



Lucy Cavendish College  
University of Cambridge

# Common Misconceptions about the Cambridge Application Process

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# Today's session

- Academic requirements and offers
- The application process
- Getting the offer
- Questions

# Introducing Lucy Cavendish College

- Previously a College for mature-age (21+) women, now open to all
- We welcome all students for all subjects offered by the university
- We are uniquely committed to widening participation at Cambridge
- We pride ourselves in having one of the most socioeconomically diverse student communities in Cambridge
- Our students are driven by a desire to make a difference and who are committed to having a positive and lasting impact on society





# What are we looking for?

- Academic ability and potential
- Satisfy any subject requirements
- Ability to think critically and independently
- Genuine subject interest – motivation and enthusiasm
- Vocational commitment (where appropriate)

**All universities are looking for the brightest and the best students, irrespective of social, religious, school or financial background. So go for it!**



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# Academic requirements and offers



Cambridge has minimum GCSE requirements – True or false?



# Cambridge has minimum GCSE requirements – **False**

- No minimum fixed requirement
- Broadly speaking, competitive applicants from a well performing school have a least 5 8-9s
- **Contextual data is taken heavily into account:** the school's year specific average GCSE score goes towards assessing whether the student has performed well relative to their school, and their year.

Competitive applicants for Cambridge should take 4 A-levels - True or false?



# Competitive applicants for Cambridge should take 4 A-levels – **False**

- **It is possible to put in a very competitive application to all subjects with three A-Levels**
- There are only three subjects at Cambridge where four can be an advantage (and it is less essential for the latter two)
  - Chemical Engineering & Biotechnology
  - Computer Science
  - Physical Natural Sciences
- Typical offers from Cambridge are based on students taking three A-Levels (or equivalent) together in Year 13
- In general, universities would rather students focused on fewer subjects and achieved higher grades: it's better to excel in three subjects than to perform modestly in four
- It is essential to ensure that students taking three A-Levels select a competitive combination of subjects and that there are not one or more which are 'out of place' within this

[www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/prospective-applicants](http://www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/prospective-applicants)

# Competitive applicants for Cambridge should take 4 A-levels – **False**

- **Medicine/Veterinary Medicine:** Chemistry plus two sciences/maths
- **Economics:** Maths required, Further Maths highly recommended
- **Engineering:** Physics and Maths required, Further Mathematics highly recommended
- **Computer Science:** Maths required; Further Maths, Physics and/or Computer Science highly recommended
- **Biology-based degrees:** three sciences/maths, including Biology and Chemistry
- **Chemistry-based degrees:** three sciences/maths, including Chemistry
- **Physics-based degrees:** at least three sciences/maths, including Physics and Maths; Further Maths strongly advisable
- **Chemical Engineering & Biotechnology:** Chemistry and Maths required, Physics and/or Further Maths highly recommended
- **Mathematics:** Maths and Further Maths required
- **Architecture:** Art, Maths and/or Physics recommended
- **Psychology:** at least one science/maths recommended

## Sciences/Maths Keystone Subjects

Maths

Biology

Chemistry

Physics

# Competitive applicants for Cambridge should take 4 A-levels – **False**

There are some subjects which are generally less competitive as one of 'only' three A Level choices for applications to Oxbridge and the most competitive Russell Group universities.

- Art & Design (unless applying for related courses, such as Architecture or Fine Art)
- Drama & Theatre (unless applying for related courses, such as the English, Drama and the Arts track in Education)
- Business
- Criminology
- Film Studies
- Law
- Media Studies
- Photography
- Physical Education
- General Studies
- Critical Thinking
- Vocational Level 3 courses

# Cambridge looks at contextual data – True or false?

# Cambridge looks at contextual data –

## True

- Every applicant is considered individually in a holistic assessment using all the information available to us
- We use contextual data as part of the overall information used to help us decide who to make offers to
  - Postcode information
  - School/college data
  - Certain individual circumstances (e.g., care experience, Free Schools Meals eligibility, extenuating circumstance)
- This data is not, however, usually used to make lower offers to certain candidates



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# The application process





Cambridge accepts students planning to take a gap year – True or false?

# Cambridge accepts students planning to take a gap year – **True**

- We do not usually mind students taking a gap year, provided this is clearly indicated in their application
- For more technical subjects, especially Maths, we would recommend checking with the College beforehand as there can be concern over subject knowledge slipping
- A year out in industry can be beneficial for Engineering
- There is much less flexibility if students only tell us they want to do a gap year after we have offered them a place

A student's choice of College will make or break their application – True or false?

# A student's choice of College will make or break their application – **False**

- The minimum entry requirements across colleges are essentially the same
- It is true that there are different ratios of applicants per subject across the colleges, however **Colleges are always ultimately looking at the gathered field of applicants from across the university**
- Strong applicants to whom oversubscribed colleges have not been able to make an offer go to the 'winter pool' for consideration by other colleges with more spaces
- Our goal is to ensure the most talented applicants will be offered a place at Cambridge, irrespective of their initial college choice

Certain Colleges will be 'the best' for certain subjects – True or false?

## Certain Colleges will be 'the best' for certain subjects – **False**

- Colleges usually offer most subjects. If in doubt, you can check on the relevant course page:  
<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses>
- Teaching is of the same quality across the colleges, and lectures and exams are centralised across the University
- Students may also go for small group teaching at another college, depending on what topic they are studying
- Ultimately students will come out with the same degree, regardless of the College



Competitive applicants for Cambridge often have excellent work experience – True or false?

# Competitive applicants for Cambridge often have excellent work experience – **False**

- Work experience is only really advised (but not required) for ‘vocational courses’ like Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
- Not so much whether you’ve done it in the first place, but what you **learned** from it and how you’ve **reflected** on it critically and carefully
- Lots of flexibility given the global health situation: applying for 2022 entry for Medicine/Veterinary Medicine will not disadvantage your application
  - Online work experience for Medicine: [www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2717/a-guide-for-gaining-relevant-experience-during-the-pandemic.pdf](http://www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2717/a-guide-for-gaining-relevant-experience-during-the-pandemic.pdf)
  - Online work experience course of Veterinary Medicine: [www.futurelearn.com/courses/vet-school-application-support](http://www.futurelearn.com/courses/vet-school-application-support)
- A competitive personal statement for Cambridge will focus primarily on supracurricular engagement – academic exploration that goes above and beyond what the student is studying at school

# More on the personal statement

A opening paragraph explaining why you want to study the course	At least 80%
3-4 paragraphs analysing your supra-curricular exploration of your subject	
A short closing paragraph about your extra-curricular interests and career aspirations/future plans	Maximum 20%

## Things to include in your personal statement:

- Why this course?
- A demonstration of your enthusiasm for and commitment to your chosen course
- Areas of interest in your subject
- Analysis of what you have done to learn/prepare
- What you have gained from undertaking supracurricular activities

# What are supracurricular activities?

- Subject-specific academic exploration
- Goes beyond your studies in school
- Directly relevant to your chosen degree subject
- Activities you do for fun in your free time
- Supracurricular activities are directly focused on academic exploration, whereas extracurricular activities are not



Wider reading



Lectures, talks, MOOCs



Subject taster sessions



Work experience



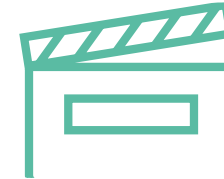
Museums and exhibitions



Keeping up-to-date with current events



Podcasts and radio shows



Films and documentaries



Practicing key subject-specific skills



Competitions

[www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/prospective-applicants](http://www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/prospective-applicants)

Cambridge takes into account  
extracurricular activities – True or false?

# Cambridge takes into account extracurricular activities – **False**

- Cambridge does not take into account extra-curricular activities that are not related to the course applied for
- However, some universities are interested in extra-curriculars. If included in the personal statement they should:
  - Demonstrate a transferable skill that is relevant to the degree applied for (e.g. team-working, communication, time management...)
  - Not be a list
  - Only constitute a small proportion of the personal statement



Students need to 'stand out' in the  
personal statement – True or false?

# Students need to 'stand out' in the personal statement – **False**

- Students need to be themselves, and should not feel they need to 'stand out' particularly
- We are looking for:
  - An explanation of why the student has chosen the course
  - A demonstration of the student's enthusiasm for and commitment to the chosen course
  - Particular areas of interest within the subject
  - Analysis of what the student has done to learn/prepare
  - An explanation of what the student has gained from undertaking supra-curricular activities
  - Honesty!

Students need to revise for the admissions assessments as though it were an A-Level exam – True or false?

# Students need to revise for the admissions assessments as though it were an A-Level exam – **False**

- Admissions assessments are not designed to be revised for in the same way as A-levels (or equivalent)
- They are designed to gauge applicants' skills and abilities
  - To assess skills (such as comprehension and thinking skills)
  - To see how applicants respond to new information beyond their current stimuli
  - Where appropriate, to assess levels of current knowledge and understanding relevant to the course applied for
- Students should look at all resources for their assessment, familiarise themselves with the format of their exam and the knowledge that will be assessed

All information about all admissions assessments available online:  
<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/admission-assessments>

# Interviewers ask wacky, bizaare questions – True or false?

# Interviewers ask wacky, bizaare questions – True or false?

- Interviewers may ask some more open ended, thought experiment type questions in order to assess students' current subject knowledge as well as their analytical thinking skills
- Examples could include
  - 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?
  - English: why might it be useful for an English student to read the Twilight series?
  - Philosophy: differentiate between power and authority.
- However, these questions are not designed to be off putting and are always within the context of the interview
- Ultimately what we are looking to assess is the students' subject specific current knowledge, skills and enthusiasm.



# Interviewers ask wacky, bizaare questions – True or false?

Interviews are NOT:

- Full of trick questions with bizarre answers
- A memory or knowledge test
- Questions with immediately obvious answers
- An opportunity for interviewers to trip you up
- Scripted and identical for all applicants
- A public speaking or debate contest
- A test of how you speak, dress, sit or shake hands
- A cultural or social test of what type of person you are



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# Getting the offer



# Cambridge can make offers based on 4 A-Levels – True or false?

# Cambridge can make offers based on 4 A-Levels – True or false?

- An offer based on all 4 A-levels is theoretically possible but not routinely made by Cambridge
- A standard offer will normally include or exclude certain A-levels
- A Medicine applicant may receive an offer like A\*A\*A at A-Level, with the A\* in Chemistry and one other subject, for instance

# Ultimately...

- Cambridge is looking for academically high achieving students with a genuine, well-informed enthusiasm for their subject, irrespective of background
- Subject specific skills, knowledge and enthusiasm is assessed all the way through the application process- from the personal statement to the interview
- The process is holistic, so all aspects of the student's application are taken together



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# Any questions?

Or you can always email us at [outreach@lucy.cam.ac.uk](mailto:outreach@lucy.cam.ac.uk)

