History Enrichment Pack

So, you want to study History at a top university? This pack contains loads of resources to help you prepare to apply and ideas for wider reading. It also has information about the history and joint honours courses on offer at Oxbridge.

# Oxbridge Courses

## History at Oxford

Standard Offer: AAA (History highly recommended)

Interviewed: 74%

Successful: 23%

Admissions Test: HAT

More information: [www.history.ox.ac.uk](http://www.history.ox.ac.uk)

The study of History at Oxford combines the examination of large regions over extended periods of time with more focused work on smaller groups, shorter periods and particular problems. It provides a distinctive education by developing an awareness of differing political, cultural, social and economic structures in past societies and their interrelationship. It combines vigorous debate over questions of interpretation with rigorous attention to the source materials. Its constant enrichment by cross-fertilisation from other disciplines leads to the asking of new questions about the past.

Oxford is celebrated for the broad chronological sweep of its courses and the enormous amount of choice offered to students. Students can study options on any part of British and European history from the declining years of the Roman Empire to the present day. The geographical range is also broad: there are options on North American, Latin American, Asian and African history (see website for further details). Students are encouraged to adopt a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to their work, and the faculty is strong on intellectual and cultural history options. The Oxford History Faculty is at the forefront of research.

## History (Ancient and Modern) at Oxford

Standard Offer: AAA (History highly recommended)

Interviewed: 64%

Successful: 25%

Admissions Test: HAT

More information: [www.history.ox.ac.uk](http://www.history.ox.ac.uk) [www.classics.ox.ac.uk](http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk)

This course enables students to study history from the Bronze Age Mediterranean and Near East, through the Roman Empire, middle ages, and early modern period, right up to British, European and world history in the present day. Fruitful comparisons between societies abound, and the methods by which we study them are mutually illuminating.

This Oxford course offers an extraordinary range of choices (more than 90 options) reflecting the breadth of interests of those who teach here. The Oxford Classics and History Faculties are world famous for teaching and research. Most of the people who will teach you here will be leading researchers in their field, and lecturers are encouraged to put on new courses which reflect their own interests. The study of original sources forms the basis of Further and Special Subjects.

## History and Economics at Oxford

Standard Offer: AAA (History and Maths highly recommended)

Interviewed: 57%

Successful: 19%

Admissions Test: HAT

More information: [www.history.ox.ac.uk](http://www.history.ox.ac.uk) [www.economics.ox.ac.uk](http://www.economics.ox.ac.uk)

The History and Economics course integrates these two subjects to form a coherent and intellectually stimulating programme. The combination allows insights that neither subject can realise alone. However, it is possible to specialise primarily in either History or Economics while still preserving the benefits of an integrated approach. The combination of economics, economic history and history (political as well as social) means that you will be equipped to view issues in the real world from a variety of contrasting perspectives. You will learn both the historian’s careful approaches to evidence and argumentation and the economist’s analytical and quantitative methods, providing an excellent preparation for a range of professional, financial and academic careers.

The course is designed to equip you with the basic tools of both history and economics, while introducing you to some of the areas which you can study later in more depth. You will be given a wide choice of subjects. Everyone studies introductory economics, which is designed to give a solid understanding of the foundations of both micro- and macro-economics. The Economics course is identical to that for Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) and students for both courses are generally taught together.

## History and English at Oxford

Standard Offer: AAA (English required, History highly recommended)

Interviewed: 57%

Successful: 19%

Admissions Test: HAT

More information: [www.history.ox.ac.uk](http://www.history.ox.ac.uk) [www.english.ox.ac.uk](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk)

A joint degree in History and English requires students to think critically about how we define ‘history’ and ‘literature’, and about how the two disciplines interrelate and, in large measure, overlap. Close attention is given to changing methodologies, to the nature of evidence and to styles of argument. It is assumed that historical documents are just as much ‘texts’ as are poems, plays or novels, and are therefore subject to interpretation as works of narrative, rhetoric and, fundamentally, language. Equally, it is assumed that poems, plays and novels represent historically grounded ways of interpreting a culture.

The History and English Faculties are the largest in Britain, with long and distinguished traditions of teaching and research. Students are offered a great deal of choice in the course over their three years, and whether their interests are in the medieval period, the Renaissance or the later periods, intellectually fruitful combinations are always possible.

The course structure at Oxford is intended to enable students to relate literary and historical ideas as effectively as possible in the investigation of their chosen historical periods, topics or authors, while recognising that some students will wish to opt for variety rather than close congruity between their historical and literary papers. Interdisciplinarity is embedded in each year of the course with dedicated classes in the first year as part of the Introduction to English Language and Literature paper, a ‘bridge paper’ taken in the second year and examined by extended essay, and an interdisciplinary dissertation in the final year.

Oxford possesses unmatched library provision for both subjects in the Bodleian Library, the History Faculty and English Faculty libraries, other faculty libraries and the college libraries.

## History and Politics at Oxford

Standard Offer: AAA (History highly recommended, Sociology helpful)

Interviewed: 53%

Successful: 11%

Admissions Test: HAT

More information: [www.history.ox.ac.uk](http://www.history.ox.ac.uk) [www.english.ox.ac.uk](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk)

The History and Politics course aims to bring together complementary but separate disciplines to form a coherent and stimulating programme. The degree not only enables students to set contemporary political problems in their historical perspective, but also equips them to approach the study of the past with the conceptual rigour derived from political science.

The special feature of the Oxford course is the chance to choose subjects very broadly across the two disciplines, so that it is possible to combine medieval historical options with the analysis of contemporary political systems. The expertise of a number of Oxford’s political theorists and historians in the history of political thought, the thematic approach taken to the teaching of general history in the first year, and the emphasis placed on interdisciplinarity in a number of both politics and history papers strengthen the intellectual rigour of this course.

## Classical Archaeology and Ancient History at Oxford

Standard Offer: AAA (History highly recommended)

Interviewed: 90%

Successful: 29%

Admissions Test: None

More information: [www.classics.ox.ac.uk](http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk)

The course combines study of the history, archaeology and art of the classical world. It looks at the societies and cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world through their written texts, visual art and material remains, and has at its centre the two classical cultures of Greece and Rome. It is aimed at anyone interested in investigating ancient civilisations and their remains, from Greek temples and Roman amphitheatres to wall paintings and the poignant residues of everyday life. While it is primarily a historical and non-linguistic degree, ancient languages can be used and learned as part of the course.

The degree is taught through a mixture of tutorials, lectures and classes. Some cover specifically archaeological or historical approaches to ancient Mediterranean cultures, but the degree is unique in also offering courses that combine both approaches. In every year of the course there are classes led by both an archaeologist and a historian, which are designed to give an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to the topics studied.

The University’s resources for this combined subject are excellent, in terms of both library facilities, especially the Sackler Library, and the range and number of postholders in the two fields. The Ashmolean Museum also contains wide-ranging collections of art and artefacts from classical cultures.

## History at Cambridge

Standard Offer: AAA (History highly recommended)

Successful: 33%

Admissions Test: None

More information: <http://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/>

Cambridge has one of the largest and best history faculties in the world and the course we offer reflects this quality and breadth of interest. Our course gives you the opportunity to explore the past from many different angles – including political, economic, social and cultural history – and to explore the interaction between history and other disciplines, such as politics, anthropology and archaeology.

There’s ample scope throughout to pursue personal interests and experiment with different historical approaches. Some paper options are shared with other courses, such as Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic; Asian and Middle Eastern Studies; and Classics, and specialist papers allow you to work with a variety of source materials such as music, art, cartoons and coins.

Our major resource is our teaching staff, made up of more than 100 leading academics, who are experts in fields as varied as the history of medieval Britain and modern India and China, nineteenth-century Europe and twentieth-century South Africa.

The Faculty has achieved outstanding teaching and research ratings in surveys by the UK national press, and was ranked first for History in the QS World University Rankings 2014.

The Seeley Library, one of the largest history libraries in the world, and the nearby University Library mean that finding the right book is rarely a problem, and there is a wealth of rare materials and manuscripts within collections in Cambridge suitable for students’ research. Undergraduate historians are also encouraged to take up or improve foreign languages. They have access to both the University Language Centre and specialist language teaching. Many Colleges have travel grants for students who wish to study the history of another country.

History Reading List

# Cambridge University Guide to Wider Reading

One of the most important things that all universities look for in their History applicants is genuine subject interest. So it is crucial, if you decide to apply to read History at university, to show your interest by exploring history further in your own time. Undoubtedly the best way to do this is through reading. Moreover, reading is fundamental to all historical study, research and writing, and getting into the reading habit now will really help your development as a historian.

It's probably no surprise, then, that quite a lot of Cambridge applicants have contacted us over the years to ask for our advice on what they should be reading. Good historians are analytical and make their own sound decisions. So rather than simply telling you all to read some sort of artificial, fixed syllabus, we'd prefer you to approach the question of reading exploratively, looking to your own interests and instincts. In short, you should read what you like or what you like the look of.

## But how do you decide what you like or what you might like? This can be done in a number of ways, for instance by:

* Thinking hard about your current course, or recent courses, of study;
* Reading general histories: Simon Schama's *A History of Britain*, for example;
* Watching television documentaries;
* Asking teachers or lecturers who know you what they think you might find interesting;
* Visiting historic sites;
* Browsing in libraries, shops or on the web, and picking books that grab your attention.

## How can you find books and articles on a particular subject?

* Obvious places to explore are the history sections in libraries and shops (online or on the high street);
* Alternatively, you can access reading lists for different types and periods of history through the History Faculty website. From the Undergraduate section go to Tripos Papers to find lists of 'Part I papers' or 'Part II papers' listed by year. These links will give you lists of courses running in a particular year. If you then click on an individual paper, you will find a description of that paper and also, near the bottom, a link to its reading list;
* Another good tip for finding more books/articles on a subject is to look at the bibliographies in relevant history books. These list the sources which historians have read during the course of their research.

## What should you seek to gain from your reading?

This question often elicits the response: 'It is important that you enjoy the history you are reading about.' We certainly hope you enjoy lots of the history that you read, but none of us enjoys everything, because we're not all interested in the same things and don't all respond in the same ways to a subject whose content and execution can differ very greatly.

The key thing, in fact, is that you learn from what you read and to do this you need to read analytically. This means making mental notes and asking questions all the way through your reading. You might try asking yourself the following questions when you finish a book or an article, and writing down your answers:

* Can I summarise the argument the historian has made?
* What evidence does the historian offer to substantiate his/her argument? Historians are like barristers in court: they must convince people of their case. To do so they must use evidence judiciously and convincingly;
* Is this historian's argument similar to, or different from, others that I have read?
* Do I agree or disagree with the argument being made here?
* Why? Is it properly evidenced? Is it coherent? Does it contradict itself?
* Doing this will help you understand what you have read and remember it later.

# King’s College Cambridge Suggested Reading

## English History: suggested introductory reading

(Select a period according to your interests)  
Medieval

* S Reynolds: Kingdoms and Communities
* J C Schmitt: The Holy Greyhound
* J Holt: Robin Hood
* F Barlow: The Feudal Kingdoms of England 1047-1216
* D Douglas: The Norman Achievement
* D Douglas: William the Conquerer:The Norman Impact on England
* R Hilton: Bondmen Made Free
* G Holmes: The Later Middle Ages 1272-1485
* J R Lander: Conflict and Stability in 15th Century England
* R W Southern: The Making of the Middle Ages
* A Gurevich: Categories of Popular Medieval Culture
* S Shahar: The Fourth Estate: Women in the Middle Ages

### Early Modern

* C Russell: The Causes of the English Civil War
* P Laslett: The World we have lost
* J H Plumb: The Growth of Political Stability in England
* J C D Clark: English Society 1688-1832
* K Wrightson: English Society
* J Brewer: The Sinews of Power

### Modern

* E P Thompson: The Making of the English Working Class
* E J Hobsbawm: Industry and Empire
* P Clarke: The Keynesian Revolution in the Making
* P Clarke: Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900-1990
* M. Desai: Marx's Revenge

## Classical Narrative Histories

* Gibbon: Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
* Livy: Histories
* Macaulay: History of England
* Tacitus: Annals
* Thucydides: History of the Peloponnesian War
* Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution

NB: You may not again have the leisure and inclination to read some of these, so you should certainly do so now if possible.

## Novels

* Balzac: Lost Illusions
* Cervantes: Don Quixote
* Conrad: Nostromo
* Dostoevsky: Crime and Punishment;The Brothers Karamazov
* George Eliot: Middlemarch
* Henry James: The Bostonians
* Thomas Mann: The Magic Mountain
* Solzhenitsyn: Cancer Ward
* Stendhal: The Red and the Black
* Tolstoy: Anna Karenina;War and Peace
* Turgenev: Fathers and Sons
* Zola: Germinal

## Studies of particular societies and epochs

Particularly useful for widening your sense of the range of historical enquiry:

* J Bossy: Christianity in the West 1400 - 1700
* F Braudel: The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the World of Philip II
* E Genovese: Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made
* E Hobsdbawn: Primitive Rebels
* J Levinson & F Schurmann: China: An Interpretative History
* K Thomas: Religion and the Decline of Magic
* E P Thompson: Whigs and Hunters
* J Womack: Zapata and the Mexican Revolution
* P Woodruff: The Men who ruled India
* N Davis: Society and Culture in 18th Century France
* C Ginzburg: The Cheese and the Worms
* D MacCulloch: Reformation

## Works of General Interest

Those marked with an asterisk will be particularly useful for thinking about general historical problems:

* N Bloch: The Historian's Craft
* R G Collingwood: The Idea of History\*
* M Foucault: Madness and Civilisation\*
* E H Gombrich: Art and Illusion
* C Geertz: The Interpretation of Cultures\*
* J Keegan: The Face of Battle
* G Lichtheim: Marxism
* A D Lovejoy: The Great Chain of Being
* A Macintyre: A Short History of Ethics
* Benedict Anderson: Imagined Communities
* Barrington Moore: Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy
* W H Walsh: In Introduction to the Philosophy of History
* Max Weber: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism\*
* J Tully & Q Skinner: Meaning and Context\*
* J Scott: Gender and the Politics of History
* A Hirschman: The Passions and the Interests\*

# Balliol College Oxford Suggested Reading

Books are grouped by periods corresponding to Oxford’s first year exams. In the first year, you select one of the History of the Britsh Isles papers and either Approaches to History or Historiography.

### History of the British Isles I (c. 300-1087)

* J. Campbell et al., The Anglo-Saxons (1982)
* E. James, Britain in the First Millennium (2001)
* W. Davies (ed.), From the Vikings to the Normans (2003)
* R. Fleming, Britain after Rome. The Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070 (Penguin, 2010)
* T. Charles-Edwards (ed.), After Rome (2003)
* L. Webster, Anglo-Saxon Art: a New History (2012)
* J Crick and E van Houts (eds.),  A Social History of England, 900-1200 (2011)

### History of the British Isles II (1042-1330)

* D. Carpenter, The Struggle for Mastery: The Penguin History of Britain 1066-1284(2004)
* B Harvey (ed.), The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (2001)
* R. Bartlett, England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075-1225 (2000)
* M.T. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, 3rd ed. (2012)
* M.T. Clanchy, England and its Rulers, 1066-1307, 3rd ed. (2006)
* M. Prestwich, Plantagenet England 1225-1360 (2005)
* R. Huscroft, Ruling England 1042-1217 (2005)
* J Crick and E van Houts (eds.),  A Social History of England, 900-1200 (2011)

### History of the British Isles III (1330-1550)

* M.H. Keen, England in the Later Middle Ages (2003)
* A. Tuck, Crown and Nobility, 1272-1461 (1999)
* S.J. Gunn, Early Tudor Government, 1485-1558 (1995)
* C. Dyer, Standards of Living in the Later Middles Ages (1989)
* S.H. Rigby, English Society in the Later Middles Ages: Class, Status and Gender (1995)
* E. Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580 (1992)

### History of the British Isles IV (1500–1700)

* E. Duffy, The Voices of Morebath (2002)
* K. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (1971)
* P. Marshall, Reformation England 1480-1642 (2003)
* S. Brigden, New Worlds, Lost Worlds (2000)
* M. Gaskill, Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-century English Tragedy (2006)
* K. Wrightson, Earthly Necessities (2002)
* C. Holmes, Why Was Charles I Executed? (2006)

### History of the British Isles V (1685–1830)

* G.S. Holmes, The Making of a Great Power: Later Stuart and Early Georgian Britain, 1660-1722 (1993)
* G.S. Holmes & D. Szechi, The Age of Oligarchy: Pre-Industrial Britain, 1722-1783 (1993)
* L. Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation (1992)
* P. Langford, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783 (1989)
* B. Hilton, A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846 (2006)
* E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963)

### History of the British Isles VI (1815-1924)

* B. Hilton, A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846 (2006)
* E.J. Evans, The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783-1870 (1983)
* M. Pugh, The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939 (1982)
* J.P. Parry, The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain (1993)
* F.M.L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900 (1988)

### History of the British Isles VII (since 1900)

* A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-45 (1965)
* K.O. Morgan, The People’s Peace: British History 1945-1990 (2nd ed. 1992)
* P. Clarke, Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990 (1996)
* M, Pugh, State and Society: British Political and Social History 1870–1992 (1994)
* R. McKibbin, Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951 (1998)
* P. Addison, No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain (2010)
* F. Carnevali and J-M. Strange (eds.), Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change (2007)

### Approaches to History

Over the past hundred years or so, there have been enormous changes in the ways in which historians have come to conceive the business of studying and writing about the past.  This paper aims to give students an opportunity to pursue some of these developments in all their richness.  Students will be able to range over a variety of major themes that historians now investigate and to consider in particular the influence of other disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, archaeology, economics, or art history, on the ways in which historians now approach their own work.  They will also be encouraged to relate these changing views of the subject to the periods of history they offer for Prelims.

Those of you who plan to take this paper in Prelims will find it useful to look through some of the following before you come up:

* P. Burke, History & Social Theory (1992)
* J. Cannon (ed.), The Historian at Work (1980)
* J. Tosh, The Pursuit of History. Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History (1984; 3rd ed. 2002)
* J. Le Goff and P. Nora, Constructing the Past. Essays in Historical Methodology (1985)
* A. Marwick, The Nature of History (1970; 3rd ed. 1989)
* L. Stone, The Past and the Present (1981)

### Historiography: Tacitus to Weber

This course offers an opportunity to sample some of the most formidably creative and influential historical minds of the last two thousand years, from Tacitus at the start of the second century to Weber at the beginning of the last. It also offers an opportunity to think critically about why these historical minds have come to be regarded as so particularly ‘creative and influential’.

Short general accounts of the history of historical writing are surprisingly rare. But the following are useful.

* Blackwell Dictionary of Historians (for reference)
* D. Hay, Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century (1977)
* J. Burrow, A History of Histories (2007)

# The Student Room Recommended Websites

* [Excellent collection of resources for Anglo Saxon History](http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/sdk13/asindex.html#links)
* [BBC History](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history) - this is pretty good. it has interesting articles, information on upcoming historical programmes on TV and radio, and some pretty nifty games too
* [School History](http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk) - it has revision information, online help, games and quizzes, and so on.
* [Spartacus Schoolnet](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk) - this is a good site for general research. it gives a good overview of the key figures and periods that are most commonly studied.
* [Explaining History](http://www.explaininghistory.com) - a really handy site for ebooks that explain different aspects of 20th Century History that are normally covered by most exam boards.
* [School History](http://www.schoolshistory.org.uk) - it's a school site. It has revision notes, quizzes and resources for things covered throughout secondary education.
* [Postmodernism](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/boghossian/papers/bog_tls.html)
* [More about postmodernism!](http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/lingua_franca_v4/lingua_franca_v4.html)
* <http://www.historyguide.org/history.html> HistoryGuide.Org] - Quotes about history
* [What is History?](http://www.unf.edu/%7Eclifford/craft/what.htm)
* [History Learning Site](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/) - Quite a few A Level course outlines
* [Guardian article about popularity of history](http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/humanities/story/0,9850,582774,00.html)
* [History Magazines online](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/an_H)
* [History Home](http://www.historyhome.co.uk/) - English History
* [Best of History Websites](http://www.besthistorysites.net/)
* [The History Channel](http://www.thehistorychannel.co.uk/site/home/)
* [Modern History Source Book](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html)
* [S-cool](http://www.s-cool.co.uk/topic_index.asp?subject_id=10&d=0) - A Level History on the Tudors
* [Learning Curve](http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/) - National Archives History Learning Site
* [[1]](http://http:/www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgTwUuUjWXo&feature=g-like&context=G23c2acfALT48VYgAAAA) - A Level History on Key individuals during the reign of Henry VIII

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.

Personal Statement Guide

The UCAS statement forms one of the key pillars of your application to university. It’s 4,000 characters detailing the reasons you feel you would be an ideal candidate for the course. While 4,000 characters may sounds like a lot, in reality it isn’t much more than a side of A4, so it is important to be concise in order to convey your passion and enthusiasm effectively.

# Getting off to a good start

The first paragraph of your personal statement is crucial. A strong opening will grab the interest of the admissions tutor, which is important when you have to stand out in a sea of potential applicants. This is the part of the statement where you have the most scope for creativity. Try and think of an original way of introducing your interest in the subject. I can’t tell you how to be original, but I can tell you what to avoid: tales of how you ‘wanted to do the subject since you were 5’ are unlikely to impress, given the vast number of students who write this every year! Many people try opening with a quote, but I’d advise against this. You want to demonstrate your interest in the subject – using someone else’s words doesn’t send out the best message.

# Getting the right balance

Writing a good personal statement is a balancing act between academic interests and extra-curricular activities. You probably have loads of enrichment activities to talk about, and they may seem more interesting, but don’t fall into the trap of talking about them too much. Your personal statement will be read by a lecturer, and their main priority is selecting students who will be the best academics. They’re not too concerned about what you can bring to the wider university community – they just want the brightest students on their course. I would include a few lines on wider enrichment, to let them know you’re a human and not a subject-loving robot, but keep linking them back to how they make you a better student. Of course, feel free to talk about subject related enrichment such as work experience or summer schools as part of the academic section – this specific experience will really help you stand out from the crowd academically.

The general advice is that your personal statement should be 75% academic, 25% personal. I’d view this as a minimum to aim for - you won’t be disadvantaged for emphasising academic matters more.

# Showing passion

‘Passion’ is the single most overused word in personal statements. Everyone knows that universities are looking for passionate students, but simply stating your passion for the subject over and over isn’t going to demonstrate this. ‘Show, don’t tell’ is the best mantra to use here. Demonstrate your enthusiasm for the subject by talking about wider reading that you’ve done; discuss an area of the subject you’re particularly interested in; show how you’ve extended your learning beyond the syllabus. All of these will give the admissions tutor a far greater indication of your passion than you simply stating it again and again.

# Hitting the books

Talking about the wider reading you’ve done can really enhance a personal statement’s academic credentials. However, there are pitfalls to avoid when discussing wider reading. Firstly, make sure that your material is academically reputable – try to choose the highest level text you’ve read to talk about in detail. Articles from non-specialist sources such as the BBC are probably best avoided. Don’t just name drop lots of books you’ve read, try and discuss the content – anyone can read the words of a book, but tutors want you to demonstrate that you’ve gained a deeper understanding of the subject. Offer an opinion about the content, what did you think was particularly interesting? What was the overall narrative of the text? I’d recommend trying to discuss what you read with peers or teachers, as it is this discussion that will really help you gain insight.

If you’re talking about a magazine or journal you read, try and give a specific example of an article you’ve read. Loads of people applying for economics will say they read The Economist, but if you talk about an article you found interesting this shows that you’re really engaging with it. If you do mention an article though, keep a copy of it somewhere. If you’re invited for interview it may well come up as a talking point, and it’ll be pretty embarrassing if you can’t remember what it was about!

# Don’t be a checklist ticker

You likely feel that there’s a list of things you have to include in your personal statement, such as details of your school subjects, your wider reading and your extra-curricular activities. While this is true to some extent, be careful not to make it seem like you’re ticking off things on a checklist. The idea of fulfilling a list often leads people to include things that just aren’t relevant. Some people feel it necessary to list all of the subjects they’re taking, often creating quite contrived ways to link it to their course. This simply isn’t necessary, as the tutor can see the subjects you’re taking on the form! Unless you have a meaningful point to make, like taking a wide range of subjects to become a well-rounded academic, save the characters.

Again, don’t begin every sentence like you’re ticking an item off the list. Sentence openings like ‘I enjoy lots of wider reading…’ or ‘I am engaged in lots of extra-curricular activities…’ scream of unoriginality. Be creative with your structure and you’ll engage with the admissions tutor much better.

# Getting your point across

You might have a burning passion for the subject, backed up with a wealth of academic enrichment and wider reading, but if you’re not able to effectively utilise language you won’t be able to communicate this effectively. So many people seem to think that the key to writing a good personal statement is to write laboriously rambling sentences. I’ve seen examples of personal statements where sentences run over 3 lines. Not only is this style of writing hard to follow, it’s also pretty boring to read. Honestly, the best advice is to think back to GCSE English and writing to persuade; after all, persuasion is the name of the game. Use a variety of sentence structures, long and short. Don’t cram loads of ideas into one sentence, separate them. Avoid using the same word over and over, but don’t just blindly throw a thesaurus at it.

When you redraft, take the time to rework awkward sentences. Read your statement aloud, and you’ll be able to tell when something doesn’t quite flow right. Simplicity is the key – useless rambling is not only using up valuable characters, but it also dilutes the impact of your statement.