



# MYTHBUSTING OXFORD

COMMON  
OXFORD  
MYTHS  
ANSWERED BY  
STUDENT  
AMBASSADORS



## *Is Oxford only full of posh people?*

Not at all! Oxford tries its best to ensure that a range of students from diverse backgrounds secure a place at Oxford every year - this means that Oxford is full of people from all over the world! Whilst Oxford does have quite a 'posh' history, which can be seen in the traditions and in the buildings of the university, the students are just like in any other university or school.



## *Is it easier to get in if you're rich?*

In a word: no. Oxford assesses places based on academic merit and potential only. If you impress the admissions tutors (the people who assess your application) with your UCAS form / written work / test result / interview, that's all that counts.

## *Will I get bullied if I'm from [x] background?*

No matter what background you may have, you deserve to be at Oxford just as much as anyone else. The university and college can't give out your personal details to other students, so you'll all be in the same boat when you first arrive. This means you can choose exactly how much information about yourself you want to share with others. Oxford is a really welcoming, inclusive and understanding place where lots of people, from a variety of backgrounds, have made their home.

## *Is it more expensive than other universities?*

Maximum tuition fees for Home fee status students are set by the UK government each year. Currently most UK universities, including Oxford, charge the maximum fee. Living costs may be slightly higher, but this depends on your living costs at home:

Oxford is less expensive than London, but largely more expensive than the rest of the UK.

However, many colleges subsidise accommodation and food to make Oxford as affordable as possible. Oxford also offers a lot of bursaries, grants and scholarships to make sure that everyone's living costs are manageable. Merton College also has a separate set of funding available for its students, as do many other colleges



## *Is it easier to get into certain colleges?*

No. Looking at admissions statistics is often inaccurate, as there are small sample sizes at college-level, and there's a lot of variation in different applicant fields. Oxford's admission process works on a reallocation basis, so if your application to one college isn't successful, you might find that another college might accept you (known as 'pooling'). The best thing to do is to pick your subject, and then choose a college that offers that subject (as not all colleges offer every subject!).



## *Do all colleges offer all subjects?*

No. Most colleges offer the larger courses (eg. English, Maths, History, etc.) but smaller courses may not be offered. Whether a college offers a certain subject often depends whether there is an undergraduate tutor for that subject based at the college. For example, Merton doesn't currently have an undergraduate Geography tutor, and so doesn't offer Geography as a subject that can be taken there at undergraduate level. The best thing to do is to visit the University's website to see which colleges offer which subjects, then do your research from there.



## *Is it easier to get into Oxford for certain subjects?*

Theoretically yes. For example, Economics & Management, Medicine, Law and Maths are very popular options and receive a high number of candidates every year. However, every person applying for these subjects has an equal chance of getting in, depending on how strong their application is. It's important to pick a subject you love, rather than selecting a subject that will 'get you into Oxford'. Ultimately, you have to study this subject for at least three years: if you don't absolutely love it, applying to Oxford will have been a waste. Please don't let the pressure of getting into a prestigious university stop you from choosing to study a subject you love. It's better to study this subject at another university than to apply to Oxford with a subject you dislike or even just tolerate.

# *Do you have to be a genius/have to get 7 9s at GCSE to get into Oxbridge?*

There is no set number of GCSEs (or equivalent) and no high IQ required to get into Oxford. However, Oxford does prefer applicants to have as many A\*s and 9s as possible, and many applicants have a lot of 7, 8 and 9 grades.

However, tutors will receive contextual data where possible, such as the average GCSE performance of your school, so your grades will be looked at 'in context'. If there are extenuating circumstances that mean you didn't perform as well at GCSE, you can still likely make a competitive application if you put this in your application.

Oxford is really interested in your 'super-curriculars', or your academic ability and potential, and so in your personal statement admissions tutors look for evidence of how you've developed within your chosen subject.

For example, reading 'Othello' in class isn't usually enough - what did you find interesting about it? What did you do after reading it - did you set up a reading club? Did you read more of Shakespeare's work? Did you read another text with similar themes? All this demonstrates an interest that goes beyond just your work in class.



## *Is it too competitive to consider applying?*

Whilst the application process for both Oxford and Cambridge is very competitive, every place at university begins with an application.

Everyone has a chance of securing a place, but only if they apply.

There's a lot of support for applications out there, so it's always worth applying if you think that the subject and the university would suit you!

## *Is Cambridge for Sciences, and Oxford for Humanities?*

Not at all. Both universities offer a mix of subjects, and they both score very highly in the league tables for both Humanities and STEM subjects. There is a slight difference in the subjects offered by both universities (eg. Cambridge's Natural Sciences course vs the individual sciences offered at Oxford) so it's more important to consider the subject itself, and what will be studied during your time at university!

## *How important are my GCSEs?*

GCSEs are important because they help to predict your A-Levels. However, the admissions tutors also have access to other data, like your predicted grades, written work, test scores, and lots of contextual data. So they're not the only factor in your application - our advice is to work as hard as you can for your GCSEs, but please don't worry about them. Your application will be considered in a contextual way, with an understanding of your school and your past!

## *How do you apply?*

Application for any university in the UK is via the UCAS website. Oxford is exactly the same, except you have the added complication of picking a college. Once you've picked your university and subject on UCAS, you'll be able to pick from a list of colleges, or just make an open application, where you don't pick a college.



## *Is it better to make an open application or pick a college?*

If you find that there's a college you really like - maybe you like the size, or the architecture, or the location - then being able to pick a college when applying via UCAS means that you'll be considered by them first. However, all the admissions tutors across the university will have access to your application data, so you may be invited to an interview elsewhere. The subject departments also run important moderation of all applications across all colleges to ensure fairness and consistency. Also, you aren't guaranteed a place at that college. Making an open application on the other hand doesn't disadvantage you - colleges considering applications never know who the open applicants are (the University distributes all open applicants to colleges anonymously, before shortlisting). Making an open application, or not picking a particular college, may be a good choice for you if you really can't decide which college to apply to!

## *What are the tests like?*

Most subjects have a written test that takes place at the end of October/beginning of November. These are often subject specific - except the TSA - and are designed to really test the limits of your brain. Whilst having knowledge of your A-level (or alternative) course can be useful, the tests may ask questions about things you don't know about. They're designed to assess how you think, and how well you can cope faced with new problems. Whilst there are practice papers online, there's no guarantee of what will be on each test.

The important bit: it is your responsibility to book the test. You have to do it at a registered test centre; whilst many colleges, sixth forms and schools are registered, not all of them are so make sure to check. You should receive a candidate number when you've booked onto the test - if you haven't got this, you haven't registered properly.



## *What is the 'written work submission'?*

For some subjects, Oxford may ask you to send in some written work. This is usually a piece that you've already written, such as an essay for class or coursework. Oxford don't want you to write anything special and impressive - they just want to see the level at which you're working now, your style, how you write and your potential. A tip? Discuss with your subject teacher what they think is suitable to submit: what's your clearest, best piece of work?



## *What happens at interviews?*

Interviews are Oxford and Cambridge's way of really getting to know their applicants and assessing whether Oxbridge would be a good match for them. At Cambridge, the interviews take place over one or two days for candidates; at Oxford, candidates are invited to stay at their chosen college (or the college that picked them!) for about 3 days.

During these three days, you'll usually have a minimum of two interviews with two tutors that could be teaching you! Outside of those interviews, you're free to enjoy the city and the college, as well as take part in the optional events that current student helpers will provide for you. After these three days, you can go home and resume life as normal.



## *How long do interviews last?*

Interviews are held over a three day period for each candidate, on average. Each interview will last around 30 minutes long, but could be longer or shorter, depending on the format of your subject's interview period. Also, some candidates may have 'pre-reading': this is when you receive some material to read or analyse before the interview itself, which will serve as a launching pad for discussion in the interview (eg. an English candidate may receive a poem to read and analyse before the interview). Often pre-reading is about 30 minutes long too.

## *What should I say in my interview?*

It's important to be yourself in the interview - don't panic or try to say what you think the tutors want you to say. Answer the questions that are asked, but don't be afraid to take your time to clear your thoughts or ask a question to clarify. The tutors know that you're nervous, and just want to help you to do your best! The interviews are designed to simulate a tutorial, just with an extra tutor (or two): they'll test you intellectually, but you don't have to be perfect.

## *Do they ask fake/trick questions in the interviews?*

This can often be perpetuated in the media, but crazy questions and hidden tests are not part of Oxbridge interviews. Tutors want to assess your academic potential and whether the Oxford teaching style is suitable for your style of learning. Whilst the questions asked are designed to stretch you, the tutors will 'warm up' to them, asking easier things first. They don't want you to be nervous or in awe of them - they just want you to display your knowledge as best as you can!

## What's a tutorial?

Tutorials at Oxford are the bedrock of teaching. You may have one or two a week, and they're essentially an hour to two hours of time spent with your tutor (who teaches your subject). You often have to prepare work for the tutorial (like an essay, presentation or problem sheet) and the tutor will discuss the work, give you feedback and answer any questions raised. It's a great opportunity to experiment with your ideas, and it's a very efficient and in-depth method of teaching. These sessions can be one-on-one with your tutor, or you may have one or two tutorial partners (other students).



## Is it a lot of work?

Oxford and Cambridge are known for having higher workloads than most universities, but this is likely exaggerated in the media. Different courses have a different distribution of 'contact hours', or teaching time. This includes lectures, lab work, seminars, classes, and tutorials but doesn't include independent study time, such as time spent studying by yourself in the library. The exact format of work depends on your subject: Humanities subjects often have about 2 essays a week, whilst STEM students may have 2 or 3 problem sheets a week (a list of questions to do). This work is usually for a tutorial, which is a one-on-one or one-on-two session with your tutor, who is an expert in your subject.

If you have questions about workload for a particular subject, please get in touch with us: @mertonjcraccess on Instagram, Humans of Merton on Facebook or email [jcr.access@merton.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jcr.access@merton.ox.ac.uk).

## *Does Oxford offer lots of clubs & societies?*

There's a huge list of clubs and societies that are set up at Oxford available online: Octopush, Salsa Society, Jewish Society, Feminist Society and many more. In your first week at Oxford, you'll have the opportunity to see them all at Freshers' Fair, a huge event that lets you wander from group to group to find the clubs and societies that interest you. There are activities available at both college and university-level: for example, your college might have its own rowing team, but the university might also have one. If you don't find the club that you want, the university encourages people to set up their own clubs and societies!

## *Will I make friends at Oxford?*

Without a doubt. Oxford has a really welcoming, inclusive atmosphere, so no matter what you'll have the opportunity to find people like you out of a student population of over 20,000. In your first week at Oxford, the university and colleges offer lots of events to help you bond with the people you're spending your time with at university! The small college environments mean that you'll be in the perfect position to bond with the people you see around college, at meals and in your accommodation. At the beginning of your first term everyone will want to make friends and socialise so it's a good opportunity to make friends and get to know people. Also, the huge number of clubs and societies on offer means that you'll have lots of opportunities to meet new people and make friends. There are also opportunities to meet people through academic means, such as at lectures, in tutorial groups or even in the library!



## *Do students ever have fun at Oxford?*

Absolutely. Whilst the workload is quite intensive compared to some universities, there are plenty of opportunities to have fun, from nightlife to talks to enjoying the city. There are a lot of fun events on offer in Oxford, and each college has a student body that often organises fun events, like college parties and outings! You'll find the people that like to do similar things to you in no time.

Also, students at Oxford have longer holidays than most UK students, with the average 'vacation' lasting about 6 weeks. This means you have more time at home, which will allow you to reconnect with friends from home, work a part-time job, spend time with family and generally have a break.



## *I have a disability, can Oxford offer any support?*

Oxford really tries its best to support any students that disclose a disability. The process basically involves disclosing your disability during the student finance application process, so that you can receive extra funds from the government. Also, you can choose to disclose your disability to your college, who can make arrangements that will make your life at university easier (exam arrangements, relaxed deadlines, etc). If you go to the Disability Advisory Service, they can make this process very easy for you by creating a Student Support Plan that will notify college and your faculty, to put as many arrangements in place as you find necessary.

**More information on Merton College is available at:  
Merton College's website**

**Or please email  
[undergraduate.admissions@merton.ox.ac.uk](mailto:undergraduate.admissions@merton.ox.ac.uk)**

**If you have any more questions, please get in contact with  
us at [jcr.access@merton.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jcr.access@merton.ox.ac.uk)  
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*Thanks for reading!*