

The Toot Hill College Guide to Oxford



Why Study at Oxford?

- Globally Renowned University. All around the world, Oxford is famous for providing a world class education.
- Tutorial Teaching. The university provides teaching through tutorials, where you are tutored in groups of one or two. This means you get fantastic levels of individual attention and your tutor can tailor your education to you.
- College system. You join the university as a member of one of the constituent colleges. Each college provides a tight-knit community to work and socialise in. Each college has its own culture and traditions, and everyone is fiercely loyal to their own college. (Of course, Hertford is the best!)
- International expert faculty. Tutors at Oxford are world leading experts, so you get an insight into the cutting edge of your subject. Often tutors will discuss their own research with you, and they have a deep understanding they can transfer to you.
- Resources. Oxford spends £16,000 a year educating each student. This is spent on world class tutors, libraries and laboratories. The Bodleian Library, for example, is the largest University library in the world.
- Short, intense terms. Terms at Oxford are only 8 weeks long, meaning the ‘work hard, play hard’ mantra is well followed. This means accommodation is affordable, as you have a short contract, and you get plenty of time off to relax and revise.
- Excellent employability. Oxford has an extensive careers service that finds internships, work experience and graduate jobs for students, meaning Oxford students are some of the most employable in the world

- Ancient Traditions. Oxford has been around since 1096, so students join a long tradition of academia. You get to live, work and study in building steeped in history – it feels like Hogwarts most of the time. It also means that Oxford has some quirky traditions, which may seem strange at first – like eating dinner in gowns. Rest assured however, most people see these traditions for what they are – a bit of silly fun. Each college also has its own level of formality – so whether you want to feel like you live in the 21st or 15th century, there’s a college right for you.
- Access Programmes. Oxford has one of the most generous bursary and scholarship schemes in the country – last year they provided £10.79 million in financial support.

Oxford vs. Cambridge

	Oxford	Cambridge
Admissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses admissions tests • Interviews over 3 days, with accommodation provided • Offers all arrive on the same day (early January) • Typical offer A*A*A-AAA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks for UMS scores • Interviews over 1 day, sometimes with a test as well • Offers come in a different times – can be waiting until the end of January • Typical offer A*A*A-A*AA
Studying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Week Terms • Tutorial System • Very similar ranking, slightly better for Humanities, Life and Social Sciences • Certain subjects exclusive eg. Fine Art, Politics Philosophy & Economics • Offer lots of joint degrees eg. Maths and Philosophy, Classics and English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Week Terms • Tutorial System • Very similar ranking, slightly better for Natural Sciences and Engineering • Certain subjects exclusive eg. Architecture, Land Economy, Natural Sciences
Social/Nightlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigger city, generally more nightlife • 1 Hour train to London • 24/7 Busses to London (£11 return) • Colleges less spread out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller city, generally prettier • 1 Hour Train to London • Colleges more spread out

Have I got what it takes?

There’s a misconception that Oxford is full of posh, privately educated students. However, last year 56% of offers went to state school applicants. So, if you don’t have to be from a posh school, what are Oxford looking for?

- A capacity to absorb and use new ideas. Oxford wants people who are able to learn quickly, and have the skills to use new information effectively. During the degree, you’ll be learning at a very fast pace, and they want people who can deal with the torrent of new ideas
- The ability to think and work independently. Oxford needs students who are able to work for themselves. Though you’ll receive excellent support, they can’t take the degree for you! You need to be able to work effectively without direct guidance.

- Perseverance and enthusiasm. Oxford tutors are all deeply passionate and excited about their subject – and they want to see the same from you! They want to teach people who have attitude and determination to succeed academically.

Oxford assesses how well you meet these criteria in a number of different ways. The application process is explained in detail below, but the elements they consider are:

- Admissions tests
- Interviews
- Exam results
- Personal Statement
- Teacher References

Application Process

UCAS

You apply to Oxford in the same way as any other university, through the UCAS website. This involves choosing your courses, entering your grades and personal information, and producing a 4,000 character (about a page) personal statement. However, Oxford (and Cambridge) have an earlier deadline of 15th October, so you may want to start work on your personal statement over summer.

College Choice

You must elect a college to apply to when completing the UCAS form. There are 38 colleges in Oxford, which provide accommodation, support and tutoring throughout your degree. When choosing a college, you might like to consider the following:

- Do they offer my course? Certain courses are only provided at some colleges. To check which colleges you can apply to, go to <http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/which-oxford-colleges-offer-my-course>
- How popular is my course at the college? Do you want a large group of fellow students for more collective working, or a smaller group for more individual attention? You can find these statistics at www.chooseoxfordcollege.co.uk
- Do you want a large or small college? Large colleges, such as St. Catherine's or St. Hugh's will typically have more facilities, whereas smaller colleges such as Mansfield or Corpus Christi will usually have a more tight knit, community feel
- Do you want to be close to the centre? Colleges in the city centre, such as Hertford or Trinity have better access to shops and nightlife, but colleges which are slightly further out, such as Keble or Lady Margaret Hall may be closer to your department, and are less swamped by tourists.
- Do you want an old or new college? Older colleges such as Balliol or Queen's are usually more 'Hogwarts-y' and traditional. Be warned, however, many colleges have newer, less pretty accommodation that you're likely to be living in. Newer colleges such as St. Catherine's are typically more relaxed and less traditional.

If you need help deciding, www.chooseoxfordcollege.co.uk gives you a survey and suggests the best colleges for you. <http://guides.tab.co.uk/guide/oxford/> also has descriptions of all the colleges, written by students.

Try and visit some colleges on an open day. In 2015, they're on the 1st & 2nd July and the 18th September. All of the colleges will be open to look around and will have students on hand to answer questions. It's easy to get bogged down in statistics, but there's no substitute for seeing them in person.

Admissions Test

Many courses at Oxford require you to take an admissions test in early November, which they use to help decide who to interview, and later who to make offers to. You'll need to speak to the exams office when you apply, and they'll enter you. Details of the individual tests are given below

BMAT – BioMedical Admissions Test

Required for: Biomedical Sciences, Medicine

Past papers and answers available <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat/preparing-for-bmat/>

ELAT – English Literature Admissions Test

Required for: Classics and English, English and Modern Languages, English Language and Literature, History and English

Past papers and marking criteria available <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/elat/preparing-for-elat/>

HAT – History Aptitude Test

Required for: History, History (Ancient and Modern), History and Economics, History and English, History and Modern Languages, History and Politics

Past papers and mark schemes available <http://www.history.ox.ac.uk/prospective/undergraduate/applying/the-history-aptitude-test.html>

MAT – Mathematics Admissions Test

Required for: Computer Science, Computer Science and Philosophy, Mathematics, Mathematics and Computer Science, Mathematics and Philosophy, Mathematics and Statistics

Past papers and mark schemes available <https://www.maths.ox.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate-study/maths-admissions-test>

MLAT – Modern Languages Admissions Test

Required for: Classics and Modern Languages, English and Modern Languages, European and Middle Eastern Languages, History and Modern Languages, Modern Languages, Modern Languages and Linguistics, Philosophy and Modern Languages, Psychology Philosophy and Linguistics

One specimen paper available <http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests>

PAT – Physics Aptitude Test

Required for: Engineering Science, Materials Science, Physics, Physics and Philosophy

Past papers and one mark scheme available <http://www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/pat/preparing-for-pat/>

School has model answers for all other papers

Philosophy Test

Required for: Philosophy and Modern Languages, Philosophy and Theology

One specimen paper available <http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests>

TSA – Thinking Skills Assessment

Required for: Economics and Management, Geography, Philosophy Politics and Economics, Psychology (Experimental), Psychology Philosophy and Linguistics,

Past papers and answers available <http://www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/thinking-skills-assessment/tsa-oxford/preparing-for-tsa-oxford/>

Written Work

Some courses require you to submit a piece of college work that demonstrates your analytical and reasoning skills. You receive details once you have applied through UCAS, and you must send the work to your college by 10th November.

Details of which courses require written work can be found at

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/written-work>

Interview

If you have a strong UCAS application and perform well on the entrance tests, you'll be invited to interview. This will take place in early to mid-December, and will usually involve staying in your chosen College for about 3 days (if your college is over-subscribed, you may be invited to interview at a different college). You'll usually be given about 3 interviews, lasting about 25 minutes, with at least one at a different college. It's a great opportunity to meet new people, explore Oxford, and get a feel for university life.

The interviews themselves are similar to tutorials. You'll be asked questions about your subject by at least two tutors for your subject. You could be given maths problems you'll have to write down solutions for or asked to discuss an idea. The content will be designed to challenge you, so it's likely you won't know the answers straight away. The tutors may provide you with guidance or new information as you go on – they're looking at how to deal with new ideas, and how you go about tackling problems. In humanities subjects, the interviewer will often challenge what you say – your job is to deal with their criticism, either by counter-arguing or modifying your argument. If it sounds scary, don't worry; everyone's in the same boat.

You can find more information, as well as sample interview videos at

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/interviews>

Offers

All Oxford acceptances and rejections are released on the same day, usually in the first week of term. You may be given an offer from the college you were interviewed at, or another one completely! If the tutors agree that you are of a high enough standard, but no college has space, you'll be given an open offer. This means you've definitely got a place, but you'll be assigned a college on results day, once they know the final numbers. If you're successful, you'll then have to get the grades (they don't usually accept anything less).