

KEBLE AT LARGE

Geography APPLICATION GUIDE



Deadline for applying through UCAS	15 th October 2016
A-Level requirements	A*AA <i>(Excluding Critical Thinking and General Studies) taken in one academic year.</i> <i>It is highly recommended for candidates to have Geography to A-level, Advanced Higher or Higher Level in the IB.</i>
Aptitude test?	Yes - The Thinking Skills Assessment <i>Taken on 2nd November, usually at student's own school. Registration for the test must be done separately to the main application but also by 15th October deadline.</i>
Course length	3 Years
Qualification	BA Geography

UCAS Application

- Every application to university starts with UCAS: applying to Oxford for any subject has an earlier deadline than other universities.
- Your teacher will submit references about you, this is important encouragement to make sure you're conscientious and hard working- although some may dismiss these references and their importance, they may be brought up in the Keble interview, therefore they do get read. Although you shouldn't worry too much as your teachers should hopefully be saying positive things about you!
- All your academic and extracurricular achievements get entered into UCAS, guidelines and statistics regarding the academic requirements for an application to the university can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses-listing/geography?wssl=1>
- Other information regarding the application can be found here:

- o <http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate/course/>
- It is important to remember that academic scores are considered in light of your school's performance, for example, GCSE performance that outperforms the average from your school will be flagged up even if you have a lower number of A*s than other applicants.
- Therefore, there is no specific GCSE grade requirement for an Oxford place, although all applicants must meet an: A*AA offer at A level.

Work Experience/ Volunteering

- This is sometimes the hardest part of your geography application. At Oxford you do not have to have any work experience, although if you can get some it is something great to talk about in your personal statement.
- Most universities understand that work experience is not always possible to obtain, therefore if you can't get any, it's not something to fret about.
- Given the broad nature of the Geography discipline, it is important to recognise the variety of work experience that could be mentioned in the application. One must however be sure to present the experience through a geographical perspective and even better an academic one!
- Volunteering is another great addition to a personal statement.
- This is much easier to come by, examples of suitable volunteering are working at Old People's homes, local school play groups, hospital volunteering and conservation projects. If you're struggling to find something, have a look online, there are many clubs that would happily have a volunteer if you get in contact with them.
- Your interests as exhibited by your volunteering may be discussed in the interview as a way of getting to know you as a geographer with other interests.
- Use your initiative when it comes to applying to these places, a position may not be advertised but a phone call/letter of enquiry may do the trick if you can demonstrate you're really keen.
- Once again, volunteering is recommended, but not essential, if you try your best and can't find any opportunities, the university will not hold this against you!

Personal Statement

- Writing a personal statement is probably the hardest part of your application, you can ask around for structures and you will see huge variety in what different people put, it is important to realise there is no formula to the

perfect personal statement, it is personal and is used to show your interests, achievements and importantly your personality in your application.

- DO NOT spend hours trawling through the student room reading about the amazing achievements of people who have supposedly got into the geography course, a lot of these are false and it's important to make sure you're talking about you, not someone else!
- Whilst the personal statement is about you, in order to help your application, it is good to read up on what each university wants to see from applicants, this can then be used as a potential structure. Often universities publish the key attributes they want a geography student to demonstrate on their admissions pages online.
- In addition to this, you should read up in detail about the course, as the geography courses varies hugely from university to university and not every course is suited to everybody. Make sure you're applying to places with a course structure you would enjoy. Also consider the fact that the Oxford geography course includes Physical and Human components so do not neglect one or the other completely.
- Your personal statement could include: motivation behind your choice to study geography, reference to particular aspects of your A level course that you enjoy/that may be relevant to geography, work experience and volunteering, extracurricular activities as well as any extended reading you may have done (do not lie about this, they will ask you about it at interview!)
- When discussing the various topics that interest you within geography, it is recommended that an academic approach is taken when discussing these interests. For example, instead of mentioning how demographics have always interested you and is an important issue to explore, it is better to discuss what about demographics interest you and the geographers (academics) that you critically appreciate as a means to explore this issue.
- Oxford Geography explores a huge variety of topics that have not been covered in A-Levels, etc so it is good to show an open mind within your personal statement to Geography as a discipline (and even the nature of geography as a discipline!).

Recommendations for Reading

- Try and identify an area of your Geography course that you specifically enjoy and extend this by finding a book or journal that explores this further.
- Keep up to date with the news and current affairs as well as developments in the subject e.g. any major new research findings.
- Try and read news and current affairs with a view of to analyse what is being discussed and critically establish points of contention. Just get thinking about what you read! (where is it from, why it is written etc).

- There is no need to memorise set articles you may come across or specific case studies but a general awareness of what's going on in the field as well as some known examples will be useful, especially to back up an answer you may give at interview.
- The School of Geography and the Environment has a published reading list for applicants that may be a useful starting point for finding relevant books: <http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/undergraduate/course/reading-list.html>
 - o By no means are you expected to read everything on the list however, it is useful to select a few options on areas that you are particularly interested in or have never read about before.
 - o This is just an introductory list, any relevant book, article, programme, lecture etc that provides advanced Geography commentary or argument can be helpful preparatory reading.
- There is no recipe for what you should read, the tutors are looking for a genuine interest in extending your understanding, it doesn't matter what specific area this may be in.
 - o It may be helpful to look briefly into the tutor's chosen fields of interest as they may have a preference for asking you about what they love best. However, they also acknowledge that everyone has their own niche and interest within the discipline so feel free to focus on your own favoured area.

Aptitude Test

- To make an application to Oxford for Geography you have to sit the TSA (Thinking Skills Assessment) entrance exam.
- The following website is where you can find details about test registration, information about the test and look through past papers: www.admissionstestingservice.org/for-test-takers/thinking-skills-assessment/tsa-oxford/about-tsa-oxford/
- You cannot register for the TSA yourself. In most cases if you are currently at a school or college then you must contact your exams officer and they can often administer the test for you. If this is not possible then you must find an authorised centre at which you can take the test. The following link is where you can search for authorised centres: <http://www.admissionstestingservice.org/find-a-centre/>
- The TSA is not a subject-specific entrance exam but is used to assess the skills and attributes of students applying for a range of courses such as Economics and Management and PPE, as well as Geography.
- The TSA is a 2 hour long paper comprising of two sections:

- o TSA Multiple Choice: A 90 minute long section with 50 multiple choice questions. These test problem solving skills related to numerical and spatial reasoning, and critical thinking including understanding argument.
 - o Writing Task: A 30 minute essay question from a choice of 4 options. The questions are not subject specific and are used to test your ability to organise ideas into a concise, analytical and effective response.
- The first section of the test is marked automatically and scores evaluated on the TSA scale of approximately 0-100. The second section, the writing task, is not scored but sent directly to the subject tutors for review.
- As the TSA is not a subject specific test it requires no specific revision or recall of facts. Therefore, the best way to prepare is to familiarise yourself with the type of questions asked and complete as many of the sample questions and past papers as possible.
- You may find that some additional reading for critical thinking element of the multiple choice section makes the questions clearer and easier to answer. Recommended by the admissions test services are:
 - o Thinking Skills - Butterworth, John and Thwaites, Geoff
 - o Critical Reasoning: A Practical Introduction - Thomson, Anne
 - o Thinking from A to Z - Warburton, Nigel
 - o Critical Thinking: An Introduction - Fisher, Alec
 - o Also useful may be the CGP guide to A-Level Critical Thinking which has very similar content to the above.
- Make sure you keep a cool head during the exam and just try and answer as many questions as you can, its multiple choice so you do have a 25% chance of getting them right!
- The essay section of the TSA exam requires no prior knowledge although a good general knowledge, particularly about current affairs and frequently debated issues is useful and may help to mark out your essays. The tutors will assess your core English skills and your ability to create a structured and well-rounded argument.
- Oxford does not use your TSA score as a final deciding factor, it is taken into account alongside your GCSEs, AS-Levels, Personal Statement and UCAS Application.
- The results of the test are sent directly to each candidate via email in mid-January, after all offers have already been made by the College.

Interview

- If your application passes the first round, you will be invited to interview at the University.
- For Geography, you will most likely only be interviewed at the college which you applied to, however, sometimes candidates are also requested to stay on at interview again at another college as well.
- Most colleges will give you two individual interviews, with different tutors, these may be on the same day or spread across a period of time- you'll be given a room to stay in for the duration of your stay.
- To prepare make sure you go over your personal statement and ensure you're up to date with everything you said you have read/enjoy, you can expect tutors to pick out very random points from your personal statement and make you elaborate on them.
 - o This is often a chance for you to talk well about the areas that you have said you are already comfortable with so make sure you are prepared to prove this and make the most of the opportunity to discuss something you know.
- On the day, most candidates may be dressed in quite a relaxed manner, as Oxford encourages applicants to dress comfortably. The tutors are concerned about what you know, not what you wear so don't worry too much about this!
 - o The key advice is usually to make sure you present the best version of yourself, whilst there is nothing wrong with trackies and trainers, it is advised to dress a little smarter in order to present yourself as a candidate that is serious and professional.
- The best way to prepare for the interview is to practice as much as possible. Speak to your teachers, parents, friends applying for the same subject or anyone willing to discuss your subject with you and get them to ask you questions about it. Time spent discussing your subject should hopefully make the experience of the interview a little more familiar and comfortable.
 - o They may also be able to point out to you any strengths and weaknesses that they can see from your answers so you can focus on areas to improve on.
- Prepare beforehand by revising your extra subject reading to refresh your knowledge of some of the areas of Geography that you may not have learnt at school but will at degree level.

- Don't worry about pausing for a second before you answer a question, it is far better to think out a well-constructed answer than to rush into the wrong one.
- Have confidence in your responses, however, if the tutors suggest that you are wrong take their hint and offer up an alternative answer.
- Don't be worried by other candidates that give you the impression that their interview went far better than yours or that they know a lot more than you, you can never tell until you hear back from the tutors - just do the best you can do! They wanted to interview you for a reason.

Further Questions?

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to e-mail Keble at Large at kebleatlarge@outlook.com