Finishing your Cambridge Application

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Today’s session

• Overview of the Cambridge Application Process
• Key dates
• Completing the UCAS form
• Personal statement
• SAQ
• Preparing for admissions assessments
• Preparing for interviews
• Final points
• Questions
Overview of the Cambridge Application Process
Overview of the Oxbridge application process

Choose course and college

UCAS application (optional extenuating circumstances form)

SAQ

Written work/admissions assessments

Interview

Choose ‘firm’ and ‘insurance’ choices

Result of application

Exam results/confirmation
15th October

**UCAS application**

Within 48 hours of submitting your UCAS form

**Email received with details of the SAQ**

22nd October

**SAQ**

Lucy Cavendish Further Information Form for all applicants

**Extenuating Circumstances Form**

Transcripts, results breakdowns, curriculum details, any other requested documents

Disability/Specific Learning Difficulty/long-term illness adjustments form

**Possible invitation to interview**

Within 48 hours of submitting your UCAS form
What are Oxbridge looking for?

- Academic ability and potential
- Satisfy any subject requirements
- Ability to think independently, critically and analytically
- Genuine subject interest, motivation and enthusiasm
- Good ‘fit’ between applicant and course
- 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!
What information do we use to assess applications?

No part of an application is considered in isolation – all available information is looked at together before decisions are made. We consider every application individually, taking all aspects into account:

• Academic record
• Personal statement
• Teacher’s reference
• Performance in any admission test/assessment (where required)
• Written work (where required)
• Contextual information and data
• Interview (if interviewed)
Key deadlines
Application Deadline: 6pm (UK time) on 15th October.

Pre-Interview Assessments: For Medicine and Computer Science, applicants must be registered by 1st October and for all other courses requiring a pre-interview assessment, applicants must be registered by 15th October.

SAQ and transcripts: 6pm (UK time) on 22nd October

Lucy Cavendish Further Information Form: 22nd October

Extenuating Circumstances Form: The form should be completed by the school/college referee or a doctor or social worker by 22nd October.

Disability/Specific Learning Difficulty/long-term illness adjustments form: 22nd October

lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/undergraduates/current-applicants
UCAS
The UCAS Application Form

Includes:

• Personal details
• Employment history
• Course/university choices
• Academic record
• Reference
• Predicted/achieved grades
• Personal statement
Personal Statement
What stage are you at now with your personal statement?

A: I’ve submitted it
B: I’m on my final draft and just need to check through
C: I’ve done a few drafts but I’m still editing
D: I’ve got some ideas but haven’t started writing
E: I’m not sure where to start
Personal Statement

• 47 lines or **4000 characters**
• A chance for you to reflect on your chosen course – why you want to study it and why you would be good at it
• A statement giving evidence of your **interests, skills and experiences**
• Your chance to ‘sell yourself’ to universities
Personal Statement

• 47 lines or **4000 characters**
• A chance for you to reflect on your chosen course – why you want to study it and why you would be good at it
• A statement giving evidence of your **interests**, **skills** and **experiences**
• Your chance to ‘sell yourself’ to universities

**Remember:** You send the same personal statement to every university you apply to, so it needs to be **relevant to every course you are applying for**
What is Oxbridge looking for in a good personal statement?

• An explanation of why you have chosen the course
• A demonstration of your enthusiasm for and commitment to your chosen course
• Particular areas of interest in your subject
• Analysis of what you have done to learn/prepare
• Supracurricular activities
• Honesty!
Tip #1: Make it academic and subject-focused

- Cambridge does not take into account extracurricular activities that are not related to the course applied for.

- Some universities are interested in extracurriculars.

- If included in your personal statement, they should:
  - Demonstrate a transferrable skills that is relevant to the degree applied for (e.g., team-work, communication, time management...)
  - Not be a list
  - Only constitute a small proportion of the persona statement
Tip #1: **Make it academic and subject-focused**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A opening paragraph explaining why you want to study the course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4 paragraphs analysing your supra-curricular exploration of your subject</td>
<td>At least 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A short closing paragraph about your extra-curricular interests and career aspirations/future plans</td>
<td>Maximum 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Tip #1: Make it academic and subject-focused**

| A opening paragraph explaining why you want to study the course | At least 80% |
| A short closing paragraph about your extra-curricular interests and career aspirations/future plans | Maximum 20% |

**Reminder:** What is a supracurricular activity?

Anything that you have done that enhances your learning and is not part of your compulsory studies at school or sixth form.

Three key criteria:
1. Academic content
2. Relevance to your chosen subject interests
3. Goes beyond your A-Level syllabi
Tip #2: **Show, don’t tell**

“As a science based student I approach all of my work as logically as I can. I am neat, thorough and pay great attention to detail. This has been especially useful in mathematics as it has enabled me to show my reasoning in clearly thought out steps. I have good self-motivation and work well independently.”
Tip #3: Discuss, don’t list

• Depth is better than breadth
• You don’t have to mention everything you’ve done!
• Talk about what you learnt from the experience, not just what you did
Tip #3: Discuss, don’t list

A local hospital placement gave me the opportunity to visit A&E, Radiology and Obstetrics and Gynaecology.
Tip #3: Discuss, don’t list

A local hospital placement gave me the opportunity to visit A&E, Radiology and Obstetrics and Gynaecology. These visits to the departments highlighted the variety and diversity of the fascinating specialities medicine encompasses. A placement shadowing a clinic staff was hugely informative regarding daily life as a doctor. During the day I sat in on consultations ranging from routine post natal checkups to discussions of treatment for young people with diabetes and overactive thyroid glands.
Tip #3: **Discuss, don’t list**

Throughout my time there the doctor's genuine interest in his cases and unfaltering motivation highlighted to me the privilege of having such a stimulating profession. This, together with the ever advancing nature of a career in medicine, was brought to the fore by an infant who was having a check up as a result of her being put on an ECMO machine after her birth with Meconium Aspiration Syndrome. The ease with which the doctor broached and dealt with sensitive subject matter also emphasised the importance of a warm, approachable manner and an ability to communicate to a person on their level of understanding.
Tip #3: Discuss, don’t list

- What did you do and why did you do it?
- What did you learn?
- How does it link to your current studies/future studies?
- What did you find interesting? Why?
- Does it link to other supracurricular exploration? Can you see patterns start to emerge?
- Did it change how you understand your subject? How?
- How did you/could you follow up on this and develop your ideas further?
Tip #4: **Link it all together**

Strong personal statements often show how a student’s ideas and understanding have developed over time

- Identify themes and patterns within the subject that you have become aware of and started to explore
- Connect supracurricular activities to demonstrate how your ideas are evolving
- Tell a story of academic development that began with an interest and culminates in you applying for that course at university
Tip #4: Link it all together

From Narcissus to ‘Snow White’, the mirror as a symbol of truth is everywhere in literature. I’m interested in the ability of literature itself to act as a mirror to society, forcing us to see the flaws we would rather remain blind to. Consequently, I have an interest in censored or controversial literature, for, as Oscar Wilde put it: “The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame.’ I found this true of his own works, especially ‘The Picture of Dorian Gray’ which I studied alongside ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ as part of my Advanced Higher dissertation. I was fascinated by their use of the supernatural to subvert traditional ideas of morality and prey on the tacit insecurities of society, blurring the lines between man and monster.
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Tip #5: *Keep it personal*

“The medical profession combines knowledge and wisdom from just about every aspect of life which is directed towards helping humanity. A physician is not just part of the health care team but the leader of the health care team. He is free to practice broadly or to acquire a specialty of his own choosing. Thus medicine offers the challenges and fulfilment that I am seeking in a career.”
Tip #6: Avoid repetition

- “I am doing A Level English, History and Geography.”
- “I got 5 8s and 3 7s in my GCSEs.”

If you have extenuating circumstances, ask your referee to include this in their teacher reference.
Tip #7: Avoid clichés

• “From a young age…”

• “I am passionate about…”

• Be wary of quotes: is it adding anything to your personal statement?
Tip #8: Get it checked!

• Get your personal statement checked over by at least one other person!
• Read it aloud to yourself to check how natural it sounds
Tip #9: **Be honest**

- It will likely be obvious if you’ve exaggerated or lied.
- Your personal statement might be used as a point of discussion in interview, so make sure you are comfortable discussing everything you’ve mentioned!
Tip #10: Write in your own voice

- Make sure it sounds like you
- Don’t use flowery language or words you wouldn’t normally
- It’s not a vocabulary test!
Some things to remember…

• The personal statement is only **one part of a much larger admissions process** (but a bad personal statement can stand out in the wrong way!)

• There is no one ‘right’ personal statement and no ‘magic ingredient’ that will guarantee your place on a course: **be yourself**!

• **Don’t panic** – they’re not the be all and end all
15th October
UCAS application

Within 48 hours of submitting your UCAS form
Email received with details of the SAQ

22nd October
SAQ

Lucy Cavendish Further Information Form for all applicants
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Within 48 hours of submitting your UCAS form
SAQ
Supplementary Application Questionnaire

Cambridge have published detailed guidance on completing the SAQ here:
Why do we have an SAQ?

• Ensures we have complete and consistent information about all applicants

• Information that is not part of the UCAS application: e.g., contextual information and additional information about your course choice
Application Type

• Specify course options/pathways: AMES, Education, HML, Mathematics, MML, Natural Sciences

• Are you completing or have you completed an undergraduate degree at another university, either in the UK or elsewhere?

• Are you intending to use the Extenuating Circumstances Form (ECF)?

• Are you currently studying full-time at another university?
Personal details

• Please give the first name you prefer to be called
• Please list your country or countries of ordinary residence since 1 September 2019
• If there are any dates during the interview period on which you will not be available for interview, please explain when and why
International

• Source and amount of funding
• Have you applied or will you be applying for a scholarship only tenable at specific Cambridge Colleges?
• Please indicate under which scheme you would prefer to be interviewed if selected:
  • USA and Canada
  • PR China and SAR Hong Kong
  • All other countries in time zones GMT+7 to GMT+12
  • Cambridge Colleges
Education

• If you have taken GCSEs at a UK school please enter its name and postcode
• Please give the month and year when you left or will leave school/college
• Having checked the transcript flowchart, are you required to submit a High School and/or University Transcript?
• If you have left school/college (or expect to leave by March 2022) please indicate what you intend to do before starting your degree course
• Were you able to take the subjects at AS/A Level or equivalent that you wanted?
• Have there been any difficulties with the teaching in any of your subjects at AS/A Level or equivalent (eg International Baccalaureate)?
• Does your school/college provide any extra lessons to support preparation for STEP or the Advanced Extension Award (AEA) in Mathematics?
## Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Qualification / Level</th>
<th>Other Qualification</th>
<th>Class Size</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>A Level (linear) Y12</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Molecules and Cells; Exchange Transport: C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>A Level (linear) Y13</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Human Health: Respiration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Atomic Structure; Bonding; Kinetics; Energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
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<td>Functional groups; Periodicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>AS Level (linear) Y12</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Keats; Shakespeare's Hamlet; A Streetcar N'i</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>A Level (linear) Y12</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Algebra and Functions; Calculus; Trigonomi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>AS Level (linear) Y13</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Probability; Complex Numbers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Qualifications

• Modular A-Levles
Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Qualification / Level</th>
<th>Date Taken (MM/YYYY)</th>
<th>Grade / Result</th>
<th>Band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English C115</td>
<td>SQAA Highers</td>
<td>06/2021</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French C059</td>
<td>SQAA Highers</td>
<td>06/2021</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German C060</td>
<td>SQAA Highers</td>
<td>06/2021</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History C044</td>
<td>SQAA Highers</td>
<td>06/2021</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maths: Maths 1, 2 &amp; 3 C100</td>
<td>SQAA Highers</td>
<td>06/2021</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modern Studies C064</td>
<td>SQAA Highers</td>
<td>06/2021</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4 English language qualifications

If you have taken the IELTS qualification please provide details of your scores below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Taken (MM/YYYY)</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Overall Score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08/2021</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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</table>

Q3 SAT results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Taken (MM/YYYY)</th>
<th>SATs Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/2020</td>
<td>SAT - Critical Reading</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/2020</td>
<td>SAT - Reading and Writing</td>
<td>735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2020</td>
<td>SAT - Math</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2020</td>
<td>Subj - Chemistry</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Add new SAT Delete Selected

Section completed?: ☐
Optional additional personal statement

- **Optional:** not providing an additional personal statement will not disadvantage your application in any way
- Additional to your UCAS personal statement
- 1200 characters including spaces
- What aspects of the Cambridge course attracted you to apply here
Some final advice...
Preparing for your admissions assessment
undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/admission-assessments

lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/undergraduates/how-apply

cambridge.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0jFweauBwCRflae
What are the admissions assessments assessing?

• Thinking and comprehension skills
• Where appropriate, subject knowledge and understanding
• Intended to introduce applicants to new information beyond their current syllabi and see how they try to address it
• Different to any exam you’ve ever sat before, so will be challenging and unfamiliar if you haven’t looked at the papers in advance
How to prepare

Information

Practice key skills

Revise subject knowledge

Time management

Essay writing

Problem solving

Critical thinking
How to prepare: Information

• All information about all admissions assessments available online, including:
  • Full assessment specifications
  • Past and specimen papers with answer sheets and explained/exemplar answers
  • Extensive information, advice and guidance
• Discuss resources with your subject teachers

www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/admission-assessments
How to prepare: **Practice key skills**
How to prepare: **Practice key skills**

- **Time management**
  - Practice under timed conditions
  - Create a plan for how long to spend on each section
  - If you are applying for an essay subject, your assessment will usually involve writing by hand for at least an hour – so practice before the assessment
How to prepare: **Practice key skills**

- **Essay writing**
  - Consider how you might structure an essay
  - help.open.ac.uk/essays

- **Critical thinking**
  - Read the passage carefully and try to understand the argument
  - Read similar texts (e.g. news articles, poetry) and practise thinking critically about them
How to prepare: **Practice key skills**

- **Problem solving**
  - Practice reading questions carefully and selecting which information is relevant
  - Don’t skip steps
  - Check for silly arithmetic mistakes!
  - Practice questions
How to prepare: **Subject knowledge**

- Look at specifications to decide what you need to revise; discuss with your subject teachers
- Revise key subject knowledge
- Identify areas of strength and weakness through practice
- Starting to go over year 12 material now will be beneficial to your A-Level studies and reduce cramming!
Preparing for your interview
Why do we interview?

• Interviews tell us much more about applicants than the UCAS application, admissions assessments, etc.
• To distinguish amongst excellent applicants by assessing your academic qualities – essentially, how do you think?
• To assess the skills and aptitudes essential for successful study in higher education
• Discussion is a key part of our supervision teaching
• Interviews are also a chance for you to see us!
What are interviewers looking for?

They are trying to assess your academic potential. This means they are looking for:

• Clear, flexible and analytical thought
• The ability to assimilate new ideas or apply existing knowledge to challenging new contexts
• Willingness to engage
• Independent mindedness
• Informed enthusiasm for your subject
• Vocational/professional commitment (where relevant)

Above all, they want to know whether you are someone who will thrive in an intellectually demanding course taught in small-group sessions
What to expect

• Discussion-based and intellectually challenging
• Conducted by lecturers and predominantly academic and subject-focused
• Discussions might include:
  • Discussion of academic interests mentioned in the personal statements
  • Discussion surrounding subject-related current events
  • Challenging questions related to topics studied in school
  • Discussion of any submitted work
  • You might be given a text or problem sheet to discuss and work through
  • Open-ended questions designed to test your ability to apply existing knowledge in new ways
• The last piece in the jigsaw rather than the final hurdle
How to prepare: **Videos**

Both universities publish guidance videos and information.

**Cambridge:**
[https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/interviews](https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/interviews)

**Oxford:**
[http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/interviews/tutors-video-diaries](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/interviews/tutors-video-diaries)
How to prepare: Videos

Law: https://youtu.be/npEcenV-Y08
Engineering: https://youtu.be/f3IYdO0XYL4
Linguistics: https://youtu.be/27FQwzEUxQM
History and Politics: https://youtu.be/5F08vpo0yDk
Physics: https://youtu.be/gncFmrU5gNw
How to prepare: Practice

• Practice discussing your subject out loud!
• Practice questions: [www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/guide/interviews](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/guide/interviews)

• Key skills
  • Critical thinking
  • Careful listening
  • Thinking out loud
  • Tackling questions with no right answers
  • Problem solving
How to prepare: **Practice**

- Why might it be useful for an English Literature student to read the *Twilight* series? (English Literature)
- Should it be illegal to run a red light in the middle of the night on an empty road? (Law)
- If you could choose to save either the rainforests or the coral reefs, which would you choose? (Biology)
- Should doctors ever have to think about value for money in treatment? (Medicine)
- How hot would the air in a hot air balloon need to be if I wanted to use it to lift an elephant? (Material Sciences)
How to prepare: Engage in your subject
• Lucy Cavendish College resources list
• myheplus.com
• Sidney Sussex College – Beyond the Syllabus
• Discover Downing Resources Finder
• University reading lists
• Ask you subject teachers for recommendations
• Footnotes/bibliographies
• University subject taster events
• #exploreyoursubject hashtag on Twitter
• oxfordandcambridgeoutreach.co.uk
How to prepare: **Keep up-to-date with current events**

- It’s important to engage critically with current events, both to educate yourself and to think about the wider contextual implications for your academic research.
- Sometimes current events can be relevant to particular subjects (e.g., scientific discoveries or law cases) but often major current events will have implications for all areas of academia.
So what should I do now?
So what should I do now?

P Programme of study
R Results
E Engage and Explore
P Practice
So what should I do now?

**P** Programme of study
- Course choice is the most important decision
- Ensure you are aware of all relevant deadlines, including for any admissions assessments you may need to sit

**R** Results

**E** Engage and Explore

**P** Practice
So what should I do now?

**P** Programme of study

**R** Results

- Work hard to do as well as you can in your current studies

**E** Engage and Explore

**P** Practice
So what should I do now?

P Programme of study

R Results

E Engage and Explore
  • Be proactive in your learning: undertake supracurricular activities

P Practice
So what should I do now?

**P** Programme of study

**R** Results

**E** Engage and Explore

**P** Practice

- Discuss your subject and answer practice questions out loud
- Practise and develop key skills: critical thinking, problem solving, essay writing, time management, listening, persevering through difficult questions
- Find resources and go through them carefully
- Start revising relevant subject knowledge
So what should I do now?

P Programme of study
R Results
E Engage and Explore
P Practice

...P Personal statement
  • Expand and give evidence for everything you mention
  • Structure it carefully
  • Triple check it for mistakes!
  • Make sure it’s personal and sounds like you
Any questions?
outreach@lucy.cam.ac.uk

Upcoming events: lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/undergraduates/visits-and-open-days
Student mailing list: cambridge.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8IgYXKCD4XjptgW