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OUMC APPLICATION GUIDE

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A Word From Our President

Oxford: A thousand year old institution rich with history. Behind the Hogwarts-esque buildings, fancy traditions and grass you aren't allowed to step on; the university has been characterised as, and remains to be, one of the world's leading academic and research hubs. Indeed, Malaysia has a long and proud history of sending students to fly our flag high in the 'City of Dreaming Spires'.

Founded in 1991, OUMC has always had a simple goal: to assist Malaysians who dream of an Oxford education. This booklet serves to aid prospective applicants by helping you with 2 main things - firstly, figuring out whether Oxford is the right place for you; secondly, if you do choose to apply, how you can craft a competitive application. We've compiled detailed and comprehensive advice on each step of the admissions process, as well as testimonies from current Malaysian Oxonians regarding their application experiences.

Applying to Oxford can be an intimidating experience. Personally, I remember frequently comparing myself to successful applicants and wondering whether I had any chance of getting in. Just know that it's not at all unusual to feel this way throughout your application process. It's important to remember that there is no Oxford 'type' of student. At OUMC, we are all different kinds of Malaysians who come from various backgrounds. All Oxford is looking for are bright minds who are passionate about their subjects.

We hope you find this booklet helpful in offering you some insight on the application process and life at the university.

Azri Raziq

Engineering Science, St. Hilda's College

OUMC President 2020/21

Step by Step

1. Complete an online application via UCAS
2. Write a personal statement for your UCAS application
3. Register for admission test or send in written work, depending on your course
4. Prepare for interview, conducted via Skype in Malaysia or in the UK
5. Wait for results and university decision, usually released in January

Important Dates

Here are some dates to work around when applying to Oxford for the 2021 admissions cycle

UCAS Undergraduate Apply opens	19 May 2020
Starting to send in applications	8 September 2020
UCAS Oxford application deadline	6pm UK time, 15 Oct 2020
Registration for admission tests	1 Sep to 15 Oct 2020 <i>(may vary depending on test)</i>
Admission Tests	4 November 2020 <i>Except law, see www.lnat.ac.uk</i>
Submission of written work	10 November 2020 <i>(only if applicable)</i>
Interviews	1 – 20 Dec 2020
Decisions	12 January 2021

For more information, please visit

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

Personal Statement

The main purpose of a personal statement is to display your interest in the subject and show the university what you have done to pursue that interest.

What should you include in your personal statement?

- Tutors at Oxford are interested in your academic ability and potential. They want to see true commitment to your subject.
- Focus around 80% of your personal statement on your academic interests, abilities and achievements related to your subject. The remaining 20% can cover unrelated extracurricular activities.
- Be concise. Fit as much information as you can without exceeding the character limit.
- Be truthful. You may be asked to elaborate on a point during your interview.
- Use correct grammar and stick to British English throughout your personal statement.
- Let others read through your statement and get critical feedback. Take the advice of others but be firm in making editorial decisions – it's *your* personal statement and should reflect you.

What not to do?

- Don't write about details you have already included in your UCAS application, such as your academic results
- Don't include university names in your personal statement
- Don't make sweeping generalized statements (e.g. 'Law fascinates me', 'I am passionate about Engineering'). Always explain *why* and give *evidence*.
- DO NOT PLAGIARISE. UCAS uses a plagiarism detection software and will notify universities if you are suspected of plagiarism. UCAS keeps copies of past personal statements so think twice before recycling your seniors' personal statement.

Choosing a College

There are as many similarities as there are differences among colleges in Oxford. Every college provides the necessary support and resources for you to complete your education in Oxford. However, there are a few things to consider when choosing a college such as:

- Subjects offered by your college
- Accommodation – the number of years you are allowed to live in college, pricing, location (not all accommodation blocks are on-site)
- Facilities provided by the college e.g. library, gym and cafe
- Location of the college, especially the distance from your department
- Access – most colleges have facilities and accommodation for disabled students, but some areas of certain colleges may be difficult to access for students with mobility issues

For more information about the colleges including a list of colleges accepting undergraduates (not all of them do!), please visit

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/a-z-of-colleges-listing>

Making an Open Application

If you are unsure which college to apply to, you can always make an open application.

What is an open application?

You do not pick a specific college. A random college will be assigned to you based on different factors such as the number of applications to a college.

Will this lower or improve my chances of getting into Oxford?

No, it won't. In the application, it will appear as though you chose the college. *Even if you do select a college, there is no guarantee that you will get into that college.* The university will distribute the students among different colleges to make sure that the best students get a place in the university if their chosen college does not have a place for them. In fact, there has always been a significant amount of people who were given a place in a college different from the one they applied to.

For more information on how the college system and open applications work, please visit <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/do-you-choose-a-college>

How to Choose a College 101

Parin Siddhartha | Year 1 Psych and Phil | Pembroke College

Hey, give yourself a pat on the back. You've not only made the great decision to apply to study at Oxbridge, and let's be real, you've rightly chosen the better place. Now, to make it a hat-trick: choosing the right college. If you want to skip the stress and unnecessary Panadol, you might think of choosing an open application. University admissions always reassures applicants that this system doesn't lower your chances of getting an offer- you might end up getting pooled to another college in the end anyway (more of that later).

Well, assuming you *are* picking a college, let's get down to it. Is there a right college? Yes and no. Yes, because there are definitely things that will make a college more suitable for you than others. I'll list what I think are the most important factors when deciding.

Firstly, the obvious question of whether College X **offers your subject or not**. Less popular subjects/combos may not be offered at all colleges. Secondly, look at the **accommodation** provisions. Maybe you want the safety of guaranteed 3 years accommodation or maybe you don't mind spicing it up and living out for a year? Thirdly, many check their **endowment** (how wealthy your college is). Being a member of a wealthier college will usually mean you pay lower rents and food is cheaper due to subsidies. However, remember that everyone loves a wealthier college; it is very likely that many people will be applying to that college too, increasing your chances of being 'pooled'.

Some other things worth considering, perhaps think about your tutors- maybe the tutor for your subject in College X specialises in an area of research that you are interested in. Maybe you want to consider College X's distance from your faculty and its library (remember that you'll have to go here regularly for books and lectures). Or perhaps you're worried about your gains, then look at the sports and recreational facilities offered. The college population and culture is worth considering (admittedly it's hard to research this but looking at the Oxford SU's alternative prospectus is a useful start!). The SU's alternative prospectus also has a

college suggester which allows you to select the factors which matter the most to you. Best be warned not to use food as a metric- as good as their fish and chips may be, you're never gonna get your *nasi lemak* and *char kuey teow* tier food, so get ready for disappointment.

The list is really endless, and if after reading this you think I've only made it harder-fret not. You can always opt for an open application, as mentioned earlier, if you really have a hard time deciding. That being said, even if you end up choosing a specific college, you could get 'pooled' during interviews and receive an offer from a different college instead. 'Pooling' is the process of transferring applicants to another college to ensure that everyone has an equal chance of getting an offer regardless of college choice. In the end, you may not even get the college you had a hard crush for after all.

So ultimately, **no, there isn't a right college.** If and when you hopefully do get an offer, wherever it is from, you'll go there and you'll fall in love with the place and its people. Like everyone else, you'll think your college to be the best one there is. Take it from me: I applied to Worcester (literally because I saw they had a building named after a Sultan), got pooled to Corpus Christi for my interviews (got too attached too early!) before receiving an offer from Pembroke- which I now know undeniably is the friendliest and best college there is!

At the end of the day, don't worry too much about it. Really don't. It is wise to do some research before choosing and once you do, keep your fingers crossed. Wherever you end up, I'm sure you'll have a great time- unless it's not Pembroke. Selamat maju jaya!

Disclaimer: All views are strictly the author's own and OUMC does not necessarily endorse the author's opinions.

Admissions Tests

Here are some common admission tests you may need to take, depending on the subjects you are applying for. There is usually a registration fee for the tests. You must take the test through an authorized test centre so make sure you are registered with one before the deadline! The dates given below are provisional and may change, so keep updated.

For information on testing and admissions, please visit

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests>.

Take note that some colleges have earlier internal deadlines to allow the placement center to check your application before you submit it.

Tips for Admissions Tests

It may be a common myth that one cannot ‘prepare’ for the Oxford admissions tests, but in reality preparation is possible and highly encouraged. Although most admissions tests do not require much subject-specific knowledge outside of your A-levels or equivalent, you can develop the skills needed by practicing as many past papers as you can **under timed conditions**. This is important as timing is often very tight in these tests, so familiarizing yourself with the test format can help you tackle it better. Some tests also have mark schemes, but there are those which do not, so do ask your subject teachers at school to help mark it for you and get feedback.

Do check <https://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/oxford-tests/> for all the latest updates on dates, timing, deadlines, marking and structure, test-specific preparation advice as well as past papers.

Biomedical Admissions Test (BMAT)

To register, visit <https://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat/bmat-november/>.

Registration is from 1 September 2020 to 1 October 2020.

Registrations from 2 October 2020 to 15 October 2020 will be charged an extra late fee.

The test will be on 4 November 2020. Results will be released on 27 November 2020

(they will be automatically received by admissions tutors).

Biomedical Sciences	
Medicine	

Classics Admissions Test (CAT)

To register, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/cat/about-cat/>.

Classics	Classics and Oriental Studies
Classics and English	Classics and Modern Languages

English Literature Admissions Test (ELAT)

To register, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/elat/about-elat/>.

English and Modern Languages	English Language and Literature
Classics and English	

History Aptitude Test (HAT)

To register, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/hat/about-hat/>.

History	History and English
History (Ancient and Modern)	History and Politics

Law National Admissions Test (LNAT)

To register, visit www.lnat.ac.uk. Registration opens on 1 August 2020. Test slots are available from 1 Sept 2019 onwards. You must register and book a test slot by 5 October 2019. You must sit for the LNAT before or on 15 October 2020.

Law (Jurisprudence)	Law with Law Studies in Europe
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Mathematics Admission Test (MAT)

To register, visit <https://www.maths.ox.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate-study/maths-admissions-test>. Registration opens on 1 September 2020 and closes on 15 October 2020. The test takes place on 4 November 2020.

Computer Science	Mathematics
Computer Science and Philosophy	Mathematics and Statistics
Mathematics and Computer Science	Mathematics and Philosophy

Modern Languages Admissions Test (MLAT)

To register, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/mlat/about-mlat/>.

Modern Languages	Classics and Modern Languages
Modern Languages and Linguistics	English and Modern Languages
Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics	Philosophy and Modern Languages

Oriental Languages Aptitude Test (OLAT)

To register, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/olat/about-olat/>.

Oriental Studies	European and Middle Eastern Languages
Religion and Oriental Studies	

Philosophy Test

To register, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/philosophy-test/about-philosophy-test/>.

Philosophy and Theology	
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Physics Aptitude Test (PAT)

To register, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/pat/about-pat/>. You must register by 6pm UK time, 15 October 2020. The test takes place on 4 November 2020.

Engineering Science	Physics
Material Science	Physics and Philosophy

Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA)

To register and find past year papers, visit <http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/thinking-skills-assessment/tsa-oxford/about-tsa-oxford/>. You must register by 6pm UK time, 15 October 2020. The test takes place on 4 November 2020.

Economics and Management	Philosophy, Politics and Economics
Experimental Psychology	Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics
Human Sciences	Chemistry (S1 only)
History and Economics (S1 only)	

Please note that while every effort has been made to ensure the information provided here is up-to-date, care should be taken to cross-check information here with the official test sites and the Oxford University official website.

Interviews

You will be told if you are shortlisted for an interview about 1-2 weeks before your interview date. You can choose to do the interview over Skype or fly to Oxford.

Skype Interviews

Skype interview dates usually differ from college to college; however, most successful candidates should receive a Skype invitation by early December. Do not worry if your friends received their invitation earlier than yours as it has no bearing on the outcome of your application. Upon receiving the Skype invitation, you will be requested to submit your Skype username and a fixed line phone number to your college. A common myth is that Skype interview candidates stand a lower chance of being accepted compared to those who fly to Oxford; however, pay no heed to this. There are many Malaysians currently in Oxford who have gained entry through the Skype interview process.

Tips for Skype interviews:

1. Secure a STABLE internet connection. This is absolutely vital in order to have a smooth interview experience.
2. Bring a marker pen and a blank sheet of paper into the interview so that the tutors can observe your workings or writing clearly.
3. Read up on your A-level materials. If the course you are applying for is not directly related to any subjects you are currently taking (e.g. Philosophy), look through past interview formats read up on some introductory materials.
4. Arrange mock interviews through Skype with your friends and tutors to improve your presentation skills.

Preparing for a Skype Interview

Natalia Vera Aw | Alumni Law | Lady Margaret Hall

After receiving an interview offer, I was given the option to choose if I wanted an in-person or Skype interview. I decided I preferred a video interview and the dates were settled quickly at a time mutually convenient to both sides (6pm for me in Malaysia, 10 am in the UK). The Skype interviews are carried out in the same time period as the face-to-face interviews in Oxford, so usually a date within the first or second week of December.

Some people think it is more advantageous to do the interview in person, but I have to admit that being able to do a video interview from home and save thousands in flight expenses was a relief. The cost-saving factor played a big part in my choice to Skype, as well as the fact that I was concerned jet lag and cold weather would affect my performance. I also felt more relaxed and comfortable in familiar surroundings, and not so nervous about the whole affair. Oxford kindly offers two to three days of free accommodation for the interviews, but flying all the way to stay for three days was not an appealing prospect. On the flip side, there is the small worry that an unstable internet connection could break off the interview, but tutors are incredibly understanding and some may request you keep a phone on standby in case the line breaks or the video fails so that you can continue an audio interview at least. Tutors will obviously not penalise you for something that is out of your control. Colleges sometimes request that you do the interview in your college or school, but since I was on December holidays and very far away from my college, they kindly allowed me to do the interview from my home.

Interview experiences can differ from person to person. For example, I only had a single 20-minute interview, while some of my friends had multiple half-hour interviews over different days. I only had the one, which was nerve-wracking, but I've since learnt that doing multiple interviews is not a measure of what they think of you. I did not require any materials (I had pen and paper, but my interview was entirely verbal). If you are doing a more technical subject, pen and paper or a whiteboard if you have one will definitely be useful.

The interview itself was surprisingly uncomplicated- I was asked a series of questions which tangentially related to law, but definitely nothing requiring in-depth legal knowledge. I was interviewed by two tutors who took turns to ask a series of questions, each question normally building upon your previous answer. Tutors give you time to think and don't mind if you pause, but since the interviews run on a schedule they may gently prod you to answer or, if you have no answer, will simply move on to the next question.

In general, I think the Skype interview should not be regarded as a hindrance to applying to Oxford if you are unable to fly there in person. You get an interview with the tutors themselves, who are simultaneously interviewing other candidates on site, without having to expend any cost at all. Although there is a perception that you can 'present' yourself more if you are there in person, a person's character and intelligence is conveyed equally well over a video interview, so long as you remain confident in yourself.

Skype Interview Experience

Chee Gee Ren | Year 2 PPE | Queen's College

I was ecstatic when I received an interview offer, an indication that one has passed the previous hurdles of the application process. Just one more major challenge to overcome now. Interviews are conducted by admission tutors to look out for qualities in candidates that can't be expressed on paper: passion for the subject, excellent problem-solving skills and teachability to name a few. Oxford sends out interview offers around 10 days before the interview is scheduled, and will always give an option to attend the interview in person or remotely via Skype.

The significance of the interview stage would make many prefer to attend the interview in person, travelling a long distance to Oxford. Most applicants might have heard rumours that a Skype interview lowers the chances of getting a place in Oxford, but this isn't true at all. Oxford understands the logistical difficulties faced by international students and is keen on hearing what you have to say rather whether in person or through a screen. I opted to do a Skype interview since it is convenient and saves the cost of an expensive last-minute flight ticket. Having to travel to the UK meant dealing with jetlag, cold weather (I very much prefer our tropical weather) and adjusting to a new environment, which might have affected my abilities to perform optimally during the interview. The Skype interview would usually run during the same period that physical interviews for your subject will be conducted. My tutors and I set up a mutually convenient time (around 4pm, Malaysian time and 8am, UK time) so I wouldn't have to attend the interview in the early morning or late at night. When the time comes, you can attend the interview anywhere with a computer and a strong, stable internet connection, usually at home or at your school/college. My college offered for me to have the interview on site, which I am very grateful for. They provided me with a quiet room, a landline (in case the Skype connection cuts off), a printer and a small white board, all within my reach. I found this preferable to a home environment, but some might also prefer doing it at home because it is a familiar and comfortable environment. In any case, do ask your college if they can provide you with facilities should you need it. A strong internet connection is essential and should be your primary consideration when choosing where to do your Skype interview.

The number and length of interviews will differ by college and course. I had three 20-minute interviews. The interview will likely be on something you've never come across (A-Level Economics certainly didn't cover auction payoffs). A good way to approach interview preparation would be to establish strong fundamental knowledge of your subject through reading around. No in-depth knowledge of your subject is needed, but tutors do expect you to know the basics, which you can apply in solving the more complex problems in the interview. You can also have mock interviews as practice for answering questions. I reached out to Malaysian students doing my course through OUMC, and am extremely grateful for their help.

The interviews themselves were unforgettable. 20 minutes prior to each interview, I was given a problem set to solve, the interview being a discussion of my answers and additional questions by the tutors. During my first interview, I felt nervous, more so since a technical error on the tutors' side meant I could not see them but they could see me. However, the tutors understand the overwhelming nerve faced by applicants, and try their best to create a calm environment that will allow applicants to thrive. Talking to a blank screen actually made for a calmer interview, since seeing my tutors' reaction at some of my questionable answers in the next 2 interviews scared me. I presented my answers to the problem sets, and the tutors asked for justification, leading to further questions about the topic discussed. Have a pen and paper by your side for taking notes and presenting your answers. Some of the follow-up question they ask will be difficult, and it is perfectly fine to pause a short while and think. Giving a wrong answer will not result in failure. Tutors will provide you with hints or guidance, and your ability to think about them and find your way to the right answer is a highly sought-after quality. The one important advice I would give is to enjoy the interviews. They are a special opportunity to discuss the subjects you're passionate about. The interview is less of a test than an intellectual discussion with tutors who have devoted their lives to specialise in your subjects.

Ultimately, the decision of whether to interview in person or through Skype should be based on personal preference. If you find yourself better able to articulate your points in person or want to pay a visit to your college (meals and accommodation are provided for free), do attend the interview in Oxford. But do not feel

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disadvantaged if you are unable to travel or worried about the inconveniences. A Skype interview might just be better for you, as it was for me. You can definitely create a strong presence remotely as long as you speak clearly and confidently.

Interviews in Oxford

Interviews are usually conducted early December. Depending on your subject, you will be interviewed 1-3 times in your college then in a second college. This is to maximise your chances of getting into Oxford. There are many student helpers to show you around. The college will provide accommodation and food for you for the duration of your interview. This is a great opportunity to see the university and decide if you like the environment there.

Tips for interviews in Oxford:

1. Be calm. The tutors interviewing you are really friendly and will try to help you along if you're struggling with a question. Don't be daunted if you cannot answer the interview questions well. The tutors are not testing your knowledge of topics beyond your level of education but are more interested in the way you think and how passionate you are about your subject.
2. Make sure you know your personal statement inside out. Tutors often ask questions about your personal statement.
3. Arrange for mock interview sessions with your college or a university application center.
4. Read around your subject to show your interest.
5. Think about questions the tutor might ask and how you will answer them. During the interview itself, don't be afraid to take some time to think about the question before answering. A well- thought-out answer given later is better than a hurried one given immediately.

The Oxford Interview Experience

Lyn Yeoh | Alumni Engineer | Christ Church

Like most Engineering applicants, I had two interviews: one in the morning at the college I applied to (Christ Church) and another in the afternoon at a college allocated to me (St Edmund Hall). Both interviews had the same format, style and number of tutors (2). They started off with questions regarding my personal statement, followed by some maths (graph sketching is a favourite!) questions, and ending with some physics questions. The tutors were all very friendly and will guide you along should you get stuck- they just want to see whether you thrive in the Oxford-style tutorial setting.

I stayed overnight in Christ Church college, which gave me a great preview as to what living in the college was like. In the evening before my interviews, I had dinner in the college dining hall and afterwards had the opportunity to meet the other applicants at Christ Church. There were also short subject meetings where we met other students applying to the same subject and could ask current students any questions we had. Overall, it was a great experience and I personally enjoyed it.

The Oxford Interview Experience

Mustaqim Iqbal | Year 3 Law | Mansfield

Unlike most universities, Oxford requires applicants to sit for assessed interviews as a part of their application process. Not everyone does an interview; some candidates are unfortunately rejected before they reach the interview stage, on the basis of the UCAS application and admission test results. Interviews apply for every subject, and are more or less inescapable. Over the years, they've built up a reputation for being the most daunting and nerve-wrecking part of applying to Oxford and this is a perception that I definitely held as I went into my interviews.

I chose to fly to Oxford for my interview, but international students have the option of being interviewed through a video call. I wholeheartedly recommend doing the interviews in Oxford if you can. The experience allows you get a feel for the city, allowing you to figure out if Oxford is a place where you would want to *live* for the next few years, as opposed to just study. It also means you don't have to deal with an unreliable internet connection – the last thing you need during an interview. However, not everyone has the means to fly halfway around the world, and Oxford (and by extension, the colleges) understand that. There is absolutely *no* disadvantage to doing the interview via Skype, and it might even give you the slight edge of not having to deal with jetlag.

I arrived at Mansfield (the college I applied to, and the one I am studying at now) the night before my first interview. I had two in total, spread across two days. The college gave me accommodation and provided food in the halls for every meal. Current students were there, and were acting as helpers for all interviewees; they showed us where the rooms were, where we had to go to collect our materials, and where to go for our interviews. We had a brief interview meeting the morning after I arrived, with all the interviewees for my subject (Law) to explain the structure of the two days and what we had to do before our interviews. A piece of paper had our interview slots printed on them, and they were pinned up on a notice board in the centre of college. Outside of the scheduled times, we were allowed to do what we wanted with our time – which meant exploring Oxford and having lunch with a

friend who was interviewing at another college, also for Law.

Most colleges across most subjects will interview you at least twice. Both of my interviews followed the exact same format. Half an hour before each of my interviews, I had to collect a printed, double-sided document before being lead to a waiting room. Each interview involved different document. I had half an hour to read and process the document, which described disputes between a handful of parties. It also provided me with a simple extract of legislation. There was more than one dispute/issue, but they all concerned the same general scenario and characters. In each of my interviews, I was asked to discuss each of the scenarios in depth, interpreting the statute provided and applying it to the dispute where relevant. I was asked to give my opinion on who was “in the right” in the case, and who I would find for if I were the judge presiding over it. Naturally, in each interview, the position I took was challenged and questioned; I was expected to justify every assertion that I made, and I was presented with counter-arguments – for some of them, I simply did not have a persuasive response.

I felt that my first interview went awfully, and I remember crying afterwards. I thought my second interview went better, and it went by quite pleasantly; I felt a lot more out of my depth in the first interview, and there were a few moments when I really did not know what to say. Funnily enough, a little over a year later, I had tutorials with the tutor who interviewed me in that very first interview. He told me that he thought I did remarkably well, and that I responded confidently to a tricky line of questioning. It shows that ultimately, you can’t really tell how an interview went – interviews that *felt* terrible might actually have been very good, and you only feel otherwise because you were pushed to the limit. The experience showed me that there really is no point to worry about how you will or might perform. The best – and perhaps only – thing you can do is speak your mind and explain your reasoning! That’s what a tutorial will be like, and that’s what an interview is meant to be like.

The Oxford Interview Experience

Maryam Jamilah | Year 3 Biology | Brasenose

Hello! My name is Maryam and I am currently a second year student in The University of Oxford. I applied to study Biological Sciences at Brasenose College, Oxford University for the October 2018 entry. I chose to participate in the interview in person, so I flew over to the UK for a few days. The reason that I chose to go to the interview in person instead of through Skype is to experience all these things that I would never have the chance to if I didn't get in. I also felt like I could show my capabilities better in person compared to through a camera. Just the feeling of being physically present with someone who is actually doing world-class research on something I was personally interested in was a motivation in itself for me to do well.

The interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes long each. My first interview was held at the college that I applied for in my UCAS form which is Brasenose College. I was interviewed by the tutors teaching Biology in that college. Throughout the discussion, the tutors guided me to talk about various topics, prompted by some props that they had lying around such as a venus flytrap, some diagrams and maps. I was really nervous and lacked the confidence to explain my ideas in English, but the tutors helped me feel comfortable with speaking even when I made several mistakes.

I have to admit that I was feeling a little bit discouraged with how my first interview went, but I decided not to let it bug me and had a good rest that night. My second interview the next morning was at Magdalen College.

Again, I was interviewed by one male and one female tutor from the college. They started out by asking me "why Biology?". It was quite an expected question, to be honest, but I didn't really prepare a script on how I would answer it. So, I just expressed how I genuinely feel about the subject. Afterwards, they proceeded with the biology questions. Firstly, they handed me a fossil specimen and asked me to describe what I saw. Then, they used my answers to expand the discussion and

proceed to the next questions.

A part of the interview that I found interesting was when the tutors played a video showing two strains of bacteria which were genetically engineered to glow a neon green colour whenever it releases toxins. The fast-forwarded video showed how when placed side by side, the green colour spreads from the middle between the two strains and eventually envelopes the whole population. A bit more background information was given, then I was asked to describe what I thought was happening, why and how. I mainly used the knowledge from A-level Biology lessons and some outside reading I did prior to the interview to justify my explanations. I also read some non-fiction books on Biology related topics that I found interesting, and this also helped expand my ideas during the interview.

I definitely enjoyed the second interview a bit more from the first. I was more relaxed and could actually think straight throughout the interview, and when it ended I felt quite satisfied with my performance. Looking back, I do not think that I impressed the tutors in any exceptional way. However, I believe that the point of the interviews is to evaluate whether you can grasp the concept of the questions given to form your own opinion critically and creatively during a tutorial. Overall, I had to say that although stressful and pressurising at times, the interviews were definitely something that I enjoyed and a great way to experience the unique tutorial system that is run by the university.

I remember that when I talked to people in the common room after the interviews, the majority of them could not tell if they did well or not. Some people felt like they had the worst time during the interview but ended up with an offer. The bottom line is, only the tutors and admission directors know what they are looking for in a student. So, it is a waste of time and energy to overthink on what has already passed and to try and compare your answers with another applicant. Move on, and focus on what will matter in the next few months. Most of all, treat yourself with something you love for having gotten through another hurdle in the application process! It has been a stressful few months and you deserve to be fully rested and rewarded with a pat in the back. I genuinely hope that this could help you with your interview preparation. All the best, and may your dreams come true!

Insight Stories: Life at Oxford

Besides providing comprehensive information regarding the application process to Oxford, we, at OUMC, believe that it is equally important to share some of our personal stories from our time in Oxford. By adding our very own 'Insight Stories' column into the OUMC Booklet, we hope to provide a different perspective of the Oxford student experience.

Oxford Is Not A Monolithic Experience

Han Shin is a second year student studying BA English Language and Literature at Oriel College. He wishes everyone a safe and well time with their families.

Oxford is not a monolithic experience – it is big, very big, larger than what anyone within it can fully understand. Physical area, layers of colleges after colleges, faculties after faculties aside, it is truly the depth of its ecology that exceeds description. By which I mean, it is an incredibly diverse place formed by students and academics of all levels from all around the world, engaged in their own fields of inquiry. And so any description of Oxford will only be a partial one; you can always find a different side of Oxford (a different community within, perhaps) that embraces and challenges you, in most unexpected ways.

For me, Oxford manifests itself mostly in *reading, writing, discussing*. This could be a very bland overview of university life so far – until you get into the infinite wonders of language and literature (English: my subject) and hear the sobering weight of voices recorded down on paper – and SOLO, our digital library infrastructure – elevating its humble thinness up into *Hope, is a thing with feathers*. Dickens converse with Woolf and Achebe and Adichie, 19th century England hears and anticipates 21st century Southeast Asia, 20th century Africa, Toronto or Syria, a continent and nation zooming in or one individual zooming out, and then amplifying into your classroom or discussion with your tutor, and then around the ancient-looking walls and walkways of Oxford colleges, literature – or it could be physics, engineering, sociology – comes alive.

This is quite a strange place, with its quirks and rigour, tradition and new. One thing the students have in common might be that we genuinely enjoy learning itself, and are frequently humbled before one corner of our subjects that has revealed itself to us – there is really *a lot* to read and learn. But it is also rarely the case that books come to define Oxford, blocking our sights from (arguably!) lovelier things like the Christ Church meadow or rowing events, or celebratory parties and hall meals with friends. As much as academics constitute an exciting (read: big) part of Oxford life, it also connects us back with people, be it friends, classmates, tutors, or large communities in the world, for whom we might be able to do good with the things

that we have learned. At the end of the day, Oxford is still a very vibrant place filled with all sorts of personalities, and there is much – a lot of people – to love here.

I won't go too much into what the events are like, or how beautiful the colleges are. Perhaps Oxford is best defined by *exploration*, as a place in which, as students, we are given the maps and telescopes to really see into the academic disciplines, but also as a place that ultimately invites your own exploration of, and connection with, itself. Oxford is not a monolithic experience – it is a place that calls for your listening, but also yearns to listen to you, if you can find your voice within this very large place. And so the last sentence is this: your experience of Oxford could be very much a reflection of who you are (it has that capacity to show you), and for this I truly believe, for you, Oxford will prove to be a beautiful place, if you two ever cross paths.

The Perfect Imperfections of Oxford

Henry Lee Min Rong recently completed his degree in Engineering Science at Jesus College. This was written in his second year at Oxford. He was president of the Oxford University Malaysia Club in 2016 and is going to be building robots in Oxford.

The term Oxford itself carries a heavy weight to bear. Since the day I received my acceptance letter till now, I have been on the receiving end of countless impressed stares and endless gushes about what an amazing institution Oxford is as well as how privileged I am to have gotten in. I am not trying to downplay the greatness of Oxford, nor am I attempting to distance myself from the privilege I have enjoyed so far but rather, I hope this article will provide some perspective on the fact that, like every other institution of higher learning out there, Oxford may be a bed of roses but it is also one with very real and very painful thorns to overcome.

Before setting foot in Oxford, I tried to mentally prepare myself for a high level of academic rigour by reading the MIT Blogs religiously. I read about the bloggers' tales of exhaustion from juggling academic commitments and extracurricular activities, the imposter syndrome you get once you realise how perfect all the high achievers around you are, the identity crises when you struggle to find something else that defines you besides your grades, the constant anxiety about the future as you apply for internships (in competition with your peers) and the overarching fear of missing out (F.O.M.O) you face as you are expected to make the most of all the resources a world class university has to offer.

Amid various congratulatory messages and constant reassurances that I was going to be set for life upon graduation from Oxford, I still felt this constant unease about my sense of self-worth as every single person I knew in Oxford seemed to be smart, ambitious and impeccably prepared in the pursuit of their dreams. I started taking the fact that I was in Oxford for granted, choosing instead to fixate most of my attention on my inadequacies and failures, which led to further feelings of guilt for not being able to live up to everyone's expectations (including my own).

It's not easy to show weakness these days. In a world where our lives are so

carefully curated on social media to showcase only our strengths and successes, our sense of self-worth is then gradually derived from what we manage to achieve. This indirectly causes us to amplify our failures and take every stumble or obstacle in life as a personal affront while failing to appreciate the immense privilege and luxuries we currently enjoy. Among the many modern privileges we enjoy are access to quality education and modern healthcare, necessities that weren't available a mere 50 years ago. Each generation will turn out arguably richer than the generation before, with endless opportunities at our feet and the world as our oyster, shouldn't we be in a better position to find out what exactly defines us?

I went through a dark period of self-doubt last term and decided it was time to take a long hard look at myself to rediscover the little joys in life. I began to reevaluate my state of being by asking myself what really mattered to me? What were my values? What makes me happy? It was the process of distinguishing between what I needed and what I wanted that made me regain that unshakeable sense of self-worth and confidence in my ability to find happiness in all that I chose to pursue.

My time in Oxford has not been completely perfect. I doubt anything will ever be "perfect" because perfection simply does not exist. The ups and downs are an inevitable part of this journey called life, no matter where you are. Like in the movie-Inside Out, where you start to accumulate memories that are not entirely happy nor sad, but a mixture of the two, because that's called growing up, I guess.

Oxford Through Rose-Tinted Glasses

Kwan Ann is an alumni who read English Literature and Language at Jesus College. She edited the Oxford Review of Books and the ISIS, Oxford's artistic and literary publication. She also works as Fiction Editor at RambutanLiterary.

When I arrived in Oxford to start my first year doing English Literature & Language, I had absolutely no idea what to expect. Of course, I'd heard the usual horror stories of elitism and strange traditions, but other than that, it was pretty much completely new and more than a little terrifying. Soon enough, it was possible for me to get used to the rhythm of going to lectures and attending tutorials, to stop marveling at the high-domed ceilings of the libraries and college halls.

As an English student, studying at Oxford is the stuff of dreams come true—Oxford is a hub of literary activity and events, and hardly a week goes by without a magazine launch, a meet-and-greet with an author, or a play to see. If anything, sometimes things overlap to the point where you might have to choose between seeing your favourite author or catching an extra hour of sleep before diving back into your readings!

Oxford is less of an experience than it is a strange way of life. Time runs in mysterious ways in the eight weeks that make up a term, and when you look back, it is both possible to wonder how it has passed so quickly and yet feel like you've spent an entire year there. One moment, you are the last one in the library, pulling an all-nighter while trying to finish an essay before a tutorial the next day, and another, watching world-famous musicians spin their music into the infinite at the Sheldonian Theatre.

And maybe after all else fades, I will be left with this: a memory of sitting on the steps of the Bodleian library under the stars, laughingly arguing with a group of friends if the distant light in the sky is a star or a planet, while staring up at the Radcliffe Camera and for a moment, being content to just exist.

We hope that this booklet has not only helped you understand the Oxford application process a little better, but that it has given you a glimpse into life at Oxford. At OUMC, we're passionate about helping dreamers realise that dreams aren't as unattainable as they may seem. Do reach out to us at www.oumc.org.uk, or at outreach@oumc.org.uk with your questions and concerns! We're cheering you on as you apply to universities and sit for exams, and we look forward to welcoming you at Oxford 😊