

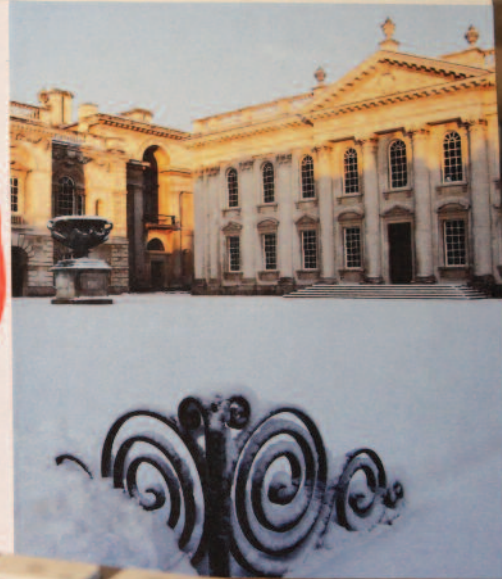


UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

December 2011

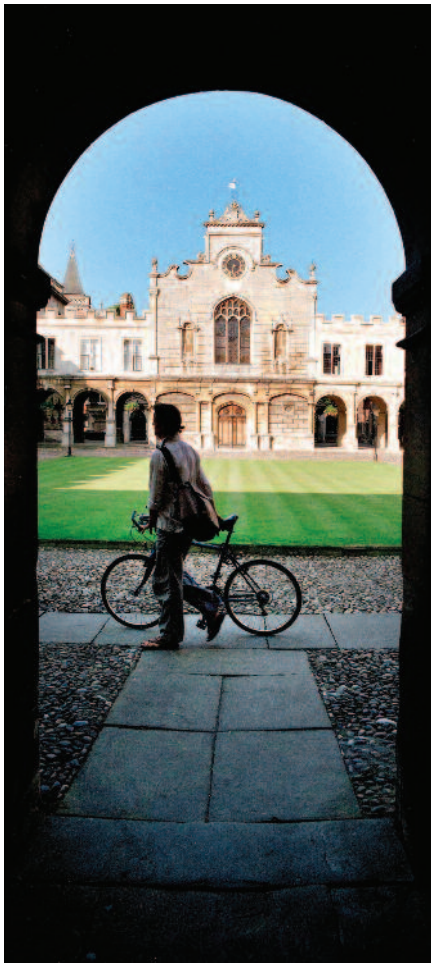
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*Cambridge
interviews?*



Cambridge Interviews:
the facts

Cambridge Interviews: the facts



Why do we interview?

Admissions decisions at Cambridge are based solely on academic criteria, so you may be wondering why we interview applicants – what's in it for us and what's in it for you?

While there's no blueprint for the ideal Cambridge student, there are certain academic qualities we look for – ability, potential and commitment. Almost all of our applicants are predicted top grades so it's difficult to select applicants fairly based on their UCAS application alone. Therefore, interviewing applicants:

- allows us to **assess** whether their interests and aptitudes are suited to the course they've chosen, and that they have the **potential** to study it to a very high level, engage with new ideas and think conceptually
- gives applicants the opportunity to expand on the information they provided in their UCAS application, and to **demonstrate** their passion for and **commitment** to their subject, and their ability to think critically and independently
- provides applicants with the opportunity to **experience** what the teaching at Cambridge is like and enables us to determine whether they would flourish in this environment, as the interviews are similar in many ways to **supervisions**

Applying to Cambridge

The process of applying to Cambridge is very similar to the process of applying to other universities. However, there are a couple of differences to consider. First, the application process starts earlier to give us time to assess all of our applicants fairly and carry out interviews. Second, you have to think about choosing a College to apply to as well as choosing a course. Outlined below is a summary of the process.

Step 1	Action
Research	Choose a course Choose a College (or decide on an open application)



Step 2	Action
Action	Submit your UCAS application online (and any other applications, where relevant) Submit your Supplementary Application Questionnaire (SAQ)



Step 3	Action
Selection	Submit school/college essay(s) or sit admissions tests, as required Attend an interview We will then advise you of our decision and of any offer

My point of view



It's really hard to know what to expect from Cambridge interviews and that's sort of the point! Interviewers want to know how you think and what you're like as a person. Mine were challenging and I must have got most questions wrong but it just shows you're a bad judge of your own performance and that Cambridge is looking for potential. Be enthusiastic and explain aloud what you're thinking so the interviewers can see your thought process.

The interviews are similar to supervisions and, for me, they were as much about finding out if Cambridge was right for me as it was finding out if I was right for Cambridge. If you go in with that attitude the whole thing seems much less scary!

Mhairi, Glasgow

What to expect

My point of view



All those stories about students having to catch a rugby ball or deal with a broken door knob at interview are nonsense. You're welcomed to the College by friendly people, taken to your interview by friendly people, and the interviewers are friendly people! They ask challenging questions, but have no desire to put you off Cambridge.

Definitely don't prepare yourself to the word but think about some things you might want to talk about or ask. Your interviewers want to see how you think on the spot, and don't be afraid to speak up with your own opinions!

Kenichi, London

The Colleges review all applicants, considering each individual's circumstances, to decide who to invite for interview. Cambridge interviews vary slightly from subject to subject and from College to College, but the information below is generally true of all subjects and Colleges and will give you an idea of what to expect.

Who do we interview?

We try to interview all applicants with a realistic chance of being offered a place on their chosen course at Cambridge and every year we interview over 80 per cent of our applicants. If you have a good examination record and a favourable reference, you're likely to be asked to attend an interview. However, due to the level of competition for places, there are applicants each year who won't be interviewed.

When are the interviews?

Interviews usually take place in the first three weeks of December so we strongly recommend that you don't make any unbreakable commitments for this time. If you have any specific learning difficulties, a disability or other special need, the Colleges will make every effort to meet your requirements, but make sure you tell them well in advance of your interview.

Where will I be interviewed?

Most interviews take place in the appropriate College. If you have time, take the chance to have a look around the College and ask students about their experiences of life at Cambridge.

How many interviews will I have and who will they be with?

You'll have one, two or three interviews each lasting between 20 and 45 minutes. How many interviews you'll have depends on the College to which you applied or were allocated. However, you'll be told what to expect in advance.

Interviews are predominantly academic and subject-related. One or two will be with specialists in the subject you've applied for, one of whom is usually the Director of Studies (who oversees your academic studies at Cambridge).

There may be another more general interview with someone not directly related to your subject, probably a College Admissions Tutor, the person in charge of admissions for that College.

What will I be asked?

Interviewers aren't out to test you with trick questions, but you will find some of the questions quite challenging as they're designed to encourage you to think for yourself and develop an argument or tackle a problem. What the interviewer really wants to find out is how you think, rather than how much you know, and very often there are no right or wrong answers.

Remember:

- don't panic if you don't know the answer to a question. Interviewers aren't trying to make you feel ignorant. What they're looking for is how well you can expand on what you know, and whether you can think your way through a new problem and engage with an intellectual discussion
- don't be afraid to consider new ideas

- if you don't understand something, do say so. Feel free to ask for clarification at any point if you need it
- answer the questions in your own way: don't just say what you think the interviewers want you to say or what your teachers would want you to say

Subject-specific academic interview

The purpose of this interview is to assess your knowledge and understanding of your subject and your potential for studying it at Cambridge. You should expect:

- a challenging discussion relating to your chosen course, which may include topics covered in your recent academic work and raised in your written application (eg wider reading and work experience)
- to be asked to apply your existing knowledge to new situations by discussing problems that you've not previously encountered

If you're applying for a non-school subject such as Medicine or Engineering, you should have some background knowledge of the field and what it involves. In all subjects we're looking for informed enthusiasm!

General academic interview

You may also have a general academic interview, where you may be asked:

- to expand on the information you gave in your personal statement – so keep a record of what you wrote!
- why you want to come to Cambridge, and why you're interested in your subject
- about your wider academic work and what you hope to do in the future as a career. However, don't worry if you haven't got any definite plans at this stage!

Will I have to do any written work?

Colleges vary as to whether they ask you to sit short tests or provide written work; it also depends on the course you've applied for. You can find information about what the different Colleges typically require for your subject on the Undergraduate Admissions website, and whatever you have to do your College will inform you before you come for interview. If you're in any doubt about what to expect, contact the College and ask.

Are interviews at some Colleges easier than at others?

It's a misconception to think one College's interviews are less difficult than another's. Each College's procedures are just different ways for them to gain a fuller picture of you. Our statistics show that, in fact, for equally well-qualified applicants, the chance of getting a place at Cambridge isn't affected by College choice.

Are extra-curricular activities taken into account?

While achievements in extra-curricular activities may be impressive, getting an offer of a place isn't influenced by them. However, interviewers often ask about other interests or experience that you mention in your application where they're of relevance to the course that you intend to study. If you've expressed a particular interest – in an author perhaps, or a recent article or programme, or some work or travelling you've done – be prepared to be asked about it.



What should I wear?

You're not being assessed on your clothes or appearance so there's no need to dress formally, and it's not necessary to wear a suit. On the other hand, you might not want to look as though you're going to the gym or for a night out! The best rule to follow is to wear whatever you feel comfortable in and don't be put off by what other people choose to wear to their interview.



Sounds nerve-wracking...

Interviewers know you may be nervous and do try to make allowances as they want you to enjoy the interview so that it's a positive experience. The best advice for calming nerves is to do a little preparation (see p6–7).

It's interesting to note that many applicants who thought their interview was a complete disaster actually did very well. In addition, often to their surprise, many students really enjoy the opportunity to discuss a subject they're passionate about with some of the country's leading experts in the field.

You're likely to meet other applicants who have come for their interview too and, just as you shouldn't be put off by what they choose to wear, don't be put off by what they say about their interview and what they discussed during it. Every applicant and every interview are different so, naturally, there can be great differences between answers to similar questions. Remember that interviewers are looking for how you think, not what you know (see 'What will I be asked?' p3). You should also keep in mind and be encouraged that you were invited to interview because the Admissions Tutor(s) felt you have the potential to do well at Cambridge and wanted to meet you.

My point of view



My interviews were nowhere near as scary as I'd expected (maybe falling off the chair in my first one broke the ice!) and I came out tired but having enjoyed them too. They were challenging but the interviewers weren't trying to catch me out, they just wanted to see what I could do and where my thoughts would take me.

It can be a little intimidating being interviewed by two world experts in their field, but they want to offer you a place – that's why they're interviewing you. Just make sure you've actually read everything you say you have on your personal statement.

Charlotte, Doncaster

How to prepare

My point of view



Preparing was stressful and nerve-wracking but the interviews turned out to be much better than I expected. Good preparation can involve re-familiarising yourself with your personal statement, making sure you know your AS Level material well (including the stuff you haven't covered for a while), and perhaps reading round it a bit so you can approach any questions on it from a range of angles. It's good to practise speaking confidently about your subject and yourself too.

Finally, focus on your strengths and remember that the interviewer will actually be trying to work with you to bring out the best in you, and not trying to trip you up.

Oliver, Manchester

There aren't any special tricks to preparing for interviews, and interviewers can usually tell if an applicant has been over-rehearsed by well-meaning teachers or parents. On the other hand, there are some things you can do beforehand which will, at the very least, make you feel more confident.

1 Know what to expect

Being familiar with what's likely to happen during your interview can help to calm a lot of nerves. To give you an idea of what to expect on the day, you may find it useful to watch our *Interviews in Action* film, available on our website at: www.cam.ac.uk/interviews/.

You can also find further guidance and advice on preparing for interviews in our Applicant Toolkit at: www.cam.ac.uk/applicant-toolkit/.

2 Obvious questions

Think about the obvious questions that might be asked and how you would answer them – such as why you want to come to Cambridge, and why you've chosen this particular subject.

3 Re-read your personal statement and any written work

Re-read copies of any written work that you've sent to the College, and think about how you might expand on what you wrote if asked. Also re-read your personal statement and be prepared to answer questions on the information you provided.

4 Read around your subject

Think about particular topics you'd like to talk about – you can to some extent direct the interview by showing interest in specific topics that you're asked about. Try to remember the author and/or title of things you've read!

- In science subjects, read around the parts of the subject that particularly interest you (either in scientific journals or popular science books).

- In arts subjects, make sure that you've read something outside the prescribed texts for your school/college subjects and have thought critically about what you've read.

You may be asked about topical issues and developments connected to your chosen course (particularly those readily visible in the wider world). However, you won't be asked about your knowledge of current affairs or matters unconnected to the subject area.

5 Practice interview

You may want to ask someone who doesn't know you very well, such as a teacher, to give you a practice interview, or even try asking yourself questions for half an hour – they'll probably be much more difficult than your interviewers' questions! This will help you to

get used to talking about yourself and your work and thinking critically about things.

6 Any questions?

At the end of the interview you'll probably have a chance to ask any questions, so, if there's something you want to know that hasn't been covered, now's your chance to find out. However, don't worry if you can't think of anything. You don't need to ask something just for the sake of it. In fact, it can give a bad impression if you ask a question that's easily answered by reading the Prospectus or looking online.

7 And finally

Probably the most important tips are to be on time, be as relaxed as possible, and, above all, be yourself!



Please note

We are aware of private companies who offer, at a charge, information and advice on our admissions process and interviews.

We DO NOT support or encourage any of these commercial enterprises. None of these companies has access to any information that is not already readily available free of charge to all schools, colleges and individual students from College admissions offices, the Cambridge Admissions Office or Cambridge University Students' Union.

Please contact the admissions office at any College or the Cambridge Admissions Office for more information.

After the interview

My point of view



It's important to read about your subject of interest so you'll be able to talk confidently during your interview – interviewers want to know that you have a real passion for and commitment to your subject. When deciding what to read, don't fall into the temptation of surfing random sites that come up on an internet search. Go to the library and read proper books, academic and professional journals and of course the newspapers.

Before answering questions, take your time to think about your answer. If there's something you don't understand in the question, ask the interviewer.

Isabella, Nigeria

After your interview you should hear back from us in early January. There are three possible outcomes.

1 Receive an offer

You might be made an offer. This will most likely be conditional, and dependent on you achieving certain grades in the qualifications you're taking. If you're made an offer, you must contact UCAS to let them know whether you accept the offer or not.

2 Placed in the winter pool

Your College may have been impressed by your application but be unable to make you an offer because it doesn't have any places left. In this case your application will be placed in the 'winter pool' and perhaps picked up by another College, which may then ask you to come for a second interview in January or may offer you a place without a further interview. See the website for more details about the winter pool.

If no College is able to offer you a place, the College you applied to/were allocated to will contact you, normally by the end of January.

3 Unsuccessful

Your application may be unsuccessful. Disappointing though this is, we hope you'll have found the application process a useful experience and valuable preparation for your other university choices. On average, we receive around five applications for each place, so every year we have to turn down many students with good grade predictions whom we would like to have taken.

Don't let the prospect of not getting a place put you off applying. We can't offer you a place if you don't apply to us. Wherever you come from, whatever your school or college, if you think you've got something to offer, and we've got something to offer you, we'd encourage you to apply.

Further information

More information and advice about interviews, including our *Interviews in Action* film, are available on the Undergraduate Admissions website (www.cam.ac.uk/interviews/) and the online Applicant Toolkit (www.cam.ac.uk/applicant-toolkit/).

If you have any further questions, or would like a copy of our *Undergraduate Prospectus*, please contact any College admissions office or the Cambridge Admissions Office.

Cambridge Admissions Office
Fitzwilliam House
32 Trumpington Street
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Fax: 01223 746868
Email: admissions@cam.ac.uk
www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/

Details are correct at the time of print (March 2011) but should be checked against the University website for up-to-date information.

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