





Harry's Oxbridge Application



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Harry's Oxbridge Application Experience:

Hello, my name is Harry and I'm a first year studying Classics (3 year course) at Trinity College, Cambridge.

What did you do/get at A-levels:

Were you State or Privately educated:

I decided to study Classics because I know without a doubt I love Classics more than almost anything in the world, and I enjoy essay writing and language learning which are the two main components of my degree. I was extremely fortunate in that I was able to access a Classical education early: for GCSE I studied Maths, English, Triple Science, History, Spanish, Latin, Greek and Classical Civilisation. For A-level I studied Greek, Latin, Classical Civilisation and English Literature at an independent school in Hertfordshire, and I obtained 4A*s.

However, it's important to keep in mind that it's by no means necessary to study these subjects if you're interested in applying for Classics. Subjects like History, English and modern languages will give you the skills you need to be able to cope with a Classics degree, and you can pick up Ancient Languages from scratch on most university courses. All you need is passion and enthusiasm for the subject, and a curiosity about the Ancient World.

I decided to apply to Cambridge because the course seemed much broader than Oxford: I'm still not sure what areas of Classics I'm most interested in and the Cambridge course allows you to have a taster of every area before making up your mind.

Alongside this, the first year texts struck me as particularly unusual and interesting: we studied Herodotus 1, Lysias 1, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Plato's *Crito*. It seemed to me that the Cambridge course was slightly more holistic early on than the Oxford course, and I thought that this would suit me better.





Why did you apply to the Oxbridge college that you did:

I decided to apply to Trinity College because it's one of the biggest colleges, has beautiful surroundings, and it's also one of the richest colleges. This means it has more capacity to be able to reimburse book expenses, and to provide funds to visit the Classical Lands.

That being said, the most important factor in my applying to Trinity was the open day: I met the academic who is now my Director of Studies and he was very welcoming and helpful, and that reassured me a lot, and helped to demystify Trinity for me. Although I'm really glad I applied

to Trinity, it's very easy to be intimidated by the prestige and lofty towers. Don't be: it's the people who will make your experience, and the people are, without exception, lovely.

What did the application process look like:

The application process looked like this: in the summer before my UCAS application would be sent in, I tried to do lots of wider research (primarily by reading books, watching documentaries or lectures online, and trying to consolidate my languages), and I started to think about my personal statement. I would also really recommend JSST Summer Schools in Greek, Latin or Class Civ, if you're able to go on them. Not only are they useful (and fun!) but you can meet other like minded people who love Classics at much as you do!

There are other summer schools too: Debate Chamber do great summer camps at UCL, and the Oxford UNIQ Classics course is an excellent summer programme specifically designed for students in UK State Schools or Colleges.

In the Autumn, I finalised my PS, and applied to Cambridge, KCL, Durham, St Andrews and Exeter (nb. Oxbridge applicants need to submit their applications by the earlier deadline).



The wider reading process continued until I got offered an interview that would take place in early December, and then I started to step it up a bit. One thing I found quite useful was trying to do a little bit of language work every day for the at-interview assessment (nb Cambridge has an assessment at interview, Oxford assesses before), and recruiting a friend to quiz me about aspects of the ancient world. I was very lucky in that someone else in my year was applying for Classics, so we tried to meet once a week to give each other mock interviews. I'd also recommend watching mock interview examples online (Oriental College Oxford have a particularly good one on their YouTube Channel.).

The interview process:

My interview day was a lot less nerve-wracking than I'd expected. My assessment was a Latin passage (previously unseen) for translation, but if you've not done any ancient languages before it will be a 1:1 session with an assessor where you will go over some linguistic material. One interview focussed on aspects of my personal statement, so I'd recommend doing a bit of wider research about the topics you mention **and read any books you've said you have read (especially if your interviewer has written that book)**. Although I wasn't really asked any questions about anything I'd done extra wider reading about (not mentioned in my PS), that reading did give me some knowledge to draw on, and to use to help me approach questions I had no clue how to approach.

In my other interviews I was asked to translate some of my set texts, given a piece of unseen Latin to parse, and asked some grammar questions about irregular verbs.

The interviewers were friendly throughout: they're not trying to catch you out, and they want to see the way you think and approach questions, not how much you can rattle off about Augustus in 30 seconds. Take your time to breathe and think, and try to stay calm. They want you to do as well as you can!

What was it like getting your results:

The period after my interviews and getting results in mid-January was one of the worst periods of my life. Even though I was really happy about how everything had gone, I was by then so fixated on Cambridge, and everyone around me had been hyping it up so much, that I was desperate to get in.

That was my biggest mistake: try to take a step back and realise that Classics is Classics anywhere, and if you love it enough to want to study it at University, you'll do OK anywhere!

When I did get the result, I immediately got kicked out of my school library for squealing (lol thanks). I was absolutely ecstatic, my parents cried (lol thanks again)- but I was also really nervous, because Cambridge still felt like an impossible dream, and I had to get A*AA in my A Levels to meet my offer. (Sometimes you'll be asked to get a specific grade in a specific subject, like the A * in Latin, but not always).



It's very easy to be intimidated by Cambridge, but it's a University filled with people like any other- people who go to Cambridge are definitely not all geniuses, and if you have an offer your interviewer thought you would do well here: don't doubt that! Imposter syndrome is real, and it never really goes away, but you have to learn how to push it to one side.

You **are** good enough.



If you could only give 3 pieces of advice

to your former self what would they be:

My three tips to Oxbridge candidates:

1. Think about why you love Classics and try to do wider reading aimed towards those areas- that'll mean you'll stay motivated and it'll be obvious how passionate you are in the interview.
2. Stay calm in the interview: it's very easy to be very nervous but remember that the academics want you to show them how good you are, and don't want to catch you out. For the most part they're academics who dedicated to teaching enthusiastic students- don't believe the horror stories you hear about Oxbridge interviews.
3. Remember Oxbridge isn't the be-all and end-all. You're passionate, you love Classics, and you're a dedicated student, so you'll do well anywhere! There are great courses for Classics in other equally great universities in the UK that will enable you to reach your goal, even if it isn't at Oxbridge!





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