



INTERVIEWS AT OXFORD

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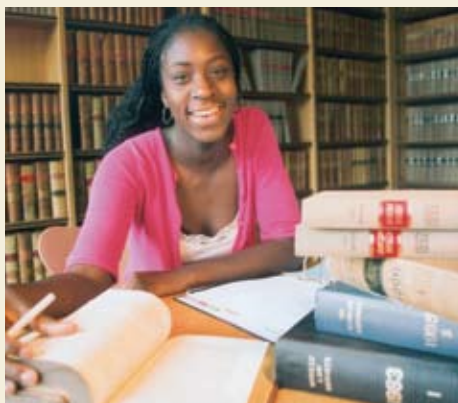
Interviews at Oxford

This booklet aims to explain Oxford interviews and the part they play in the selection procedure. Please remember that the interview is just one aspect of your application, as tutors will also consider your:

- examination results,
- personal statement,
- academic reference,
- predicted grades, and
- admissions tests or written work, if they are required for your subject.

This booklet also gives advice on how you can prepare for your interview, so that you will be able to do your best.

If you have any further general questions about your interview, please contact the Undergraduate Admissions Office. You can find contact details on the back cover of this booklet. If you have been invited to an interview, and have any questions, please contact the college that has invited you. You can find their contact details on any letter that they have sent to you, or at www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/colleges/.



Applicants with disabilities

Students with disabilities should inform their college of any particular requirements well in advance of their interview, so that any appropriate arrangements can be made. Please also refer to www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/guides/ for further information on sources of support that will be available to you.



Applying to Oxford

For details of how to apply to Oxford, please see www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/apply/. The deadline for applications is 15 October. Please note that several subjects require you to sit a written test as part of your application and/or to submit written work. To make sure that you can prepare in good time and register for any tests that may be required, please do check the details for your subject at www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/courses/.

Shortlisting

Many excellent candidates apply each year, and most of them have a good personal statement, a glowing reference and top predicted grades. With so many applications for each place at Oxford, it just isn't possible to interview everyone. Tutors review each UCAS application, along with any written test or written work required for the subject, and then decide on a shortlist of candidates who will be invited to interview.

For some courses, over 90% of candidates are shortlisted. In other subjects, particularly those

International students

Please check www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/int/ for details of interview arrangements for international students.



Greg Smolonski

that are most heavily oversubscribed, a smaller proportion of candidates will be shortlisted – in some cases less than 50%. Sadly, this does mean that some candidates will be disappointed, as their applications will not be considered beyond the shortlisting stage. However, it also means that those candidates who have been identified as having the strongest ability and potential may have more than one interview, increasingly at more than one college.



Rowena Scott Chemistry

My headteacher and my teacher for Further Mathematics organised mock interviews – all of which were harder than the real thing.

In my interviews, I was asked questions from the A-level syllabus and tested on interpretation and how quickly I picked up new material. The tutors did not ask me any general questions such as why I had applied to that particular college. I was interviewed twice at the college I had applied to (although shortlisted applicants are increasingly allotted interviews in different colleges). I had an interview for Inorganic Chemistry with the tutors for Organic Chemistry and one for Organic Chemistry with a tutor for Inorganic Chemistry!

Being in Oxford was also a fantastic and memorable experience. The students arranged a bar quiz for us and took us to our interviews. I met a range of interesting people, many of whom I still know now!

Before your interview

Have I been shortlisted?

Towards the end of November or in early December you will receive an email or a letter indicating whether or not you have been invited for interview. If you have been invited, the letter will include practical details of your interview and further information.

Please note that you will probably be interviewed at the college to which you applied, or the college to which you were allocated, if you made an open application. However, in some

cases your application may be referred to another college. This can happen if a college is significantly oversubscribed for your subject that year, and will be made clear in the letter inviting you to interview.

In some subjects all candidates will automatically be interviewed at a second college. For other subjects, you may be offered the opportunity to have an interview at a second or even a third college. This does not necessarily mean that you will not be offered a place at the first college.



Stephen McGlynn Experimental Psychology

I came along to an open day at the University and completely fell in love with the place.

I had to take a test, which I found surprisingly relaxed. You couldn't really have prepared, as it was on a completely random, newly researched topic and seemed mainly to test skills of analysing data, evaluating and criticising experiments, and general writing. It was certainly nothing to worry about.

I had two interviews in different colleges, each with two tutors, lasting about 20 minutes. The first took the form of a mini-tutorial, in which I was introduced to a topic, and then asked about its implications and applications, as well as a few questions to check that I had grasped the concept correctly. The second one was more of a general chat, looking over my personal statement, and then a discussion of various psychological topics, trying to think of their everyday applications and common examples. I was pleased that I'd read a few general books on the subject, and some journals and blogs, as this helped me know what I was letting myself in for. It was all extremely friendly, and very chatty.



Emma Mussell

History

I knew that the questions during my interviews would be challenging, but was reassured by the knowledge that tutors wanted to test my ability to think about new ideas rather than establish what I did or didn't know. My first interview started with a couple of questions about my A-level courses, which helped me relax. The tutors then went on to ask about my personal statement and the essay I had sent in. For the second interview I was given a text in advance – it was quite theoretical so no prior knowledge of the topic was required. We discussed the concepts it contained, and I applied some of the ideas to topics I had studied. I actually enjoyed the interview experience.

I think applicants should try to come to interviews as relaxed as possible as it really helps you to think clearly and come up with interesting points for discussion. It really is true that there are no 'right answers' to most of the questions.

How can I prepare?

We recommend that you:

- think about the obvious questions that are often asked at the beginning of an interview to help you settle down, and think how you might answer them. Think specifically about why you want to study at Oxford and why have you chosen this particular subject.
- read widely around your chosen subject, including newspaper articles, websites, journals, magazines and other publications that relate to your subject.
- take a critical view of ideas and arguments that you encounter at school or college, or in the media – think about all sides of any debate.
- be prepared to show some background knowledge of the subject, if you are applying for a course not normally studied at school or college, such as Medicine, Law, Biochemistry or Oriental Studies. However, you will not be expected to have a detailed understanding of specific or technical topics. For example, you may be asked what role your subject plays in society and how you came to be interested in it. For these subjects, the topics for discussion are likely to allow you to demonstrate the skills needed by an undergraduate: the ability to use information to construct your own opinions, the willingness and ability to analyse and, in the sciences and mathematics, facility in problem-solving.
- re-read any written work that you have submitted, and think about how you might expand on what you wrote.
- re-read your personal statement.
- organise a practice interview for yourself. This could be with a teacher or someone else who is familiar with your subject, but preferably not someone you know very well. This will help you to get some more experience of talking about yourself and your work in an unfamiliar environment.
- remind yourself of the selection criteria for your chosen subject. These criteria can be found at www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/courses/criteria.shtml.



Finding your way

For details of how to get to Oxford and how to find your college please see www.ox.ac.uk/aboutoxford/maps/.

Interviews in Oxford take place in December, after the end of term, when many students will have returned home for Christmas. However, each college makes sure that there are plenty of undergraduates around to provide information and to help candidates find their way around. These undergraduates will have recently experienced the interview process themselves, and are very well placed to help and advise you.

What to wear and what to bring

Please wear whatever clothes you feel comfortable in. Most tutors will not dress formally, and it is not necessary for you to do so. We recommend that you bring copies of any written work you have submitted, and a copy of your personal statement, as tutors may refer to these during your interview.

It's a good idea to bring a book with you or some school or college work to do, as you will only spend a relatively small amount of your time in Oxford actually in interviews or taking tests. There will also be plenty of opportunity to spend time with other interview candidates as well as current undergraduates.

You will need to bring your own personal items such as toiletries, but your accommodation and meals will be provided free-of-charge by the college. It is advisable that you bring a mobile telephone, along with its charger, so that the college can contact you, if they need to.

Tom Cox Mathematics

I stayed in Oxford for four days and had two interviews at one college, and a third one at another college. I had expected everyone to be very sure of themselves and confident but the nerves hit everyone at some point before they went into their interview room. I was given a list of eight questions the night before my first interview to look over and was asked to try to answer three to four of them. This helped a lot as it gave me some idea of what we would discuss, which was very reassuring.

The tutors were both really friendly and made the interview seem more like a practice tutorial than an interview. I got the impression they were really trying to help me understand rather than catch me out. The whole experience was obviously a little stressful at the time but was also great fun. I met lots of people with similar interests who I kept in contact with afterwards.

Alison Fincher

English Language and Literature

On the day of my interview I was given 30 minutes to read a poem and prepare to discuss it. The interview itself was very scholarly. The interviewer did not want to know much about me personally; she was far more concerned about how well I understood the text I had just read and how well I could discuss it with her. She asked me for my general impressions, including whether I could identify when or by whom it was written. Then she asked me more technical details. Finally, we discussed the poem's meaning. Ultimately, I spent 30 minutes discussing poetry with a learned academic. I enjoyed it so much that I almost forgot she was interviewing me! Overall, my interview was more academically rigorous than I had expected, but anyone who knows their topic could not help but do well.



At your interview

Who will interview you

Interviews in Oxford will be conducted by people who are experts in an aspect of the degree course for which you are applying. You may be interviewed by two or more tutors at a time. If you are applying for a joint course, with two or more subjects, you should expect to be interviewed by tutors representing each of the subjects.

What to expect in the interview, or interviews

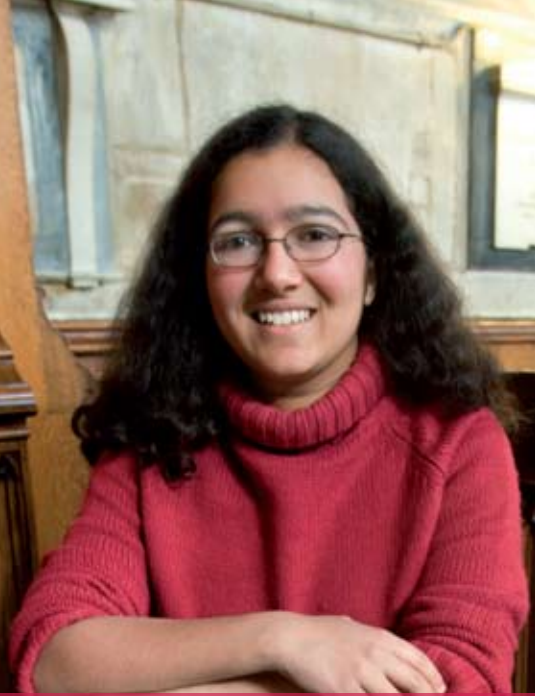
Tutors want you to be yourself in the interview, and to allow you to demonstrate your skills and abilities. They will probably ask you a few simple questions to begin with to help you feel at ease.

They will then move on to questions about your subject, and questions that will help them to assess your suitability to study at Oxford. It is quite likely, especially in arts subjects, that you will be asked to answer questions about a short piece of text. You will be given the chance to read the passage carefully before the interview, and will be advised if there is

anything particular on which you need to focus.

You may be asked factual questions, especially in science subjects. The basis for this discussion will probably include the subjects you are currently studying at school or college; for courses that require written work, this may also be used. However, you may also be offered opportunities to show whether you have read around the subject and to demonstrate your interest beyond your school or college syllabus.

In many ways, your interview will be like a mini tutorial. If you don't know the answer to a question, you may wish to explain that you haven't covered that topic yet, but do try to work out the answer if you can. Allow the tutors to guide you, if necessary, and ask if you don't understand a question. Many questions are designed to test your ability to apply logic and reason to an idea you may never have encountered before. The questions may seem difficult, but don't worry: this does not mean that the interview is going badly. The tutor will be seeking to stretch you in order to assess your potential.



Shanika Ranasinghe **Music**

As soon as I arrived for the interview period, I was taken to the Faculty of Music, where I had to perform a short piece for my preferred college's tutors. That afternoon, I was sent to another college for an interview. I had three interviews in total. They were not as I had expected them to be. They were more of a friendly chat than an interview! I was asked about the written work I had sent in, as well as questions about my A-level syllabus and my interest in world music. In all three interviews, I was asked to look at a piece of music and talk about its style and interesting features. I found this part of the interview quite hard, but the tutors were happy to give me a moment to think about my responses and to prompt me when necessary. It wasn't about what I knew or didn't know: the academic staff were more interested in how I could argue my point of view and engage in a debate with them.

Purpose of the interview

The interview is designed to assess your academic abilities and, most importantly, your academic potential. It provides tutors with a valuable opportunity to assess your potential beyond your written record. The interview allows them to evaluate your understanding of, and aptitude for your subject, and to give you the opportunity to explain why you are committed to studying it. Tutors make their decisions based on your academic abilities and potential, not your manners or etiquette, appearance or background.

What tutors are looking for?

A good deal of the teaching in an Oxford college takes place in small classes or tutorials, and your interviewers – who may be your future tutors – are assessing your ability to learn. This depends both on how carefully you listen to questions and how sensibly you answer them. Clarity, and concise and relevant arguments are all-important!

Tutors are looking for your self-motivation and enthusiasm for your subject. They are looking for evidence that you are thinking independently, that you are willing to engage with new ideas, beyond the scope of your school or college syllabus, and that you are committed to your subject(s).

Are there right or wrong answers?

Interviewers are not going to ask you trick questions, but many of the topics you will cover do not have simple 'right' or 'wrong' answers. The questions are designed to encourage you to think for yourself and develop an argument. Be yourself and ask for help if you need it.

Interviewers are not trying to make you feel ignorant or catch you out. They are looking for evidence of how well you can explain what you do know, and whether you can think your way through a new problem or argue your position. If you don't understand something, do just ask.

Timothy Tay

History

Ten minutes before my interview I was given a short passage to read. The interviewer then asked me questions about the passage, such as when I thought it was written and what themes I had identified. She also talked to me about the history of Singapore and Malaysia (I'm from Singapore), making me think about certain issues that I had not really considered before. I guess she wanted to see how I would think critically through ideas that I had not learnt in a classroom setting, and whether I could create and develop my own ideas.

If I had to give advice to prospective applicants, it would be simply this: be calm and confident, and try and enjoy the interview as much as you can.



Are extra-curricular activities taken into account?

Please remember that tutors make their decisions based on your academic abilities and potential alone: extra-curricular activities do not form part of the selection criteria in any subject. However, they may ask a question or two about your extra-curricular activities, particularly at the start of the interview, as you are settling in. They may ask you why you enjoy a particular activity and what you have learnt from it. They may also be interested in how you have balanced your time between studies and other activities.

Your questions

At the end of the interview you may be given the chance to ask your own questions. This is not the place for detailed discussion of the course syllabus or other details, as you should have explored the course information before you applied. However, it is the time to ask about any points about your own academic work, or perhaps about one of the questions you were asked in the interview.



Greg Simolonski



Lizzi Porter Fine Art

The practical test I had to take at my interview the most fun test I'd ever been to! We all talked to each other and lent each other tools and materials. I made the biggest mess, and produced some work that I was really pleased with.

I had two interviews. One was with two tutors at my college, who asked me about a particular exhibition I had visited, and also about my favourite paintings. The second one was with several tutors at the Ruskin School. They asked me why I wanted to study my subject, and also about the work I had submitted in my portfolio. They all seemed kind and friendly, and it felt far more like a conversation than an interview. I really did enjoy the whole experience. I got to stay in the college for two nights, with entertainment provided by the current students. I walked all over Oxford looking at other colleges and museums and I know that even if I hadn't been offered a place, the experience would still have been extremely valuable.

The result

Colleges will inform candidates of their decision by the middle of January. The letter you will receive will explain one of three things:

- You are made an offer of a place to study your subject at a particular college. If you have already completed your examinations, this offer will probably be unconditional. If you have not yet finished your final examinations, the offer will probably be conditional upon your achieving certain grades, usually AAA at A-level, or equivalent qualifications. The offer may specify that you need to achieve certain grades in particular subjects and may include a requirement for evidence of proficiency in the English language.
- You are made an 'open offer', which means that you have an offer from Oxford and are guaranteed a place if you meet the terms of any conditional offer. However, the college you will

go to has not yet been specified, and will not be decided until after your final examination results have been published.

- Your application has, unfortunately, not been successful.

For many applicants who have, until now, been the most academically successful in their school or college, it can be very dispiriting to not get an offer. In recent years, over 75% of those who applied did not receive an offer; and it is probable, if you have selected your other courses wisely, that you will go on to study at another excellent university.

In a few years' time you may wish to consider applying to Oxford for further study after you have completed your first degree elsewhere. We often see candidates who were unsuccessful in their undergraduate applications here making successful applications for graduate study.

Finding out more

Admissions Information Centre ⓘ

We have an Admissions Information Centre the *admissions* ⓘ, on Little Clarendon Street, usually open from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday, which is a good first port of call for potential applicants and their parents and carers. At the *admissions* ⓘ you can pick up copies of the prospectus, individual subject brochures and all other leaflets relating to undergraduate study at Oxford. There are also staff on hand to provide advice and to answer any questions. If you are not able to visit us in person, you can call or email or write to us instead. Contact details can be found on the back cover of this booklet.
www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/admissionsi/.

Podcasts

Find out for yourself what Oxford University is all about by listening to our podcasts. Be a fly on the wall when Mike Nicholson, Oxford's Director of Undergraduate Admissions, chats with students and staff from around the University about how best to prepare for the Oxford interview, as well as about courses, colleges, student finance, and what to include on the application form. Download and listen to whole episodes, or select taster clips from each episode at www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/podcasts/.

iTunes U

Our podcasts are also available on the University's site on iTunes U, along with lectures, interviews and short films about life at Oxford. They can be listened to online or downloaded to a mobile device.
<http://itunes.ox.ac.uk>.



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