Guide to the History Aptitude Test

The history aptitude test is an admissions test set by Oxford University for prospective undergraduates. It is a key element in your application, alongside the personal statement, predicted grades and interview. It will take place in early November, once your UCAS application is sent off.

The HAT is a 2 hour paper designed to test your skills as a historian. It is split into 2 questions, one worth 60 marks and the other worth 40. In both questions, you are given a text extract and asked to read, interpret and respond. The first question asks you to summarise and explain the argument of the author, then apply these ideas to an area of history you have studied. The second question asks you to respond to the extract in a short essay.

# How to prepare

The HAT is a skills based paper, so there are no specific knowledge requirements. The test is designed so that students taking exams from any exam board will have enough knowledge to apply, so make sure you remain familiar with your AS history syllabus. In addition to this, it is also helpful to read widely in history. This will help provide historical context to some questions, and also will introduce you to new ideas and concepts that the HAT may draw upon. During term time, I would recommend reading widely within the AS course – use the history library and ask teachers for any recommendations. Over summer, try to expand your horizons – read about an area of history that you have always been interested in but have never had a chance to study. The school reading list may be of help here. Also, as the test approaches try to complete as many past papers as you can. They are all available at <http://www.history.ox.ac.uk/prospective/undergraduate/applying/the-history-aptitude-test.html>, along with mark schemes.

# Specification

## Purpose of the Test

The purpose of the Oxford Colleges History Aptitude Test (HAT) is to provide a predictive assessment of candidates’ potential in an academically demanding History degree. The test results are intended to be used as a significant component of the selection decision in conjunction with past examination performance, evidence from the UCAS form, performance at interview and, in the case of candidates invited for interview, an item of written work completed in the normal course of study during Year 13 or equivalent. The test draws on generic academic skills appropriate to intending historians, and requires the limited deployment of knowledge acquired in the course of study for an A Level or equivalent. It provides an objective basis for comparing candidates from different backgrounds, including mature applicants and those from different countries. The HAT is designed to be challenging. Its aim is to help to differentiate effectively between able applicants for university courses, including those who may have achieved, or who are expected to achieve, the highest possible grades in school examinations.

## Qualities to be assessed

The HAT tests the following skills and attributes:

* the ability to read carefully and critically
* the adoption of an analytical approach
* the ability to answer a question relevantly
* the ability to offer a coherent argument
* precision, in the handling of concepts and in the selection of evidence presented to support points
* historical imagination
* originality
* precision, clarity and facility of writing

In order to test some of these, the HAT requires candidates to deploy a small amount of their own historical knowledge to illustrate and develop concepts or hypotheses contained within the first part of the test paper. Depth of knowledge will not be tested, and no special preparation is required. As History is a subject that often requires the deployment of several abilities at once, each question will test a range of skills and attributes, as described below.

## Structure of the Test

The test has two elements: a series of questions, including a short essay, based on a short piece of historical writing; a single question, based on a primary source. The duration of the test is two hours. Candidates are advised to spend about 40 minutes on reading the texts, thinking about them and planning their answers. The rest of the time they should spend on writing. Guidance is given about the form and length of each answer. A specimen test paper, and examples of candidate answers, will be made available. HAT papers from 2005 onwards have one less question than the specimen paper and the 2004 paper, to allow candidates more reading and thinking time.

## Question One (70–75 minutes, including reading, thinking and planning time)

This section comprises three questions and is worth 60/100 marks:

1. Definition exercise: Understanding and defining terms drawn from the text. Relates to: careful and critical reading; precision in the handling of concepts; precision, clarity and facility of writing. (10/100 marks)

2. Explanation exercise: Analysing and explaining terms drawn from the text. Relates to: careful and critical reading; analytical approach; precision in the handling of concepts; precision, clarity and facility of writing. (20/100 marks)

3. Essay exercise: Applying a concept/hypothesis from the text to a historical situation; writing cogently at length. Relates to: analytical approach; coherent argument; precision in the handling of concepts and selection of evidence; relevance to the question; historical imagination; originality; precision, clarity and facility of writing. (30/100 marks)

## Question Two (45–50 minutes, including reading, thinking and planning time)

This section comprises one question and is worth 40/100 marks:

4. Interpretation exercise.  Interpretative response to primary source. Relates to: careful and critical reading; historical imagination; originality; precision, clarity and facility of writing.