

# The Ultimate Guide to *Oxford & Cambridge* Admissions

*Everything students in Singapore need to know  
about getting into the most competitive  
universities in the UK!*



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# Introduction

The UK is one of the world's top study destinations for international students — the allure of its prestigious and long-established institutions is undeniable. Every year, hundreds of students from Singapore apply to the most competitive universities in the UK, drawn to the unparalleled opportunities that a top UK university education offers.

But how do you get started on the path to your dream university? What are the UK university requirements? What deadlines should you be looking out for? What should your personal statement look like? What about the interviews? How should you start preparing now, regardless of which grade you're in, to kickstart your journey to your dream school?

If you're a student applying for undergraduate studies in the UK, this eBook will answer all your questions, and then some! We'll give you guidelines on application timelines and entrance exams, insider tips on building your portfolio, the differences between Oxford and Cambridge (you can only apply to one!), and more.

By the time you're done reading this eBook, you'll be well on your way to your dream university.

Happy reading, and good luck!



# Making the Choice: US vs UK education systems



## US Education System

For the first four years of a student's US university education they attend 'college' where they undergo a liberal arts (or in some cases science and engineering specific) undergraduate degree.

Determined to allow students to explore study options and access a broad and comprehensive education during these four years, most universities do not require their students to choose a 'major' — or area of study — until the end of their second year.

This process of academic variety and flexibility enables students to expand their high school knowledge and make an educated decision as to the course of their future career.

Liberal arts courses are interdisciplinary and cover a range of topics, allowing students to explore different academic avenues which both expand upon their knowledge in favoured areas of study and uncover hidden passions before a decision on a major has to be made. Even then, students can take 'minors' or 'certificates' in other areas of study to both compliment their major and offer diversity in their final two years at college.

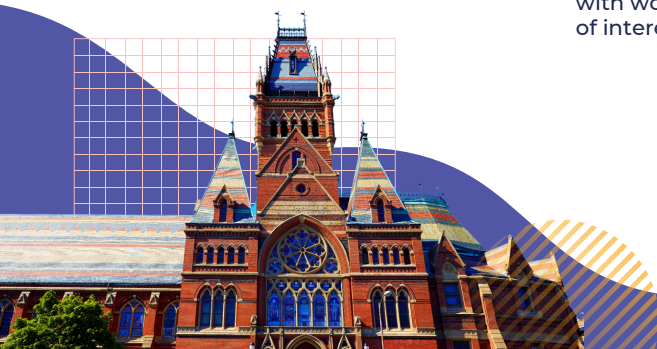


## UK Education System

The UK educational system places more emphasis on in-depth knowledge of a specific area of study. But while they are more traditional and less concerned with a student's non-academic pursuits, they do want to see evidence of a student's passion — what matters to them, why it matters to them, and how they intend to pursue these passions to make academic progress and contribute to the university.

By including a personal essay question, asking for a supporting reference and interviewing most of their candidates, top UK universities gain a greater insight into the 'human' qualities of their applicants - qualities which are often key to gaining acceptance in an increasingly competitive academic field.

More specifically, in the case of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the tutorial system takes this desire to examine a specific area of study in great detail to a new and highly individualised level. In these weekly tutorials – which are often as small as one faculty member with three or four students – students have the opportunity to explore, enquire, share and discuss their thoughts and ideas with world leaders in their chosen field of interest.



## How do you decide?

Of course, both the US and the UK boast some of the most famous and respected educational institutions on the planet. In the US, there are the eight Ivy League universities (Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, Cornell, Dartmouth and Brown) as well as Stanford, MIT, Caltech and the University of California 'family' including UCLA and UC Berkeley. Meanwhile in the UK, there are Oxford and Cambridge, along with the 'Russell Group', which consists of 24 prestigious institutions including the University College London, King's College London, London School of Economics and Political Science and Imperial College London.

Ultimately, only you know which kind of educational environment you thrive in. Would you prefer the broad-based flexibility of the US "liberal arts" model of education, or would you fare better with the in-depth, subject focused style of learning in the UK?

Both US and UK universities offer a plethora of choices — and Crimson Education helps narrow these down for each and every one of our students. In fact, the 'best fit' university philosophy is key to Crimson's personalised application/tutoring approach to overseas university acceptance. If you're interested in learning more about which education system might fit you best, schedule a free consultation with one of our Academic Advisors **[here!](#)**





# Application Requirements

Every year, hundreds of students from Singapore apply to top universities in the UK. In 2020, UCAS reported a 14.74% increase in international applicants this application round, from 63,690 applicants in 2019 to 73,080 in 2020 (excluding medical school and Oxford or Cambridge applications).

For medical school and Oxbridge applications, there was an increase of 6.52% in international applicants from 2019 to 2020 - suggesting that across the board, interest in a top UK university degree remains as high ever.

What this also means is that the competition is also higher than ever; meeting the minimum entry requirements is now no longer enough to guarantee a spot at a top university. Universities are now looking for qualified applicants that have gone above and beyond to distinguish themselves both in and out of the classroom - however, fret not! Achieving your dream university goals is not impossible, with the right preparation and guidance.

Keep reading to find out what UK universities look for when making their admissions decision, and what deadlines to remember!

## Academic Requirements

- + School Grades (A-Level, IB or GPA)
- + Admissions Tests (LNAT/BMAT/UCAT/Oxbridge entrance exams etc)
- + Teacher Recommendation

## Non-Academic Requirements

- + Extracurricular activities related to your intended course of study
- + Competitions, awards and leadership positions related to your course of study

## Personal Statement & Interviews

- + Demonstrating competency and curiosity about your intended field of study
- + Putting your achievements in context

## *Dates to keep in mind:*

### UCAS Application

- + 15th October - Oxbridge, Medicine and Veterinary Science application deadlines
- + 15th January - all other UCAS applications

### Oxbridge and other admissions tests

Oxbridge/ Imperial: generally late October/ early November

### Interviews

- + Oxbridge interviews are generally held in December
- + Certain CS/STEM interviews, particularly for Imperial College London, are held from November- February
- + Location: UK, SG or online (increasingly so, given travel restrictions in place due to COVID-19)



# An Overview of the UCAS

In the UK, applications are completed and submitted online through the Universities and Colleges Admission Service, or UCAS. The UCAS system requires the input of information into various sections including personal details, course choices, details of the student's education to date, their employment/extracurricular history, a personal statement and a teacher (or similar) recommendation.

Much like applying to Singapore universities, the UK system requires applications to specific universities and courses, with each applicant allowed up to five course/university choices. The key here is for your child to shape their application and profile to the specific courses they are passionate about applying to. Once again, Crimson Education experts specialise in helping students build their UCAS profile to maximum advantage, with the application deadline for most courses being mid-January.

## Oxford and Cambridge

The great majority of UK universities have similar application demands and processes. However, it is worth noting that while Oxford and Cambridge universities use the UCAS system, they also have their own individual application processes and deadlines.

Firstly, a student must choose between the two, meaning they can apply to either Oxford, or Cambridge, but not both. Secondly, students must choose a course and a college to apply to (what they want to study and where they want to live).

Applicants are also required to sit tests associated with their chosen courses of study. For example, the Biomedical Admissions Test or BMAT is required for all students applying to medicine, biomedical science and dentistry at both universities. They must also, when invited, attend a university course-specific interview.

The deadline for applications to Oxford and Cambridge is mid-October and results are released in mid-January.



# Grade Requirements

Broadly speaking, there are three main university “clusters” that are popular among students applying from Singapore:

## Oxbridge

The University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge

## G-5 Universities

A group of 5 public research universities, established in 2004, comprising Imperial College London, the London School of Economics, the University of Cambridge, the University of Oxford and University College London

## Russel Group

A group of 24 leading research universities in the UK, established in 1994, comprising the following:

- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- Cardiff University
- Durham University
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Exeter
- University of Glasgow
- Imperial College London
- King's College London
- University of Leeds
- University of Liverpool
- London School of Economics & Political Science
- University of Manchester
- Newcastle University
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford
- Queen Mary, University of London
- Queen's University Belfast
- University of Sheffield
- University of Southampton
- University College London
- University of Warwick
- University of York

Do note that minimum entry requirements are only the threshold you need to cross to get your foot in the door — for instance, on their website, Oxford states that students need a minimum total score of 38, 39 or 40 points (depending on the course) including core points, with 6s and 7s in subjects taken at the Higher level for the International Baccalaureate. However, in our experience, the typical offer is much more demanding: successful students often score higher than the minimum requirement set out by the university.

Typical offer based on our experience:

University	IB	Singapore A-Levels
Oxbridge	≥43	AAAA (all 3 As at minimum H2 level)
G-5 Universities	≥40 - ≥42	AAB - AAA (Note: Most G-5 schools also require at AAA for popular courses like Engineering, Law, Economics)
Russel Group	≥36	AAB - ABB



# Oxford vs Cambridge: How do you choose?





Oxford and Cambridge are two of the most prestigious and historical universities in England. Not only are they both a few hundred years old, but they hold some of the highest academic standards in the world.

When applying, remember you can only choose one. Their teaching methods and application processes are fairly similar, but both universities offer different

opportunities and degrees! It's important to do your research before sending in your application.

Before starting your application, you must decide on your course. Some courses are offered at Oxford, but not Cambridge, and vice-versa.

View chart to understand key differences:

	 <b>University of Cambridge</b>	 <b>University of Oxford</b>
<b>Economics</b>	Offers an Economics course and a hybrid Land Economy course.	Does not offer pure Economics – students can take hybrid courses like Economics and Management, Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) or History and Economics.
<b>Law</b>	Does not require the LNAT – however, students will have to take an equivalent Cambridge Law Test.	All undergraduate students applying to read Law at Oxford must take the LNAT.
<b>Natural Sciences</b>	Students cannot focus on a specific field right at the outset. Instead, they study a broad-based Natural Sciences curriculum before specializing in concentrations like Physics, Chemistry, Materials Science etc.	Students can choose to directly pursue a concentration within the Natural Sciences – i.e Physics, Chemistry etc.
<b>Computer Science</b>	Offers a Computer Science course but no hybrid or interdisciplinary courses.	Offers a Computer Science course.  Also offers interdisciplinary courses like Computer Science and Philosophy, and Computer Science and Mathematics.

## Other Considerations



University of  
Cambridge



University of  
Oxford

### LOCATION

A university with a city around it

#### City

Cambridge is relatively small and mostly dominated by students.

#### Time to London

The university is less than an hour to London by train so going into the city for the day is an easy possibility.

#### Weather

The city is foggier and windier than Oxford. Bring a windbreaker.

A city with a university in it

#### City

Oxford feels like a big city with the university sprinkled throughout. It is a lot more urban.

#### Time to London

London is also only an hour away by train.

#### Weather

The weather at Oxford is not as windy or foggy, but it is still in the UK, so bring an umbrella. Or three.

#### Bottom Line

Both cities are great college towns but the best fit depends on what you are looking for. If you want to live in a quaint, student-run city, Cambridge is for you. If you are more interested in living in a big, busy city where your uni doesn't feel like the entire city, Oxford is for you.



### ACADEMICS

#### Supervisions

Cambridge's supervisions are just like Oxford's "tutorials"

#### Courses

Cambridge, like Oxford, offers a wide variety of courses and is especially well known for its natural sciences courses, offering a flexible natural science degree so you can combine any biological and physical science to create your degree. Additionally, unlike Oxford, you can study education as an undergraduate at Cambridge.

#### Assessments

Like at Oxford, you will be informally assessed weekly during your supervisions. However, you will also have exams throughout your time at Cambridge, not only in your final year.

#### Tutorials

If you've ever dreamed of being in a class with only one other student and the professor once a week, you're in luck! Tutorials allow you to discuss your work in a small setting in order to get really personalised critiques and advice.

#### Courses

Oxford is reputed to be slightly stronger in the humanities and social sciences. However, if you do choose to study science, you have to pick one subject; there are no flexible science degrees available. However, you can get a joint degree.

#### Assessments

Throughout your time at Oxford you will be assessed informally through the work you produce for your tutors. In your final year, you will take about 30 hours of exams that will determine your degree classification.

#### Bottom Line

Academics are the best differentiator between the two universities — not in quality, as both are world-renowned, but in style and approach. Consider what you want to study before you decide where to apply. Luckily, both universities offer "Open Days" where you can visit the departments you are interested in and figure out which ones you like best. Check out the full course listing for Oxford and Cambridge if you cannot attend an "Open Day". The subject you wish to study will help you determine which uni to attend.



# The Personal Statement: Everything You Need to Know

When applying to UK universities, you will have to write one personal statement that goes to all 5 schools you apply to. You will be given a word limit of 47 lines of text, or 4000 characters. This equates to roughly 500 words.

Your personal statement should demonstrate the following:

- Your academic aptitude and commitment to the subject you are studying
- Your specific interest in the course you are applying for, including what drives your passion for the subject
- Your career aspirations and long-term goals for how you plan to use your university education in your chosen field of study

This essay is of pivotal importance when assessing your candidacy. In some cases, it will be the deciding factor for an interview offer when it comes to candidates who have comparable grades and extracurricular qualifications.



## Meet Our Strategist!

Meet Evelyn, one of Crimson's Admissions Strategists! She has a BA and an MA in Mathematics (with Honors in both!) from the University of Oxford, and a Cambridge CELTA qualification. Evelyn's students at Crimson have previously gotten into top schools like Oxford, Cambridge, LSE, Imperial and more! In this section, Evelyn will go over some top tips for writing your application essays.

## WHAT YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT SHOULD INCLUDE

**Honesty:** UCAS screening algorithms flag personal statements showing signs of plagiarism - so make sure your work is your own and that you haven't copied sections of text from other sources.

**Subject related focus:** The primary objective of your personal statement is to demonstrate your commitment to and proficiency in your chosen subject.

**No list:** Do not include a list of your accomplishments; instead highlight those that are most applicable to the subject you are applying for.

For instance, if you are applying for an Aerospace Engineering course, your Math Olympiad experience is applicable - but your football championships are not!

**Clear and understandable language:** Be genuine and truthful! Do not overuse flowery language - it is better to be concise and clear rather than trying to impress with elaborate language, which in most cases actually makes your key points harder to understand!

**Deferment:** Singaporean students serving National Service should clearly state the reason you are deferring your entry.

## ESSAY TIPS

UK Universities look for intellectual engagement with the subject you are applying for

For instance, UCAS Personal Statements for STEM subjects are often technical and focus on 1-2 distinct areas of the STEM subject you are most interested in. Therefore, if you are applying for a course on biomedical engineering, for example, you will need to focus on a specific topic area (eg: epigenetics), within the

broader subject, and justify your interest in that field.

Remember that you cannot develop this kind of subject engagement overnight — so it is important to start investigating your areas of passion early.

Read widely on the subjects that interest you and get involved with relevant extracurriculars so that when it's time to write your personal statement, you will be able to do so knowledgeably and with ease!

# Sample Essays: What Makes A Good Personal Statement?

Wondering what kinds of personal statements make the cut? Here's an example of a winning personal statement by one of our stellar Crimson students.

It's important to understand that there is no single, foolproof approach to writing the perfect personal statement. To read more personal statement examples, check out our [Crimson Education blog](#) where we post sample essays each week from students that have gotten into top universities, including [Oxford](#), [Cambridge](#), [King's College London](#), [Exeter](#) and more!



**University of  
Cambridge**  
Economics  
*by Emma T.*



I first came across economics in 2015 whilst searching for a topic for a project on sustainability.

While others focused on the environment, I found researching how to maintain sustainable debt in the third world far more interesting. This made me realise the critical role of economic policy in global welfare, particularly in supporting the most vulnerable, which is why I wish to pursue the study of economics.

I further explored my interest in economics during the Future Problem Solving competitions nationally and then internationally in the US in 2017. Through this, I searched for solutions for hypothetical future problems, which led me to research Public Choice Theory to try to reconcile effective economic policy and political motivations, which were often at odds. I found that if we deem public image as a positive “good” for politicians, market theory can be applied and such analysis could be used to develop economic policies that are politically viable. I am eager to learn how other factors besides politics could be accounted for in a similar way, improving the use of economic tools.

In order to understand economic developments on a global level, I participated in Model EU in 2018 where I was elected the Trade Commissioner for New Zealand. Here, I negotiated a trade agreement with the EU where their protectionist policies on agricultural products were a key issue due to NZ's heavy reliance on these exports. A free trade agreement would benefit NZ far more than the EU due to the respective proportion of trade with one another. Through this, I learnt that globalisation is not always the most rational choice for countries, even if there are expected future benefits - which is something that I hope to analyse further.

As I am especially concerned with the impact of globalisation on communities, I researched the adverse economic impact of anthropomorphic climate change and ocean acidification on the New Zealand seafood industry. This made me curious about whether Green GDP may be required to direct economic policies. However, there is no accurate method of calculating the value of environmental degradation which means government policies based on GDP may become ineffective. Alternatively, NDP, which takes into account the depreciation of human and physical capital, could capture the degradation of natural resources more accurately, but is not widely used to inform policy.

I then became aware of issues related to the current use of GDP as an economic tool after reading 'The Value of Everything' by Mariana Mazzucato. The exclusion of productive unpaid work by the production boundary made me reflect the likely ramifications in the developing world as a large proportion of work is unpaid. Therefore, displacement of productive unpaid workers could be misinterpreted for an expanding labour force. I am excited to learn how current economic tools such as GDP and concepts for the future such as Green GDP can be developed in order to tackle the issues society faces.

I realised the importance of cultural systems in regards to income distribution after the Christchurch terrorist attacks, which happened only a short distance from my home. The victims were predominantly male and sole providers for their families, which led to immense financial difficulties. Because of this, I organised a school fundraising event, raising over 6000 NZD for the Muslim community. This experience demonstrated that there are inherent vulnerabilities in cultural systems to certain unforeseen events and that, ultimately, traditional economic models ignore cultural norms which may obscure otherwise predictable outcomes.

Economics is evidently at the forefront of guiding international action in order to help those most affected by global developments. I wish to study how the tools and models found within economics can be used to achieve this, and hope to apply the knowledge and skills gain in a career in organisations such as the World Bank or IMF.



# Acing the Interview

It is common for UK universities to invite you to an interview as part of the application process — and if you are applying for a course like medicine, or to Oxford or Cambridge, the interview is a compulsory part of the application process..

So, what should you expect?

First — take a deep breath. If you've made it as far as the interview, that means you're already well qualified for the course you're applying to!

The important thing to note is that UK interviews are content-based and designed to evaluate your aptitude for the subject, as well as your attitude towards learning and critical inquiry.

The interviewers will not expect applicants to possess university-level theoretical knowledge of the subjects. Instead, they will want to test how you can think critically and apply more basic principles and knowledge to theoretical questions and situations. This will test your skills at logical reasoning and problem solving, which they look for in potential admits.

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**Here are a few sample interview questions to give you a sense of what to expect on the big day:**



**University of  
Cambridge**

- + What techniques could be used to date how long a disease has existed in a population? (Medicine)
- + Would you rather be a seedless or 'non-seedless' grapefruit? (Natural Sciences)
- + If a wife had expressed distaste for it previously, would her husband's habit of putting marmalade in his egg at breakfast be grounds for divorce? (Law)
- + Is the moon made of cheese? (Veterinary Science)



**University of  
Oxford**

- + When given a drawing of the nerves from the ear to the auditory canal - explain the image shown. (Medicine)
- + Is it morally wrong to attempt to climb a mountain? (Theology)
- + If the punishment for parking on double yellow lines were death, and therefore nobody did it, would that be a just and effective law? (Law)
- + Do you believe in fairies at the end of the garden? (Engineering)

## So, how do you prepare for the interview?

Here are some key tips to help you tackle challenging interview questions:

- These interviews are designed to simulate the experience of being in a tutorial at university. That means that it is okay to not know the answer — interviewers are looking for how well you can deal with uncertainty, and what your thought process looks like in each scenario.
- Always try to clarify information or technical terms that you do not know or understand. Be sure to reason out loud — this allows the interviewer to understand your rationale, and evaluate your critical thinking abilities.
- Ensure that you're also confident with using scientific or technical language in your answers (depending on your course) — this shows that you know your stuff, and also makes it easier for them to visualise you as a student in one of their classes!
- Read over your personal statement and any written work submitted, and read widely around your chosen subject, including newspaper articles, websites, journals, magazines and other relevant publications.
- Take a critical view of ideas and arguments that you encounter in your reading, at school or college, or in the media: think about all sides of the debate.

At the end of the day, the best way to ace your interview is to practice, practice and practice! Make sure you have several mock interviews to familiarise yourself with the interview situation and the stress. Informal practice will also help — practice speaking about your subject and your thoughts about what you've seen or read in informal settings with teachers, parents or peers.



# Your Application Timeline

The path to your dream university is years in the making. You should be spending the 3-4 years before your application exploring your options, deepening your knowledge of your intended course of study, and building hands-on experience that will allow you to succeed both at university and beyond.

We've crafted a handy timeline for you to keep in mind as you plan towards your UK university aspirations — but keep in mind that this is not meant to be a checklist. Rather, this timeline is meant as a guide for you to think about how to build up a strong foundation of knowledge and experiences that will come in useful when applying to your top choice universities.

Non-Application Years (Sec 3 / Grade 9 onwards)	
Sec 3 / Grade 9	<p>Think about what academic subjects interest you, and read up on them outside of class to develop your knowledge further.</p> <p>Explore a variety of extracurricular interests, including volunteering. Try out different things and see what interests you most.</p> <p>Continue to do well in school — a strong academic record is important!</p>
Sec 4 / Grade 10	<p>By now you should know what extracurricular activities fit your profile best. Start focusing on 3-4 activities to demonstrate your genuine passion towards your subject area as well as your academic proficiency through different competitions. Also look into subject related activities that will help you develop important skill sets such as critical thinking skills, resilience, teamwork spirit, leadership etc.</p> <p>Choose your A-Level and IB subjects wisely — make sure you have checked entry requirements at the schools you want to apply to. It's crucial to think ahead to what you might wish to study at university, and plan your subject selection around that. If you get this step wrong, you might find yourself in a position later on where you want to study a subject at university, but do not meet the requisite subject requirements for it!</p> <p>For instance, if you want to pursue medicine you should focus especially on your science subjects — and remember, don't drop Chemistry and Biology! You can't apply to many medical schools without them.</p> <p>Aim for good grades across all subjects!</p> <p>Source volunteering/community service opportunities that you find meaningful — and stick with it!</p>

### JC 1 / Grade 11

At this stage, you should have narrowed down your extracurricular interests to 2-3 activities that you excel in. You should actively try to aim for leadership positions and have contributed positively to your organisation(s) at this point.

You should foster strong relationships with your teachers, so that you can count on a favourable reference from them in your year of application.

In addition to possible internships/job shadowing, you should also have a strong track record of volunteering, having built up this commitment over the last few years.

Brainstorm your personal statement ideas — think about what you want to say, and how you will back it up.

Start preparing for university applications — this means thinking about standardised tests (BMAT, LNAT, etc), interviews, and so on.

Continue to focus on your grades — you need nothing less than excellent academics to make it into top UK universities!

## Application Year

JC2/Grade 12

### All year around

Consider your options — which universities do you want to apply to? Which courses interest you? Are you applying to Oxford or Cambridge? (You can only apply to one! Remember you only get 5 choices, so choose wisely!

Focus on improving or maintaining your school grades — you will need a predicted AAA at the A-Levels or a 42+ on the IB to have a competitive shot at most top schools.

### March - May

Find out whether the universities you are applying to require standardised tests — for example do you need to take the BMAT, the UCAT, the LNAT etc.

Start brainstorming ideas for your personal statement.

### August

Start approaching your teachers for your reference letters.



## Application Year

JC2/Grade 12

### September

Cambridge application due if you wish to be interviewed (remotely) from Singapore or Malaysia.

You will have to submit your UCAS and your Cambridge Online Preliminary Application (COPA - a Cambridge specific supplement), typically by 20 September.

### October

October 15th — All Oxford/Cambridge and medical school applications are due.

### November

Interview offers for UK universities start rolling in, and will continue until March of the following year.

Entry examinations for Oxbridge will typically be held during this time.

### December

Oxbridge interviews as well as those for medicine and certain CS/STEM courses are generally held in December.

### January

If you're not applying for medical courses or to Oxbridge, the UCAS deadline for most other UK universities is mid-January.

### January - May

You'll start receiving admissions offers! Keep your fingers crossed!



# Student Stories from Singapore:



## From Singapore to the University of Oxford: How Bryan Secured a Spot at His Dream School!

Bryan always knew that he wanted to specialize in Chemistry. His passion for the subject is self-evident; in his free time, he likes to translate chemistry texts and scientific papers into Mandarin Chinese! There was no question as to what he wanted to study at university -- in fact, it was this certainty in his chosen field, as well as the potential for global exposure, that led Bryan to apply to courses in the UK.

In the end, with Crimson's guidance Bryan received an offer to study Chemistry at the University of Oxford -- and what's more, he received offers from every other university he applied to as well! "I applied for Chemistry at five different universities, but with slight variations. So for King's College London, I got an offer for Chemistry with Industrial Exposure. For the University of Manchester, it was Chemistry with a specialization in Medicinal Chemistry. I also got offers for Chemistry with Management Studies from both University College London and Imperial College London.

"However, the journey wasn't without its challenges. Applying to UK universities while still fulfilling his National Service (NS) obligations made it a lot harder for Bryan to juggle his Service duties alongside his application deadlines. That's where Crimson came in.

"Crimson helped me with the balancing act; my tutors were very flexible and they adjusted their schedules to mine. We scheduled our Skype calls during the pockets of free time that I had in between my NS training. As I was in a military camp, we couldn't have a regional call due to security reasons. So my personal statement was actually written over an audio call as well as through shared Google documents."



# How Crimson Helped Bryan



## Essay Mentoring

Bryan knew that he needed direction with his application to UK universities. Crimson helped him by first focusing on the personal statement, followed by the interviews. Bryan's strategist, Isaac, as well as essay mentor, Beck, worked closely with him to ensure that his passion for Chemistry really stood out in the personal statement.

"I think the most daunting thing was the personal statement because I actually had no idea how to go about writing it. There were all these ideas in my head but I couldn't organize them into a coherent format. But with Isaac and Beck's help, I think I demonstrated my interest in the subject."

"Beck also helped me a lot with my personal statement. She was really helpful -- after I drafted my personal statement, her comments helped me to improve it by quite a lot. My tutors were actually constantly supportive of me.

"As a busy NS-man, Bryan appreciated the effectiveness of remote meetings and virtual sessions that were held while he was serving his duties in the military camp.

"The coolest thing about working with Crimson was the Skype calls that I had. I wasn't expecting tutoring sessions over Skype to be that useful because we are very used to being taught in person; I wasn't sure being taught over a video call would be just as effective. It turned out to be very good."



## Passing the Oxford admissions test with flying colours

Bryan had to clear another hurdle once on top of his personal statement -- the notorious Oxford assessment test. The stakes were high: in order to advance to the interview stage, Bryan first had to ace this test. To do this, Bryan received tutoring from Hannah, a current Chemistry student at Oxford. In the end, he far surpassed the average score -- and secured an Oxford interview!

"I think from what was written (in the official email) is that the average Oxford applicant who gets called up to interview would usually get around sixty points. I got 77.7, so I knew going in that I had quite a good chance."





## Acing the Oxford Skype interviews

Bryan also received specialised training for his Oxford interviews. He feels that the guidance was extremely valuable in helping him prepare confidently for the UK interview format which was vastly different from anything he had experienced in Singapore.

"(The interview preparation) was more about getting used to the interview format and to gain confidence. Something that is quite different is that local universities tend to ask questions such as 'Why are you applying for each subject?' or 'What are your future career aspirations?'"

"But for the UK universities, they asked me more Chemistry-related questions like about the electron methods and chemicals. Questions that are something that I think most of us are not used to."

Bryan also realised that virtual interviews are completely different from physical interviews, and thus that expert training was a necessary part of his preparation.

"I think something that wasn't (known to me previously was that) an interview over Skype was different than an interview in person. There are certain things which you might need to do, or look out for, that we might not have to do for a physical interview. That was what having a tutor taught me."

"I had to get used to the process of saying my interview answers out loud and writing (more responses to complex questions). We talked about things that I could do to keep the interviewer engaged because the interviewer is going to be able to see me writing things down while I am speaking over Skype."



## Bryan's advice to Oxford hopefuls?

"I would still do plenty of research first because even though I started working with Crimson quite late, I think it does help. One of the main reasons why my application was relatively good was because I did my own research before working with Crimson. I already knew which course I wanted to apply for and I already knew the courses that I'm applying for had this entrance test. And I was already aware of the necessary preparations I needed as well. So, it made it much easier to work with my tutors."

**Research,  
research, and  
research!**



# How Anya Landed An Offer from the University of Cambridge

## **“You Don’t Have to Be a Genius!”**

Anya grew up in a family of lawyers. It was only natural then, that she too followed in their footsteps and pursued a career in law. Still, she always felt like her dream of studying at Oxford or Cambridge Law was a little far-fetched; according to her, you’d have to be a “real genius” to get in.

Her doubts were amplified by the fact that she started the application process for Cambridge quite late, with only a month left to go before the deadline in October. And yet, with Crimson’s help, Anya landed an offer from her dream school - Cambridge!

“I’m the second person in my school to go to Cambridge, and definitely the only person in my year to go to Oxford or Cambridge. It was a shock for me and my parents because A, I did the whole thing in such a rushed manner and B, I’m not the best student in my year. That student also applied to Cambridge and didn’t end up getting a spot.”

“I thought that to get into Oxford/Cambridge you have to be like a real genius...but when I talked to everyone who was helping me with my law test and my interview and my personal statement, they seemed so relatable and real -- it made me feel like my dream was more achievable.”



# How Crimson helped Anya

Crimson's team of tutors taught Anya how to handle the Cambridge interviews, prepare for the Cambridge Law Test, and write a winning personal statement. Having experienced the application journey themselves, Anya's mentors at Crimson were very generous with their advice.

"What makes Crimson different is the fact that the team has gone through the process themselves. They're all friendly and young, so that makes it quite relatable -- rather than having a professor come in and tell you how to do an interview, it made a difference knowing that my tutors had done this themselves.

"With Crimson, everything was made possible. Anya managed to pull off a last-minute application despite having to deal with exams, essays, and science experiments -- all crammed into a month and a half!



## Personal Statement

Anya had a Crimson essay mentor to help her with her personal statement -- Bianca, a Law graduate from Oxford. As a former law student herself, Bianca was able to help Anya realize her genuine interest for the subject; this really allowed Anya to be sincere and thoughtful when articulating her intended course of study in her personal statement.

"Bianca really found a way to make it [the essay] both personalized but still make it very polished and sound very professional. And she really understood what I wanted to write, instead of telling me what to write. She allowed me to come up with my ideas, and then she helped as to how I could use my ideas in the essay. So overall my essay was just a lot more polished than it would've been otherwise."





## Interview and Law Test preparation

Multiple mentors are involved in the Oxford/Cambridge interview preparation process at Crimson. These interview practices, coupled with great tutors who taught her different answering techniques, gave Anya just the confidence she needed to ace the interview.

"I think I had six hours of help with the interview and three mentors altogether. That's two hours with each mentor, and in that way, I received different perspectives and different opinions on my performance. I think each approach had something that was quite valuable, and that was quite nice."

The preparation for the Cambridge interview itself really pushed Anya to think critically, and gave her a sense of security when walking into her actual interview.

"I sort of knew what was going to happen on the day of the interview. And also there's security knowing that you've practiced and have gotten good feedback. I think that definitely made me more confident in the interview.

"On top of the interviews, the Cambridge Law assessment is another key component in the Cambridge applications. For the Law admissions test, Anya had five hours of essay help and received constructive feedback from her tutor, Alec.

"Alec was actually really good at analyzing the essay and giving me feedback. Not only was he effective, but he was also able to accommodate me despite being busy."

...

## Anya's advice to aspiring Oxford/Cambridge applicants?

"Start early - don't try and cram everything in at the last minute like I did! And I would say to just apply because I thought you had to be a genius to get in, but you really don't. Just apply no matter what you think of yourself and if you think your application isn't very strong, try your very hardest and apply. You might be surprised at the results."

***Start early, try your very best and just apply -- you might be surprised at the results.***





# **Crimson Exclusive: A Former Oxford Admissions Officer Answers your FAQs!**

One of the main reasons why families choose to work with Crimson is our vast global network of admissions strategists, tutors and experts — including Former Admissions Officers from some of the most competitive universities in the world!

In this section, Hannah Rowberry, a Former Admissions Officer at the University of Oxford answers all your burning questions about studying at a top UK university.



## **About Hannah Rowberry**

After graduating from Cambridge with a degree in Natural Sciences, Hannah worked as a scientist, science teacher and College Outreach Officer for the University of Oxford. She has also been an Academic Registrar and an Admissions Officer there, experiences she now draws upon in supporting Crimson students in preparing for university life.



## Beyond academic performance and admissions tests, what else are Admissions Officers looking for?

In addition to your academic ability, the key selection criteria are: your interest in and commitment to your subject, your ability to think independently, and your academic potential. These can be demonstrated through your personal statement, your reference, your interview, and potentially in admissions tests too.

For example, you could use supercurriculars (course-relevant extracurriculars, such as reading) in your personal statement to demonstrate that you have developed your interests in your chosen course, and reflect upon your learning from these. Your performance during the interview could also demonstrate your thinking skills and potential, as you will be showing how you respond to an unfamiliar problem, using your existing knowledge and skills, and demonstrating your potential to flourish in an Oxbridge teaching environment (interviews are effectively a mock tutorial).

There also may be course-specific selection criteria, which you will likewise need to demonstrate in your application. These may be fairly simple, but can be quite extensive, particularly for highly competitive subjects like medicine, where you will need to show strengths in a wide range of relevant skills and qualities.





## What are some common mistakes you've seen from otherwise qualified applicants?

The most common mistakes are often strategic. Applicants may have chosen to apply to courses where they would not be a viable or competitive applicant, or may have been overly ambitious in their choices overall and not chosen a good spread of reach, target, and safety schools across their 5 UCAS choices. Applicants also may make errors in their course choice, often not thoroughly exploring all the available options (potentially hundreds of courses at each university, and tens of thousands across the UK), and picking very oversubscribed options with lower chances of success. That's not to say a student shouldn't apply to a popular course if, after researching all options, that's their best fit; but a great first step in thinking about university is broadening your academic horizons — the subject you'd love to do may be something you haven't even heard of yet!

Other errors may arise in the personal statement. For example, not understanding what the course you're applying for is really about: I've seen otherwise strong applications where the personal statement indicates a student has misunderstood what they will be studying.

Students may list impressive-sounding supercurriculars and achievements in their personal statement, but fail to add depth to these, such as explaining what they've learnt from an experience or providing their own reflections and insights.

In the interview, a common error is the failure to demonstrate intellectual curiosity and flexibility — students may wrongly assume that it will be impressive to argue their opinions and stick to them at all costs, whereas interviewers may actually want to see that they can take onboard new information and come to a reasoned conclusion having done so.





## **Are extracurricular activities important for UK applications?**

UK selection criteria tend to be predominantly academic, with much less emphasis on extracurricular activities than the US. General extracurricular activities tend to be discussed briefly in the personal statement, to demonstrate skills and qualities such as leadership or teamwork. However, 'supercurricular' activities — things you do to explore subjects and develop your academic skills beyond your school studies — are very beneficial to UK applications. These include things like reading, podcasts, online courses, research, relevant work experience or volunteering, competitions, writing, projects, debating, and even just enjoying talking about your academic interests with friends and family.

Hopefully, these are things you are naturally doing in pursuit of your interests, and feel excited and motivated by. They can be very helpful in exploring and broadening your academic horizons, and as you explore in more depth, narrowing down your course choices. They enable you to develop academic skills that will help bridge the gap between high school and university, and demonstrate the interests, skills, and qualities universities are looking for. You shouldn't do them just for the sake of your personal statement, but they will certainly come in handy when you're writing it!



## What are Oxbridge interviews really like?

Oxbridge interviews assess your academic potential and “teachability” — they aren’t meant to be some scary test with lots of difficult and bizarre questions, but rather a mock tutorial, seeing if you’re suited to the kind of teaching that takes place in the university. They’ll be looking to see how you approach a problem you’ve not come across before, and whether you can apply existing skills and knowledge to a new scenario. They’ll see how you take onboard new information, prompts, and questions to work towards an answer.

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## When should I get started on my UK university application?

It’s never too early to start preparing your application. There are strategic decisions that are important several years in advance, such as choosing your high school qualifications and subjects, to ensure you’re able to meet the university and course entry requirements and can build an impressive academic profile. It’s also great to have time to explore your academic interests and broaden your horizons!

Supercurriculars take time to develop too, and for the most competitive courses such as medicine, universities would like to see a long term commitment to exploring relevant experiences. It is also advantageous to familiarise yourself with the admissions process early on, so that you feel comfortable and confident with it when the time comes. I was seven years old when I first visited the Cambridge college I would eventually apply to — you don’t have to start quite so young of course, but early inspiration and aspiration is key!



# How Can Crimson Help You?

Crimson Education offers intensive, holistic, personalised support for students applying to universities in the UK.

All support is delivered 1-1 by a team of expert strategists and mentors. It covers every step of the UK admissions system:



Admissions Test



Written Work  
(Additional essays)



Extracurricular Development



Personal Statement



Interviews

On top of this, each student receives bespoke guidance from a top Strategist, allowing them to effectively plan their application journey, choose the schools that best fit their skills and goals, and ultimately fulfil their potential.



## Our Results

**366**

Offers to  
the Ivy league

**133**

Offers to Oxford  
and Cambridge

**2,200+**

Offers to US  
Top 50 universities

**900+**

Offers to the UK  
Top 10 universities

# Why work with Crimson?



In recent years, the goal posts have moved regarding the level of student who secures offers to top universities. Now more than ever before, students must do more to stand out.

Our mentors are experts on university admissions who attended the top universities in the UK themselves. Through a combination of support from the Strategist, Application Mentor, Admissions Test Tutor and Interview Tutor, our services ensure students are prepared – academically, emotionally, and personally – to reach their maximum potential in secondary school, during the university application process, and beyond.

Crimson's comprehensive and personalised admissions support has everything students need to maximise their chances of admission to Oxbridge and beyond.

## **Strategist**

Strategists guide a student's development, acting as a source of knowledge, encouragement, motivation and advice.

### **WHAT THEY DO**

In particular, the Strategist will support a student to:

- Strategically choose universities and courses that suit the student's personality and strengths so that they have the best chance to thrive at university and in their chosen career
- Ensure every element of the application, from recommendation letters to preparation for the admissions test, is optimised and submitted early!

## **Application Mentor**

The Application Mentor provides targeted support across several areas of the application process.

### **WHAT THEY DO**

Your Application Mentor will:

- Provide focused support as the student writes their Personal Statement, ensuring it reflects the student's strengths and passion
- Oversee the selection and editing of written work or supplementary essays

## **Extracurricular Mentor**

Extracurricular Mentors give students all the guidance and tools they need to undertake a range of impressive extracurricular activities.

### **WHAT THEY DO**

EC mentors are assigned based on your intended course of study. Each programme is tailored to the individual student, but follows the same three stages:

1. Activity strategizing - your EC Mentor assesses the areas of your application profile that extracurriculars can enhance and extend before identifying relevant activities to undertake
2. Activity engagement - your EC mentor guides the steps you take to engage and helps you communicate progress, building key written and verbal skills
3. Activity reflection - after an activity has ended, your EC Mentor will guide the writing of an in-depth evaluation that can subsequently be used in a personal statement



# Additional Support for Oxbridge / Medical School Applicants



## Interview Mentors

The UK Interview Mentors prepare students for the final and arguably the most challenging part of the application process.

### WHAT THEY DO

The service comprises realistic and rigorous interviews sold by the hour. All interviews are conducted by our expert interviewers who specialise in the student's subject area. Each interview takes the same format and provides the opportunity for constructive feedback:

- 40-45 minutes - mock interview
- 15-20 minutes - feedback

During the mock interview, students are given new material to analyse and discuss, such as a graph, a problem-set or a written extract. In addition to testing students on their relevant knowledge, the mock interviews allow students to develop the critical soft skills needed to perform convincingly, namely:

- Communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Adaptability
- Independent thinking
- Engagement
- 

Note that our Tailored Admissions Support provides initial interview support, including a general introduction to interviews, what interviewees are looking for, guidance on tackling difficult questions, improvising, getting personal, and more. Nevertheless, it's the true-to-life practice that will truly ensure a student is fully prepared—even if the rest of the application is perfect, the interview is the key to the final lock in securing a great offer.

## UK Admissions Test Tutoring Mentors

Test Tutoring Mentors provide invaluable 1-1 support for what is notoriously one of the hardest parts of the UK application process.

### WHAT THEY DO

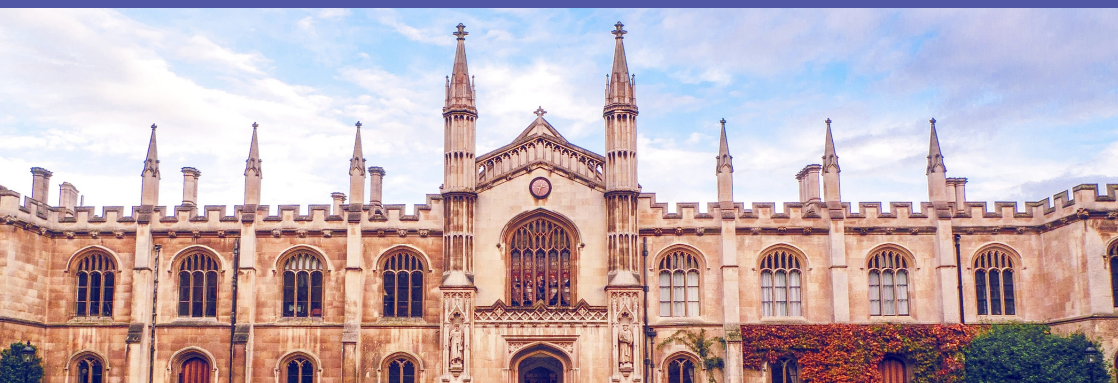
Crimson boasts a wealth of experience and resources in the range of tests required by Oxbridge universities and medical subjects including but not restricted to:

- BioMedical Admissions Test - BMAT/UCAT
- Thinking Skills Assessment - TSA
- Law National Aptitude Test - LNAT
- Mathematics Aptitude Test - MAT
- Physics Aptitude Test - PAT

Our programme is delivered by one of our experienced Admissions Tests Tutors. The service is split into three stages:

1. Test introduction - this first session covers the format of the test and introduces the key skills that are required.
2. Test breakdown and approaches - these sessions deal with common questions and strategies to employ. They also determine which areas the student is less confident with and ways of overcoming them.
3. Test practice and review - these sessions review questions that students have tackled in their own time, analysing the thoughts processes displayed and subsequently improving them.

Crimson's proprietary developed practice questions allows students to immediately apply skills and strategies taught by their tutors. Our UK admissions test tutoring ensures you'll maximise your chances of securing an offer to a great UK university.



## Final Thoughts

We hope this eBook gave you the pointers you need to start planning your journey to your dream university! If you made it this far, you're probably serious about pursuing a degree from a top UK university — and we're ready to help.

Standing out from a crowd of tens of thousands of other applicants isn't easy. As you know from reading our overview of UK admissions, there's a lot to do (and to perfect!). Don't embark on this process — one of the most important journeys of your life thus far — alone.

To learn more about your university options and what a top UK university education can do for your future, [visit our website to schedule a free consultation](#) with one of our expert academic advisors. From finding your best fit university to clicking "submit" on your applications, we've got you covered!



## QUESTIONS?

Send us an email or call us -  
we'd love to connect with you!



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# Ready to Get Started?

Book in a free one hour consultation with one of our expert Academic Advisors who can answer all your individual questions and create a plan for you or your child.

[Talk To Us](#)



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