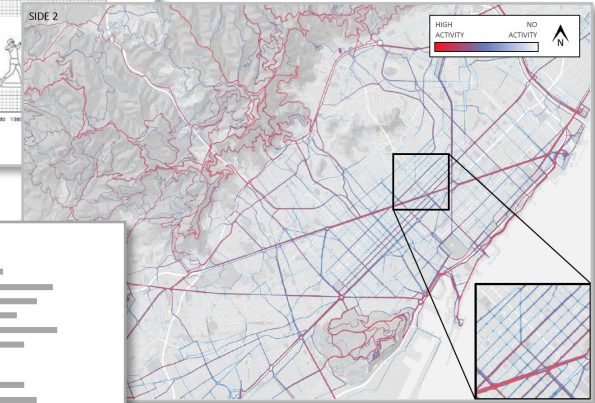
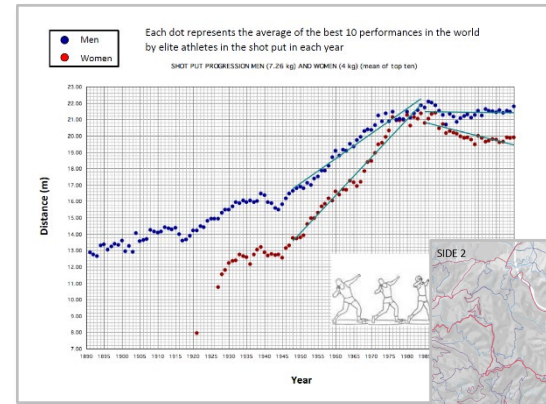
College-Registered Assessments - Cambridge

- Online
- Set date – most 23-29 November for all bar 4-year Classics (7 or 8 December)
 - University-wide = same day
 - College-specific assessments – check college. Some subjects, but not every college.
- Will be notified in advance
- Keep a regular eye on inboxes (incl. Spam/junk/'promotions') for the most up-to-date information



What will an interview involve?

- Academic in focus
- Academic stimulus or problem to work through
- Tutors will support you – they want to see you at your best



$$8!^{\frac{1}{8}} < ? < 9!^{\frac{1}{9}}$$



What could an interview cover?

Icebreakers

- Why do you want to study your subject?

Something from your personal statement

- What did you think of this book/article/documentary/concept?

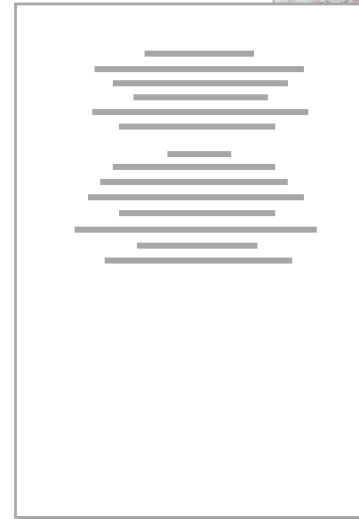
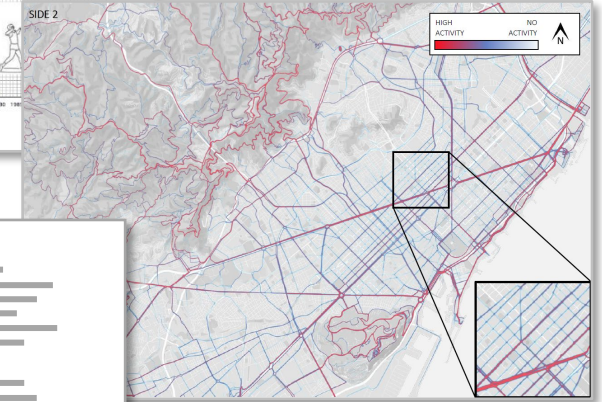
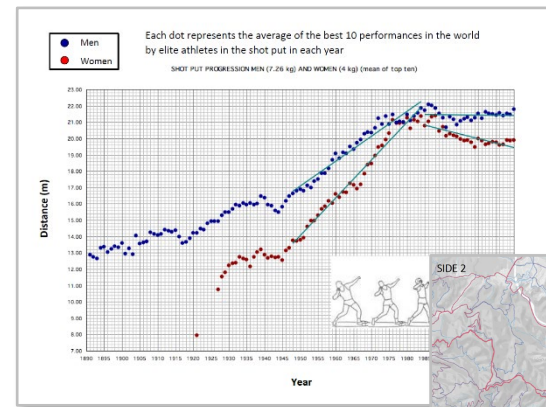
Current (relevant) events

Unseen material

- Material before interview
- Material during interview

Problem solving questions building on existing knowledge

There are no trick questions or hidden agendas!



$$8!^{\frac{1}{8}} < ? < 9!^{\frac{1}{9}}$$



Some examples of what to expect (preparatory study):

- **English** - piece of poetry, extract from a piece of literature
- **History** – a historical source (primary, secondary or both)
- **Languages** – piece of poetry or literature in the target language
- **Law** – a piece of legislation or verdict
- **HSPS, PBS** – a text, or possibly a diagram or other representation
- **Economics** – a text, or maths questions to attempt

Arts/Humanities

Some examples of what to expect:

- A (scientific) report or article that you will discuss with the interviewers
- A specimen to discuss
- A diagram or other representation

Sciences

What are we looking for?

“There really is no Oxbridge type”



“how well you can think something through”

“**not** how much you already know”

“flexible, responsive and thoughtful”

Some Tips to Help Prepare

Do

- Read over your personal statement
- **Talk through** your thought processes, explaining yourself as you go – concentrate on the question
- Ask for clarification if you are unsure
- Think of the interview like a **tutorial/supervision**
- Speak with current students – some colleges and departments will have events of ‘chat with me’ features on their website
- **Listen**; take a moment to think; try to give your answer some structure.
- Dress comfortably

Don't

- Pretend to know something you don't – do have a go at working it out if it's new!
- Forget to listen to what the tutor is asking you



After the Interview

- Do not discuss the questions with other candidates
- Don't over-analyse what was said

Remember:

- You can only do your best – that's all we can ask of you!
- The interview is just *one* part of the process
- Try to enjoy it!

- Interviews are designed to be challenging!
- It's not you vs the interviewer
- Everyone will feel stretched!
- Don't panic if you get something wrong!
- Keep talking, think out loud!
- Again, they are meant to be hard!



OMG, that was so hard,
I must have done terribly!

I had an interview at Oxbridge! A serious academic conversation, designed to challenge me. It was even a bit fun.

Types of Questions: Opinion

- History: Which person (or sort of person) in the past would you most like to interview, and why?
- English: Tell me about your favourite poem, or book.
- Languages: Have you ever visited X, why do you want to study languages?
- Geography: If I visited your local area, what would I be interested in?
- Law: Tell me about a case you find particularly interesting
- Land Economy: What do you think about those who regard climate change as nonsense?
- Psychology: What study/experiment particularly interests you and why?
- Maths: what was the most beautiful proof in A-Level maths?
- Biological Sciences: What do you like most about the human body?
- Sciences: If you could have half an hour with any scientist living or dead, who would it be and why?
- Medicine: What makes a good doctor?
- Questions about something read on the personal statement

Interview Questions

“What makes a good doctor?”

- Various ways to approach this question:
- What ways could ‘good’ be defined
- Identify e.g.
 - Medical standards
 - Patient perception
 - Outcomes
- The discussion might extend to other topics related to points made

Types of Questions: Compare/Contrasts

- History/Politics: what makes civil wars so different to other wars?
- English: is there a difference between innocence and naivety?
- Languages: In a world where English is a global language, why learn French/German/Spanish?
- Law: Why should justice not be retributive?
- Economics: Why are rich countries rich, and poor countries poor?
- HSPS: Does the recent migration crisis in Europe challenge or reinforce racism?
- Land Economy: Is it more important to focus on poverty at home or abroad?
- Psychology: Questions around nature vs nurture
- Biology: Ladybirds are red. So are strawberries. Why?
- Computer science: it is a fact that, apart from the peripherals, the whole of a computer can be made from NAND gates. The Egyptians created NAND gates using marbles rolling down chutes and used them for booby trapping pyramids. Therefore, the Egyptians invented the computer.
- Chemistry: Why are some objects opaque and some transparent?
- Medicine: If a carrot can grow from one carrot cell, why not a human?
- Architecture: comparison of different buildings (e.g. with accompanying image)

Types of Questions: Application of existing knowledge to new and challenging circumstances

- Philosophy: differentiate between power and authority
- History/Politics: Is violence always political? Does 'political' mean something different in different contexts?
- Languages: What are the differences between Spain and Latin America?
- Law: if the punishment for parking on double yellow lines were death, and therefore nobody did it, would that be a just and effective law?
- Geography: What do you think would be the major differences on Earth if plate tectonics didn't exist?
- HSPS: Must all revolutions necessarily fail?
- Psychology: Design an experiment to show whether monkeys' behaviour is innate or learnt.
- Physics/Engineering: How hot does the air have to be in a hot air balloon if I wanted to use it to lift an elephant?
- Biology: What would life be like without enzymes?
- Chemistry: How would you adjust ethanol to make it a stronger acid? How would you adjust carboxylic acid to make it stronger?
- Veterinary: Why do lions have manes?
- Medical Sciences: Why do living systems need hormones?

Interview Questions

“Here’s a picture of a gravity dam. How would you design one of these dams for holding back water?” (Engineering)

- What forces are acting on the dam, and how do these affect the wall’s stability?
- Construct some basic mathematical expressions predicting the point at which water would push the wall over.
- Discuss failure by sliding, structural design, advantages of solid and hollow designs, the effect of water seeping under the dam.

Types of Questions

“What is ‘normal’ for humans?” (PBS)

- Various ways to approach this question:
- Distinguish the normal from the statistical average
- Identify issues about judging normality
 - ‘Biological’ factors
 - Cultural and historical perspectives
- The discussion might extend to topics such as the relation between abnormality and eccentricity.

Types of Questions: technical questions, requiring prior knowledge

- Classics: How many Latin cases are there excluding the vocative? How many do you think might have been in Proto Indo-European?
- Theology: What is the importance of literacy in the development of religions? Can you give some examples?
- English: Was Romeo impulsive?
- Languages: what is language?
- Economics: Differentiate x^2/z^2+h^2
- Geography: Suggest a list of conditions necessary for life on Earth
- Law: What are the differences between lie, deceive and mislead?
- Maths/Physics/Engineering: Sketch $y=\cos(x)$ and $y=\cos(2x)$, then shade the area represented by the integral of $\cos(x)$ from π to zero.
- Chemistry: Tell me about alcohols, aldehydes and ketones. How can they be distinguished - both chemically and physically?
- Why does your heart rate increase when you exercise?
- Explain the relation between the structure and function of DNA
- How have vets' lives changed in the last 30 years?
- Music: listening exercise

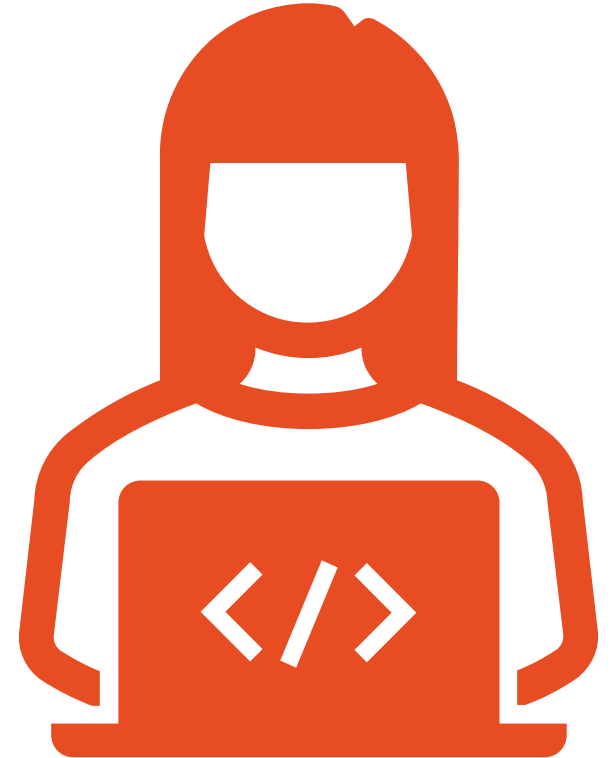
Practical Advice

- Read the subject page on your college's website
- Read the current applicants section (where available)
- Read all emails carefully – check daily, check spam
- Email if something unclear
- Pay attention to what YOUR college is doing



Some Online Interview Advice

- Print off your invitation to interview
 - Highlight the times, links, codes and passwords you need
- Have some water nearby
- Test the tech in advance
- Have the college admissions office phone number & email written down



Be prepared:

Possible issues:

- You are unwell on the day
- You've tested positive for Covid-19
- Lost/dodgy internet connection
- Device not otherwise working

What to do:

You're unwell/Covid-19 as soon as positive (including in days before):

- Contact school
- Contact your college

Technology:

- Test in advance
- Try an ethernet cable
- Call/email your college with an update
- Stay calm
- Afterwards – email a clear report to your college

Between Now and Interviews

- **Keep exploring** your subject – reading around it etc.
- Practising talking about your subject out loud to others
- Pay attention to your emails and what **your** college tells you
- Check out advice on our websites
- Check out Inside Uni
- Sample Interview Videos online



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*Free student advice on the
Oxbridge applications*



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