English

Application Guide

**Deadline for applying through UCAS:** 15th October

**A-Level requirements:** AAA

**Aptitude test?:** English Literature Admissions Test (ELAT)

**Course length:** 3 years

**Qualification:** BA English Language and Literature

Application Checklist

* **Personal statement**
* **Grades – Predicted AAA, one of these should be in English Literature and one other essay subject is usually preferable but not compulsory**
* **One essay – An example of your work should be submitted to tutors**
* **Sit the ELAT**

**Work Experience / Volunteering:**

This isn’t the most important when it comes to English as opposed to subjects like Medicine, so don’t worry about doing lots of it for the sake of your application, as there’s nothing directly relevant in terms of work experience and it isn’t what they’re looking for. However, anything that demonstrates your literary interest is good - if you’ve volunteered at a local bookshop or literary festival then it certainly won’t hurt to mention these in your application.

**Personal Statement:**

A crucial thing to remember is that extra-curriculars really do not take center stage on this piece of paper. It is all about what literature interests you - which books, groups of books, themes, poetry, plays - do you like post-colonial literature, modernist literature, Romanticism, Shakespeare, drama? It doesn’t have to be something you’ve found outside of class necessarily and you don’t have to be an expert, but focussing a short paragraph on a particular work you really enjoyed during English classes and how it engaged you specifically is great. Following this paragraph up with a sentence on how you investigated this further is always good, to show that you’re interested in it. For example, if you really liked *A Streetcar Named Desire* at A-Level, demonstrate how you followed it up by reading other Tennessee Williams plays such as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* Try and pinpoint specifically what interested you about specific works rather than just saying you liked them; why do you think *King Lear* is such a powerful play: Shakespeare’s language, his themes, his characterization? And how and why was that certain thing so effective? Go wild and have fun with it, it’s really just a space for you to demonstrate your love for literature. But most importantly, don’t mention anything you aren’t prepared to discuss and defend in your interview! Make sure you’ve read each text that you mention reasonably thoroughly, and have things to say about the texts that you haven’t mentioned in your Personal Statement, so you have more to say about them when if you get quizzed in your interview.

**Recommendations for Reading:**

It’s English - so anything that interests you! As above, try and show developed and sustained interest in a certain area; for example, if you’ve written that you enjoyed studying Keats’ poetry at school, show how this then led you to read Wordsworth and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* due to your curiosity about Romantic poetry. Try and go beyond the big obvious titles, for example if you’re interested in T.S Eliot then don’t just read *The Waste Land* but perhaps investigate his *Four Quartets;* if Virginia Woolf is your thing then have a look at some of her essays - ‘A Room of One’s Own’ is a good place to start - rather than just reading *To the Lighthouse.* At this stage don’t worry about secondary reading and criticism as the tutors are more interested in what you make of the primary texts themselves. That said, if you do have a particular interest in a certain literary theory or movement it can’t hurt to read a book on it and mention this on your personal statement.

**Aptitude Test (ELAT):**

You will need to contact someone at your school about sitting the ELAT as early as possible (preferably at the end of Year 12, very beginning of Year 13) if your school does not usually run admissions tests for Oxbridge, as the deadline for applications is on October 15th, and the ELAT will be shortly after this. Ideally your English teacher or Head of Sixth Form will know you are interested in applying to Oxford and will take the lead on organising this for you.

You can find past papers online - I would recommend doing about three of these before the real thing. Get a teacher to give you feedback if possible, or if a friend is also applying for the same subject, read each-other’s attempts. It might seem odd to you that the ELAT is arranged around a theme, rather than a question; get used to creating avenues of enquiry for yourself. A good place to start is to simply compare the texts, finding similarities and differences. One thing that you might find useful is to look at how the different genres of the extracts might affect how the texts are written - if it’s an extract from a radio-play for example, how might that influence the author, compared to a play which is viewed onstage?

You can choose to compare either two or three texts, choosing two keeps things simpler (especially within the time constraint) but if you’re particularly strongly drawn to three then that works as well, but make sure you’re giving each enough attention. Be very precise in your attention to language; sustained close reading of the texts with result in stronger answers - really tease out the ways the authors create different layers of meaning through their use of language, form and structure.

**Interview:**

If you can, practice a bit for these with teachers at school. Get them to find a poem they think is at a suitable level for discussion – ideally it is one that you can interpret in a number of different ways. Then prepare it for 30 minutes, maybe they can prepare questions ahead of time on the poem, and then have a discussion for 15-20 minutes about it. This can also be replicated with a family member; perhaps compile flash cards with general questions on that can be applied to poetry. Eg. ‘What sort of themes come out in this poem?’ or ‘What do you think the poem is about?’ Try and come up with two or three answers, not just one. Tell the listener what you think of the poem, and then try to pinpoint specifically *why* that thought occurred to you. How did the author get that thought across? Did you have that thought because the author meant it to happen, or was it more down to a personal experience or view? The why is the important bit - it can be something as simple as an inanimate object being given a gendered pronoun instead of ‘it’. Above all, be up for **talking** about the things you read. Practice speaking to people about the books you love - see if you can convince somebody you know to read a book they might not ordinarily choose. As mentioned above, make sure you can speak fluently and engagingly on **all** the texts mentioned on your Personal Statement.

**Further Questions?**

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