

TOWNLEY

EST 1937

GRAMMAR SCHOOL



OXBRIDGE EVENING

Monday 24th March 2025

From here it's possible

Introduction

Oxford and Cambridge universities hold a special place in many people's imagination. With several hundreds of years of history and countless appearances in novels, films and television programmes, the two institutions are very well known across the globe.

This can be a great advantage in attracting applicants as their reputation certainly precedes them. However, there are some disadvantages as well, as their portrayal in the media has led to some popular - but false - stereotypes about what kind of students are admitted.

In truth Oxford and Cambridge Universities:

- Seek to attract the best and brightest applicants regardless of background, which they seek out via extensive access programmes across the UK, as well as visits overseas;
- Have highly rigorous and fair application procedures designed to allow the very best candidates to shine;
- Are diverse and vibrant places to live and study

It is important that any student should have the opportunity to apply to Oxbridge and it is important for schools to raise students' aspirations and support them through the application process. At Townley we have a strong history of success in students from BAME backgrounds securing places at Oxbridge.

What makes Oxford and Cambridge such special universities?

The collegiate system

Both Oxford and Cambridge universities are made up of individual colleges, as well as different academic departments. While academic departments are responsible for core teaching and assessment, a college will be your home when studying. Colleges provide academic and pastoral support and arrange small group tuition, sometimes with a tutor or supervisor from another college.

Each college will have a diverse range of students – usually including both undergraduate and graduate students – studying across a range of subject areas.

The college system offers the benefits of belonging to a large internationally renowned university, and also to a smaller, interdisciplinary academic college community. You will have access to your college's facilities, such as an extensive library and IT provision, as well as the resources of the wider university.

You are able to specify a preferred college when you make your UCAS application. Whatever you may have heard, college choice does not matter! Each college offers the same excellent standard of teaching and has the same very high academic standards.



I had never really considered myself to be of that standard; to me Oxbridge seemed to be for the brightest minds, and I never thought I'd be at that level, but evidently it's not an inconceivable dream!

**Megan D
Alumni**

Teaching

Teaching methods are very similar at both universities as you will attend lectures, seminars, classes and laboratory work as appropriate for your course.

Unlike at many other universities, at Oxford and Cambridge you'll also benefit from personal tuition with experts in their field. You'll gain greater insight into your subject by being able to discuss your developing ideas and get individual feedback.

The only difference is in the name: Oxford refers to these sessions as 'tutorials' while Cambridge calls them 'supervisions'.

You are required to prepare an essay or other piece of work in advance of these sessions and then meet with your tutor to discuss the work, perhaps with one or two other students. Sessions may happen as frequently as once or even twice each week, depending on your course.

Deciding whether to apply to Oxford or Cambridge

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge agree that the most important decision a prospective applicant has to make is the degree they wish to study, not which university they want to apply to.

So ensure you read the course details carefully for any subject you are interested in. You will be studying for several years, so it's vital to choose something that you are really passionate about.

Oxford and Cambridge courses tend to be traditional academic courses, with a strong emphasis on personalised teaching through small-group tuition. Formal assessment is often 100% based on examinations.

Keep an open mind, and consider topics you've not directly studied before. Degrees like Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (Cambridge) or Classics and Oriental Studies (Oxford) will all help you to develop analytical abilities and skills attractive to future employers. Only a few professions require specific degrees. Remember, a strong personal interest in the course is essential: at interview, it will soon become apparent if you are not completely committed to the subject.

It is not possible to apply to both Oxford and Cambridge in the same year, so you'll have to choose one or the other. Both universities are world-renowned in teaching and research in both arts and science subjects, so the decision is largely an individual one, driven by your choice of degree course.

Some courses are offered at one of the universities but not the other. Check each institution's undergraduate prospectus and website for details of courses on offer. It is important to be aware that courses with a similar title at the two universities may be different in content. Check the course details to see which one will suit you best.

I think the most important part in the interviews is to try on every question, explain your thought process clearly, evaluate throughout, be confident with your answers but be willing to accept if you are wrong at the same time and try to rectify any mistakes instead of ignoring them or giving up.

**Nahiyat Q
Alumni**



Townley Oxbridge Programme

1. Attendance at Townley's Oxbridge Evening – parents and students are invited, representatives from Oxford and Cambridge discuss the application process and what to expect.
2. Oxbridge Group Sessions – provision of up to 5 group sessions, where students will be discussing interview questions and key topics in faculty areas to ensure students can develop skills and confidence in preparation for interviews in December. **These will take place from June to July.**
3. Application Guidance – guidance on the UCAS application process from June to October and full checking of application before **submitting on the 15th October.** Each student will be allocated a referee in June and will have a referee meeting to discuss reference.
4. Personal Statement Support – support on personal statements from June to October with one key member of staff – this will include advice and feedback on 3 to 4 personal statement drafts. Guidance document will also be provided.
5. A Level Results Day - support and advice from Oxbridge and UCAS staff.
6. Admissions Test – To be entered and sat at Townley and to be provided with full guidance on examination requirements.
7. Supervision – 1 to 1 supervision with a senior member of staff in October and November – 3 to 4 meetings. This will provide a key opportunity to discuss preparation and practice interview questions as well as being given unseen material to discuss at the supervision meeting.
8. Oxbridge Group Interview workshop – 2-hour session in November with Oxford and Cambridge representatives on the interview process and interview questions – individual advice provided where needed.
9. Interview etiquette workshop – 30 minute workshop preparing students on how to present themselves at interview.
10. Mock Interviews – 2 x 30-minute mock interviews with key staff at end of November – feedback will be provided on strengths and areas to develop.
11. Set of interview questions – to be provided after mock interview to help preparation for actual interview.
12. Preparation for university – advice and guidance on preparing for university between January and February – accommodation, finance, life at university.

Although I was nervous about the interview, I really enjoyed this part as it was finally a chance to argue about a subject I love with other people who love it, and what lawyer doesn't like a chance to argue?

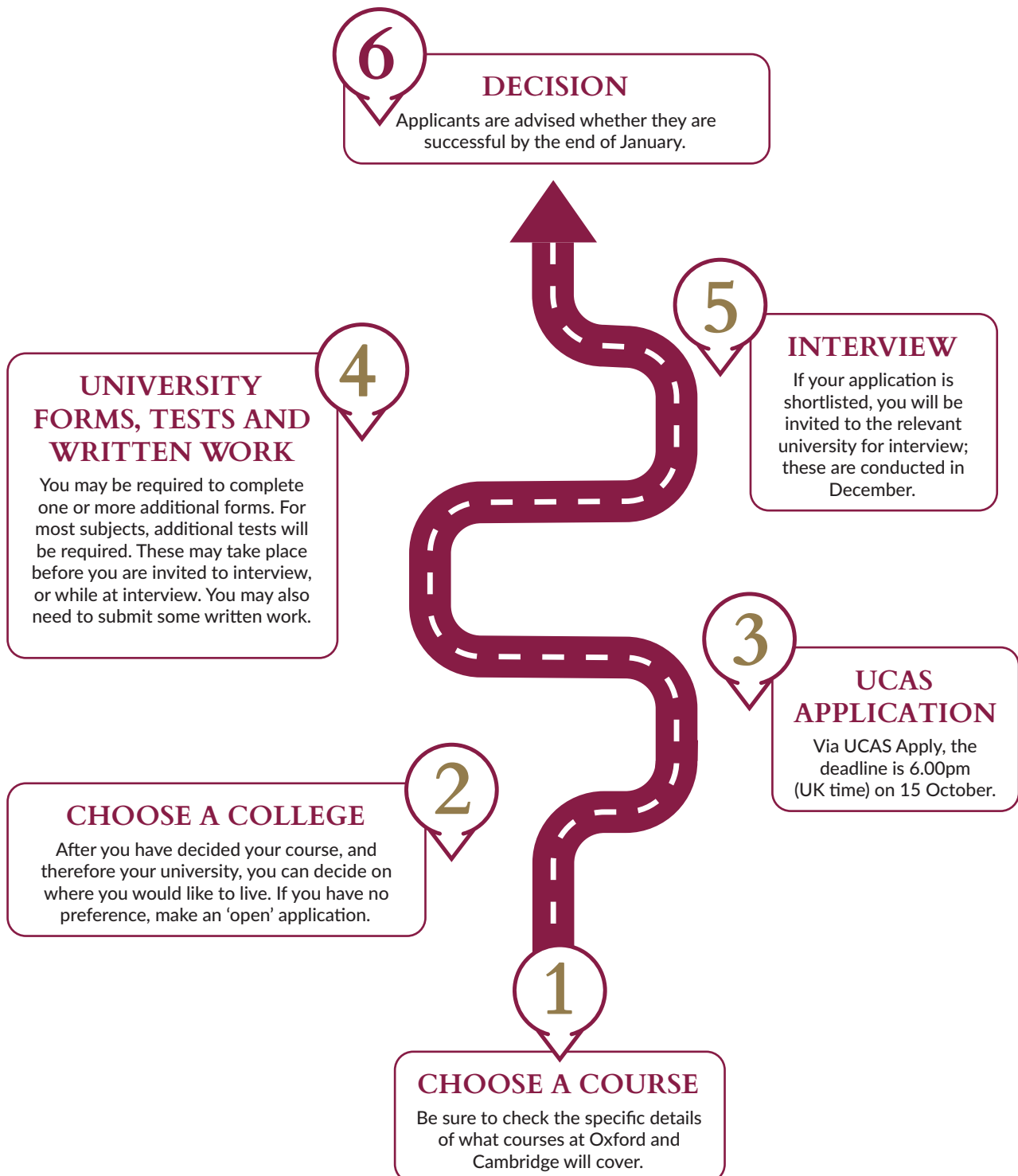
**Shirley M
Alumni**

The most valuable piece of advice I was given was that it was okay to pause, breathe and think.

**Timi O-W
Alumni**



Your Oxbridge application



Top tips for applying to Oxford or Cambridge

Do

- Choose a course you are really passionate about.
- Read widely around your chosen subject. It's not enough just to do well at school or college. Tutors have often devoted their life to their subject, so of course they want to teach students who share their enthusiasm.
- Practice talking about your subject: not just with your teachers and fellow students, but with other friends and family members. Talking to non-experts is an excellent exercise as it gets you thinking in new ways and helps you to find new ways of expressing the concepts and issues involved.

Don't

- Stretch the truth on your application form. Tutors may ask you about anything you include in your application, so make sure it's all correct.
- Spend time worrying about which college to apply to. There are far more productive ways to spend your time.
- Lose heart! The application process is very competitive, and sadly there just are not enough places for all the people who apply. However, the only way to guarantee you will not be successful is to not try at all.

Why not go for it?

Start talking - when an interviewer asks a question it is expected that you take a moment to collect your thoughts but pausing until the whole answer is formulated is a mistake, the lecturers are more interested in the way the student thinks and speaking your mind gives the interviewer an opportunity to correct you if you have misunderstood or are arguing a flawed point.

Tips from our Alumni and students

Edgar, Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Oxford (offer holder)

"I think that the most important part of the application process is knowing that getting an offer from Oxbridge is not impossible, and the only way to have no chance is to not apply in the first place. While applying is certainly a competitive endeavour, perhaps the most important step you can take is making the decision to commit to this process. Once you have decided that you are going to apply to Oxbridge, there are several steps that can help you prepare. Initially, make sure to check that the A-level subjects are suitable to the degree you wish to apply for and do some additional reading around your subject of interest in order to further deepen your knowledge.

In order to prepare for the admissions tests, I would recommend doing as many past papers as possible. Admissions tests usually place a heavy emphasis on speed, and have a lot of time pressure, so doing practice tests under exam conditions will help you learn to cope with having to work quickly as well as accurately. It would be a good idea to start familiarising yourself with the format of the admissions test you are going to take as some Oxbridge applicants have to complete a technical interview about the subject. One piece of advice that is applicable to any interview, regardless of the course it is for, is that you should say everything that you are thinking - within reason.

The interview is intended to assess your thought process and your suitability to the tutorial / supervision system. In order to allow the tutors to do this, it is very important that you think out loud - even if you make mistakes. It is far better to make a mistake that is later corrected, than to not say anything at all. Personally, I made several mistakes in each of my interviews - the interviews are not about being fully correct on the first try, but instead about demonstrating a good level of engagement with the questions and guidance provided by the interviewer. Finally, it is very unlikely that many of you will be confident that you will get into Oxbridge from the beginning. In fact, I personally spent the entirety of the application process thinking I was most likely to be rejected and not make it to the next stage. What you should make sure to do is to take on each part of the application process one at a time, and try not to worry too much about the possibility of rejection along the way."

Anne-Laure, Classics, University of Oxford (first year)

"My journey to Oxford was largely facilitated by my support network. In Year 12 I applied to Target Oxbridge, a program by Rare Recruitment which helps black students advance to Oxbridge. Through this program I made so many friends and it also helped me make connections in my university life now - just last week I was on a panel talking to the current Target Oxbridge cohort about life at Oxford, and in a few weeks, I will be working on the Easter residential as a university ambassador. There are many programs like this which offer mentorship, like Zero Gravity, but mentorship can also be found through your closer network. My Oxbridge Mentor helped me greatly in the application process, reading my personal statement and choosing my written work. My friends were also really supportive - just talking about my subject and having mock interviews was so helpful. Applying to Oxbridge is a rigorous process - I had the personal statement, an admissions test, submitted written work and sat 5 interviews (most people I

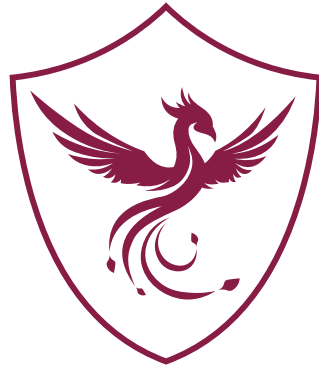
know sat 1 or 2!). Perhaps when you start the process you realise it's not the place for you, or the degree you applied with isn't one you are actually passionate about studying in higher education. Regardless, you lose nothing from applying! Oxford is a great university for so many reasons and I've really enjoyed my time there. I'm on the Junior committee of the African Caribbean Society as the Access and Outreach Officer which has allowed me to engage with younger students in events like our Year 12 Shadowing Day, I'm on my college netball team, I go to FemSoc, Hip Hop Soc, Women of Colour Soc just to name a few! There's really something for everyone, and the resources and money the university has makes it that bit easier to pursue your interests outside of schoolwork. Even without being a member of the Oxford Union, a debating society that attracts famous and influential people, I have still been able to make sincere connections. I did a poetry workshop with Adjoa Andoh, who plays Lady Danbury in Bridgerton, I've talked to fellow Townley alumni Baroness Amos, I've met Josh Tedeku who is in Supercell and Boarders and more! The workload as you might expect is very heavy but mostly manageable, especially if you form a close relationship with your tutors and are able to more easily ask for extensions. Our holidays are 6 weeks long which offers a proper opportunity to relax and wind down after a long and stressful term. All in all, I am so glad I took the risk and chose to go to Oxford."

Ava, Law, University of Cambridge (first year)

"My story of how I got in is a little different than usual. I wrote the personal statement, got the interview and then was rejected on offer day, but I also got the opportunity of August Reconsideration. From this experience I learnt a few things about the application process: Firstly, rejection is almost inevitable in this process. Often people picture rejection and think that they would not be okay if it happened, but then you realise that it truly is not the end. Secondly, I learnt that advice online focuses too much on your personal statement, extracurriculars, entrance test results and more.

The most important part, to me, is the interview, so my best advice to tackling the interview is to begin practicing little and often from the day you submit your application. Practice with teachers, look for schemes that help with interview practice like Zero Gravity and Oxbridge Applications. Get in the habit of reading topical information and questioning the rationale behind. I used year 12 to focus on building information for my personal statement, so I was doing essay competitions, work experience and activities within school focusing on quality over quantity. In y13, I focused on LNAT practice, which for any law applicants I recommend just making essay plans instead of writing full essays.

The experience of going through those old Cambridge traditions is truly special. My first-year highlight thus far was definitely matriculation, wearing your gown for the first time and signing the matriculation book does make you feel part of a community much bigger than you. It is hard work though. The content is obviously more advanced than A-Level but what makes it truly different is the consistency of work, which seems to be an Oxbridge creation. I have friends at other universities that have one essay every 2-3 weeks, whereas I have an essay a week minimum, at its max I have three essays a week. I also have two supervisions a week alongside lectures, so it does feel very intense. That being said, it is definitely possible to enjoy the experience and I personally think that it's worth all the work."



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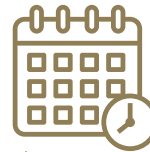
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ACTION POINTS

- Wider reading and research
- Visit Oxford and/or Cambridge
- Research colleges
- Explore courses on offer
- Build your personal statement
- Prepare for the Admissions Tests
- Talk to people who have applied to and got into Oxbridge



KEY DATES

- Oxbridge Evening
Monday 24th March 2025
- Oxbridge application deadline
Wednesday 15th October 2025
- December 2025 - Interviews
- January 2026 - Offers

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