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**OXFORD UNIVERSITY**  
MALAYSIA CLUB  
EST. 1991

The Oxford  
University  
Malaysia Club  
Undergraduate  
Application  
Guide

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## A Word from Our President

Since its initiation in 1991, OUMC has always had the simple goal of assisting Malaysians who wish to pursue an Oxford education. Within this guide is a combination of information about important deadlines, the interview process, and insights from students about their experience here at Oxford. Applying to Oxford can be a very intimidating and exciting experience, so I hope this guide helps to reduce some of the misconceptions you have and ultimately encourage you to apply if it's the right choice for you.

There is definitely no 'Oxford type' so do not feel pressured to portray yourself as a caricature of this mythical creature. All the admissions process is looking for is academic brilliance and suitability to the Oxford teaching style, which can find itself in every type of student. If you are passionate about the subject you are applying for and have proof of meeting the entry requirements, there is no reason why you should stop yourself from applying because you do not think you stand a chance. You definitely do.

I am excited for you if you're thinking of applying. I hope you find what you're looking for and more within this guide, and if you have any questions I would be more than happy to get in touch with you. The contact emails can be found on our website. In the meantime, do take care, and happy reading!

Cheryl Bee

Law (Jurisprudence), St. Edmund Hall

OUMC President 2021/22

## 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 Microsoft Teams 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 2022 admissions cycle

UCAS Undergraduate Apply opens	18 May 2021
Starting to send in applications	7 September 2021
UCAS Oxford application deadline	6pm UK time, 15 Oct 2021
Registration for admission tests	1 Sep to 15 Oct 2021 <i>(may vary depending on test)</i>
Admission Tests	3 November 2021 <i>Except law, see <a href="http://www.lnat.ac.uk">www.lnat.ac.uk</a></i>
Submission of written work	10 November 2021 <i>(only if applicable)</i>
Interviews	1 – 20 December 2021
Decisions	11 January 2022

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 statements.

## 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 café;
- 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 2 Psych and Phil | Pembroke

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!

## Admissions Tests

Here are some common admission tests you may need to take, depending on the subjects you are applying for. There might be 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/test centres have earlier internal deadlines to allow the placement centre 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 [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat/bmat-november](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat/bmat-november).

Registration is from 1 September 2021 to 1 October 2021.

Registrations from 2 October 2021 to 15 October 2021 will be charged an extra late fee.

The test will be on 3 November 2021. Results will be released by the end of November (they will be automatically received by admissions tutors).

Biomedical Sciences	Medicine
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### Classics Admissions Test (CAT)

To register, visit [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/cat/about-cat](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/cat/about-cat). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

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

### English Literature Admissions Test (ELAT)

To register, visit [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/elat/about-elat](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/elat/about-elat). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

English and Modern Languages	English Language and Literature
Classics and English	

### History Aptitude Test (HAT)

To register, visit [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/hat/about-hat](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/hat/about-hat). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

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

### Law National Admissions Test (LNAT)

To register, visit [www.lnat.ac.uk](http://www.lnat.ac.uk). Registration opens on 1 August 2021. Test slots are available from 1 Sept 2021 onwards. You must register and book a test slot by 15 September 2021 and sit for the LNAT before or on 15 October 2021. Results will be automatically received by admission tutors in November, but candidates will receive their results in February.

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

To register, visit [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/mat/about-mat](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/mat/about-mat). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

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 [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/mlat/about-mlat](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/mlat/about-mlat). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

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 [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/olat/about-olat](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/olat/about-olat). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

Oriental Studies	European and Middle Eastern Languages
Religion and Oriental Studies	Classics and Oriental Studies

### Philosophy Test

To register, visit [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/philosophy-test/about-philosophy-test](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/philosophy-test/about-philosophy-test).

Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

Philosophy and Theology	
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### Physics Aptitude Test (PAT)

To register, visit [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/pat/about-pat](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/pat/about-pat). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time. The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

Engineering Science	Physics
Materials Science	Physics and Philosophy

### Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA)

To register, visit [www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/thinking-skills-assessment/tsa-oxford/about-tsa-oxford](http://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/thinking-skills-assessment/tsa-oxford/about-tsa-oxford). Registration opens on 1 September 2021 and closes 15 October 2021 6pm UK time.

The test takes place on 3 November 2021. Results are automatically received by admission tutors in November.

History and Economics (Section 1 only)	Economics and Management (Section 1 only)
Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics	Philosophy, Politics and Economics
Experimental Psychology	Human Sciences
Geography	

*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 remotely over Microsoft Teams or fly to Oxford.

### Remote Interviews

Teams interview dates usually differ from college to college; however, most successful candidates should receive a Teams Meeting invitation via email by early December. Do not worry if your friends receive their invitation earlier than you as it has no bearing on the outcome of your application. Upon receiving the invitation, you will be requested to submit a telephone number to be used as back-up in case of any internet issues. You may also be asked to give the name and contact details of a teacher who will be present during the interview. Note that you do not need to download Microsoft Teams or have an account, as the interview can be accessed in your web browser. You may also need to produce a suitable form of identification, such as your passport, at the start of the interview. A common myth is that remote interviewees stand a lower chance of being accepted compared to those who fly to Oxford. Pay no heed to this—there are many students, Malaysians and otherwise, currently in Oxford who have gained entry through the remote interview process.

#### Tips for Remote 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 with your friends and teachers to improve your presentation skills
5. If you have any concerns and enquiries about your remote interview, do not hesitate to reach out to your college! They are generally very accommodating and understanding.

## *Teams Interview Experience*

Ooi Zhe Ren | Year 1 Mathematics and Statistics | St John's

If you have received an interview offer from Oxford, congrats! Give yourself a pat on your back—you definitely deserve one.

For myself, the interview experience was a chaotic, engaging and memorable one. As an international student living outside of Europe, I was not expected to travel to Oxford, as the college was understanding that this would be expensive, and the long journey may possibly impede my interview performance. So, like most Malaysian students, I opted for an online interview. In pre-COVID times, students taking online interviews were asked to take the interview in their school, so be sure to liaise with your school for the appropriate preparations if this is the case. Unfortunately, I had a trip planned around the interview dates on the website, so I ended up having to take my interview during my vacation in a hotel room. So, if you are ever uncertain about the dates, please do contact the college admissions team to discuss. In the end, my college was kind enough to let me take the interview outside of school, and this also reflects their general attitude: they are usually happy to help sort things out, so do let them know if you have any concerns for the interview.

For me, the bulk of the interview was solving mathematical problems; there were two problems in each interview, each problem's discussion led by one of the two tutors, while the other tutor was taking notes of the interview. Some interviews, such as my first interview, may start with some casual questions to ease the interviewees' nerves, while others, like my second interview, won't. It is easy to feel nervous during your interviews, but tutors are usually understanding and quite friendly—and I found treating the interview as a discussion about interesting problems made me get into the zone easier. In any case, try to calm yourself down and listen very carefully to the tutors' questions, and always ask for clarification if needed. In my first interview, I was too excited and gave an answer to a generalised version of the problem my tutor was asking because I misheard the question; that probably didn't leave too good of an impression!

I would say a good interview is a careful balance of composure and engagement: you should definitely give yourself some time to think out an intellectual response instead of just blindly guessing, but equally important is to let the tutors know about your thought process and how you are attempting the problem. Thinking in silence for a very long time should be avoided, since the tutors are interested to see how well you engage in academic discussions.

The tutor may give you some hint (or you could ask for one). Don't be afraid if you have different ideas than what the hints suggest though! In my second interview, I suggested a method that was quite different from the given hint, and the tutor was perfectly happy to explore that alternative; in the end, we still arrived at the same conclusion albeit using a different approach. Throughout my interview, I also kept speaking out my observations and checking with the tutor if I was still on the right track ('—is this correct?'). Of course, they won't tell you more than they think they should, but asking is still perfectly reasonable.

Personally, I found the questions to be more qualitative than quantitative— involving less workings and more conceptual musings, and I didn't have to constantly show my paper to the camera (although there was a graph sketching problem). You should still be prepared to write clearly, and make sure the video is mirrored so that your writings show clearly and not inverted, if you're writing on paper. I also only knew about my second interview at the end of my first interview, that was to take place on the next day, so try to keep your schedule free for the next couple of days in case you need to attend to more interviews.

Overall, I would say the interviews were fun, although admittedly a bit stressful at the time. In-person interviews are of course enjoyable, and is a good time to explore Oxford and meet future college-mates, but the important thing is that you can perform just as well in online interviews and that they don't put you in any significant disadvantages over in-person interviews. So, if you're having interviews soon, good luck, be prepared, and most importantly, have fun and take this as a learning experience!



## *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 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

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.

*\* Note that online interviews used to be conducted via Skype, but now the University prefers to use Microsoft Teams to conduct the remote interviews.*

## 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 centre.
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*

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 our 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 led to a waiting room. Each interview involved a 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*

Myra Ng Sze Hui | Year 1 Materials Science | St Anne's

I was in the midst of weighing the pros and cons of doing a remote interview vs doing an in person one when I received a message from my dad saying he'd already bought the flight tickets (thanks dad!), so that was that. With the interviews being in person, I had the opportunity to attend two—one at St Anne's (the college I applied for and the one I'm currently at) and one at St Catherine's (randomly assigned). I arrived in the UK with my dad a couple days in advance so that I would have some time to overcome the jetlag. I think my body didn't respond very well to the cold weather and so I was a bit sick throughout the trip- just a couple factors you might want to think about when considering whether having an in-person interview is the way to go. Thankfully, my body decided to cut me some slack during the day of the interview itself. I had arrived the night before and stayed overnight in St. Anne's. The college was beautiful and the food did not disappoint (it was part of the reason I chose St. Anne's after all) so at this point Oxford was already winning me over.

Our interview slots were attached on a noticeboard in the college's Junior Common Room and mine was due to start at 11.40am. I woke up as early as I could—which was not very—before having a wonderful breakfast in the hall and then flipped through some of my notes before the interview. I made sure to be in the common room 10 mins before the start time and someone escorted me to one of the teaching rooms. There were two tutors and my interview began with initial small-talk and questions about my personal statement. The tutor proceeded to hand me a crystal model to observe and asked me some questions about it. I got stuck multiple times but he helped guide me towards the correct conclusions. The rest of the interview went by similarly, with a mechanics question which involved dropping a metal chain to the ground from the table, and then the head tutor let me hold a zirconium tube which, he explained, is used in nuclear reactors then proceeded to ask me some questions about materials processing and nuclear fission. This concluded my first interview which took roughly 40 minutes. What I found very interesting about my first interview was that the questions were very interactive and I was allowed to touch a couple of the props, which is one of the advantages of having an in-person interview.

After lunch, I had to pack up my things and head to St. Catz, which was a 20-minute walk away, for my second interview. The tutors in St. Catz were very warm and welcoming, which lightened the mood considerably. They began with the usual personal statement questions and I remember spending quite a while on this as they seemed pretty interested in what I had to say (always a good sign!). They continued by asking me about the solidification process of metals. I was given a related equation and had to do some simple manipulation which led to sketching its graph on some paper—which brings me to another point: If you are applying for a science or engineering course, make sure that you're familiar with graph sketching. It's a good idea to do lots of practice on this before the interviews. After another lengthy question about an electrical heater, my second interview ended. I did enjoy this interview a bit more and felt that it went better but honestly, you never really know with these things.

All of the questions were quite similar in the sense that you would not be able to come to an immediate conclusion or answer. They're also split into many subsections that are designed to challenge you and make you apply your knowledge in unfamiliar scenarios. Just take it one step at a time and you'll get there in the end! It is absolutely normal to get stuck or not know how to tackle the questions, but voice out your thought process so that the tutors know where you're struggling and can help you from there. Don't be afraid of saying something wrong as they would appreciate a wrong attempt much more than a non-existent one. The whole point of the interview is to give a small taste of what tutorials in Oxford will be like, so don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Tutors just want to see that you are eager to learn and if the tutorial system is suited towards you.

A huge congratulations to you if you've managed to secure an Oxford interview and for surviving the notoriously tedious application process. My final tip would be to do lots of mock interviews. I signed up for the OUMC Mentorship Programme and the mock interviews I had with my mentors really helped me practice thinking out loud and made me more comfortable with the formal setting of the interview. All the best for this final leg of the race and may the odds be ever in your favour!



## *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 question.

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: Real and Imagined*

*Ceri Holloway is an English student at St John's who recently just finished her second year. In her free time, she enjoys going out with her friends, and cooking Malaysian food for her household!*

You'll hear a lot about why and how people applied to Oxford, ranging from long-held ivory tower dreams to spur-of-the-moment personal statements written just hours before the deadline. Cliché as it may be, all of us got here because the interviewers somehow saw a love for our subjects—no matter how deep this is often buried under our endless complaints about the workload. There have been times when I've caught myself wanting to *keep writing this essay*, and there have also been times where I'm barely able to get a sentence out. Some weeks you don't get a minute to breathe between balancing essays upon essays, and some days you stroll along to a tutorial in the sunshine with a professor who embodies everything you love about this university and what its education provides you. All this is to say that Oxford is as chaotic as it is beautiful, and the best way to enjoy the short time we have here is to stride straight into the mess enclosed within its dreaming spires, taking in as much as you can along the way.

As the world was hit by the pandemic in 2020, so was Oxford and the life it promises. I was one of the few who decided to stay in college during that Trinity term instead of returning home, and I found myself in a city hollowed out. Replacing sounds of late-night crowds coming through the college doors was a haunting silence that rang through the streets. With just a handful of people remaining in St John's for that strange term, I spent many evenings staring out onto a deserted alley, usually so full of movement and noise. My seminars and tutorials on the dreaded Microsoft TEAMS became the majority of my 'social life'. The tutors who always checked in with me either in class or through emails provided a warmth that I wholly appreciated, closing the distance that seemed at the time to be pulling everyone apart. Despite only knowing each other for two terms, friends who had gone to their homes across the UK and the rest of the world dropped me messages regularly, asking about me and the city that they had to so abruptly leave behind.

Now at the end of my second year, sadly still being affected by Covid and its restrictions, I've come to appreciate the things I took for granted in my first few months. In my first year, I hardly paid attention to the historical magnitude of the buildings and streets I was walking past, too busy inhaling my lunch as I tried not to be late. However, now that going on walks has become the fashionable thing to do, my friends and I frequent by the Radcliffe Camera on late summer evenings, catching up on our days as we eat our takeaway dinners on the surrounding cobblestones. While the Bridge of Sighs on our left is inextricably linked (for me) to the opening of *Mamma Mia 2*, watching the daylight fade with my back on the Bodleian Library cements in my mind that this is what I continue to work for: not to live up to or 'earn' a place here, but to continuously create the romanticised version of Oxford that I've always wanted.

Trinity term 2021 has stood in stark contrast to the isolated one I experienced last year. Though we still have not regained our nights out or guest dinners or college balls, my friends and I have had stunning days out, whether picnicking in Port Meadow or swimming at Hinksey Lake. Colleges have had varying levels of strictness with their continued distancing rules, and I will be the first to say my college could definitely have dealt with this a lot better. But, with a stream of perks like free crepes, ice creams, and drinks in the college quad, even I won't complain too much. Many of my tutorials and seminars have been outside in the gardens, which has made reading large volumes of Shakespeare much more appealing! The first day we were allowed to have in-person teaching again, the seven of us (2nd year English students in St John's) eagerly greeted our tutor with iced coffees, picnic blankets, and sunscreen in hand. Walking to a grassy spot partially shielded by a large tree, how could we not get into the mood for Romantic poetry, brimming with images of the English countryside?

Has it been the Oxford I've seen in my dreams? In many ways, no. Yet, I've seen the city in all four seasons, glistening in the snow and luminescent in the sunlight. I leave you with Oxford as I see it, a place that is concrete and real and has stood the passing of centuries, and also a place that is malleable and soft on the edges, ready for you to make what you want of it. And, if that is a *Brideshead Revisited*, 'dark academia' fantasy, then you're certainly in good company.

## *A Chapter in Life*

*Foo Zhi Yu recently completed his degree in Law at Brasenose College. He hopes that everyone stays safe and happy.*

My time at Oxford has been a time of discovery and self-exploration. Being thrust into the proverbial deep end of attending university in a different country, I had to adjust, as everyone does. The food in particular is an interesting (and sometimes slightly painful) experience, if you're used to the delight that is Malaysian cuisine. I've spent roughly half my life living abroad, away from my parents, so perhaps I didn't find the prospect of starting anew in a foreign land as daunting as others have, but it nevertheless took time and effort to settle down. With the benefit of hindsight and some rose-tinted glasses, I thought it was all worth it. The short, intense terms, at times resembling a sprint and a marathon combined, are simultaneously punishing and rewarding. There have been setbacks, missteps, even tragedies, but also progress, growth, and triumphs. My life is all the richer for these myriad flashes of colour.

Over the past few months, without the possibility of travel, college has become home. And yet, I find myself comforted and encouraged by that knowledge, content to live in a beautiful place where I feel a sense of belonging. In many ways, it is home: waking up to the sun shining through the windows, shared moments over dinner in the warm glow of the candles, conversations ranging from the mundane to the esoteric deep into the night...

When I arrived, I was awkward and alone, trying my best to fit in; now I am happy in my own skin, lucky to have met those I would confidently call lifelong friends and more. Oxford has changed me, sometimes in ways I could not have imagined, but I am no less myself than I was before. University, at times, becomes a book for the self to be written on. There is always something more to do, to see, to listen – more than any one person can experience in a lifetime. The narrative you write in this quirky and fascinating place is therefore deeply enriching and personal. Never more have I found that my choices truly shaped the course of the tale, yet undoubtedly, I too have been influenced by friends who fill some of the pages with

their own wonderful stories. It has, without reservation, been the largest, strangest, most varied chapter in my life, and one of the most fulfilling.

Time flows in strange ways within the Oxford bubble. Much like a river, it has exciting rapids, but is also lined with placid moments of peaceful reflection. When it is all over, I suspect the dominant feeling will be one of fondness and satisfaction. The memories I've made and the self I take with me when I leave, I think, are no less important than the academic connotations that come with studying at Oxford, probably more so. Having spent the better part of three years here, I have absolutely aged, am somewhat more tired, possibly slightly jaded, but I will always treasure these precious, utterly unique moments amongst the dreaming spires. I hope that you might one day do the same.

## *The Perfect Imperfections of Oxford*

*Henry Lee Min Rong is an alumnus who studied 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 re-evaluate 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 alumnus 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 Rambutan Literary.*

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 marvelling 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](http://www.oumc.org.uk) or at [outreach@oumc.org.uk](mailto: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 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿*