

Forum: [Hack Forums](#)

Thread: [\[Polymath\] UK Education Helpdesk](#)

Rivalry - August 5, 2014, 7:32 am

HELLO

My name's Rivalry, and on behalf of Polymath I'd like to welcome you to a helpdesk dedicated to the UK's education system.





A-LEVEL SUBJECTS

These are the subjects that I'll be most able to help you with.

English Lit

Politics

German

Geography

Critical Thinking





WHAT CAN I HELP YOU WITH?

I can basically try to help with anything and everything, so long as it's related to the UK education system (obviously being British I'm unfamiliar with systems in other countries). Examples of what I can assist you with include:

University Choices

Personal Statement Writing

Extra-Curricular Stuff

Super-Curricular Stuff

GCSE/A-Level Subject Choices

Exam Preparation

UCAS Deadlines

Oxbridge Applications

Reading Lists

EPQ

Please note that this is not a homework service. I will neither complete nor help you with schoolwork. I am willing to proof-read and advise on (with total privacy, obviously) things like Personal Statements, though.



CONTACT ME

You can either leave a comment below, or send me a message. Thanks for reading!

Jon Snow - August 7, 2014, 12:33 am

What is a lad like you with 10 A*'s at GCSE and 4 A's at AS doing here?

Did you consider applying for Harvard? They accept few international students, but you are in that category.

Rivalry - August 7, 2014, 2:33 am

(Aug 7, 2014 12:33 AM)Akuma? Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) What is a lad like you with 10 A*'s at GCSE and 4 A's at AS doing here?

Did you consider applying for Harvard? They accept few international students, but you are in that category.

HF is useful for graphics, and as a practice arena for debating. There are also some people far cleverer than me here, so it's fun to talk to them.

I did, and I took the SAT. I did well, and if I did it again then I'd probably do even better, but I decided that I preferred Cambridge as a place, and I'd be alone if I went to Harvard since nobody from my school will apply there. Also, I don't think that there's any way of me affording to go to university in America. Their system has the counter-productive trait of having higher economic barriers to entry than academic barriers to entry, which the UK doesn't have.

Jon Snow. - August 7, 2014, 11:10 am

(Aug 7, 2014 02:33 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) HF is useful for graphics, and as a practice arena for debating. There are also some people far cleverer than me here, so it's fun to talk to them.

I did, and I took the SAT. I did well, and if I did it again then I'd probably do even better, but I decided that I preferred Cambridge as a place, and I'd be alone if I went to Harvard since nobody from my school will apply there. Also, I don't think that there's any way of me affording to go to university in America. Their system has the counter-productive trait of having higher economic barriers to entry than academic barriers to entry, which the UK doesn't have.

If you don't mind me asking, what school did you go to then? And regarding fees at Harvard, there are Scholarship Programs available too.

I'm going to guess you went to either Eton or Harrow ?

Rivalry - August 9, 2014, 2:17 am

(Aug 7, 2014 11:10 AM)Akuma? Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) If you don't mind me asking, what school did you go to then? And regarding fees at Harvard, there are Scholarship Programs available too.

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I'm still at school and about to start my A2s. Yeah, I'm aware, but there's just so much hassle with America that I'd rather stick around in the UK for a little while longer.

Nope, neither of those. I'm from the grim North!

Rivalry - August 31, 2014, 12:09 pm

I'll shove this back up to the top. I hope you all did well in your exams! The new year's about to start; if you have any questions or whatever, just PM me :)

Expeditious - August 31, 2014, 12:40 pm

This seems like a really good help desk I hope it helps many people, am gonna shoot you a PM regarding a question I have.

Florist - August 31, 2014, 3:58 pm

I am like polar opposite of you ha

Computing

Maths

Physics

Chemistry

4 As @ AS with Avg 91%

I'm applying for Physical Nat Sci at Cambridge but this PS is hard as I'm not the best with english :(if people are doing OCR boards for sciences or AQA maths they can always give me an ask ;)

What's your pvt school? MGS?

The Fuhrer - August 31, 2014, 5:58 pm

This is a great idea man. If this was around this time last year I would've done better in my Politics exam for sure. Ah well, such is life. Nice to see some UK based education help though :)

Rivalry - September 5, 2014, 1:47 pm

(Aug 31, 2014 03:58 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) I am like polar opposite of you ha

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No, but I know some people from MGS quite well. That's an impressive UMS (assume) average, well done!

If you ever need me to proofread your PS (confidentially, of course), I'm standing by.

Helped a bunch of people out via PM; hopefully some of what I've said has been of value to someone. My inbox is always awaiting your message :)

Swrvx - September 5, 2014, 5:01 pm

Thank you for this service, i will be needing someone to proof-read and maybe help with my personal statement.

Will require this service in a few week's if it's still up.

Thanks.

Florist - September 6, 2014, 2:03 pm

(Sep 5, 2014 01:47 PM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) No, but I know some people from MGS quite well. That's an impressive UMS (assume) average, well done!

If you ever need me to proofread your PS (confidentially, of course), I'm standing by.

Helped a bunch of people out via PM; hopefully some of what I've said has been of value to someone. My inbox is always awaiting your message :)

I'm curious what your private school is now :-)

I'd like that waiting to get it back atm.

My UMS avg isn't that good considering the top3 avg is 94% for accepted candidates at Cam whereas my top 3 avg is 92%.

What's it like applying for your subjects?

Rivalry - September 9, 2014, 11:45 am

(Sep 6, 2014 02:03 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) I'm curious what your private school is now :-)

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What's it like applying for your subjects?

I wouldn't pay much mind to being below the average. Half of the successful people are, remember

:)

I met people there on the Open Day who had UMS averages of 84ish, so it's not really a panic scenario.

I haven't bothered checking the average for English, but I'm fairly confident that I'm higher (98% average across top 3, 97% across top 3 most relevant).

We'll have to see! Have you decided on a college?

reama - September 9, 2014, 11:46 am

It's good to see a UK education help desk. Proud to see you achieving good!

Florist - September 9, 2014, 1:04 pm

(Sep 9, 2014 11:45 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) I wouldn't pay much mind to being below the average. Half of the successful people are, remember :)

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WOAOAOAOAOAO Daz some crazy scores I'm jealous :-(
Clare & Churchill I think :-) WBU?

Rivalry - September 9, 2014, 1:36 pm

(Sep 9, 2014 01:04 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) WOAOAOAOAOAO Daz some crazy scores I'm jealous :-(
Clare & Churchill I think :-) WBU?

Cam's not so much about the grades as it is about ability at interview, your personal statement, and submitted work/essays, though :l

I can't decide between Emmanuel and Pembroke. Clare is really nice, though. I had that one shortlisted for a looong time :P

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Why Pembroke? I didn't like the accomodation there.

Rivalry - September 9, 2014, 2:13 pm

(Sep 9, 2014 01:51 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Why Pembroke? I didn't like the accomodation there. Love the location, it's cheaper, it's great for English (big community there), and it's really, really pretty. I also know a few people there who love it, so.

kiwiz - September 11, 2014, 3:06 am

could anyone help me ps making magazine newspaper articlearticle that will be distributed to youths around the UK. The essence of the article is to encourage youths to develop Apps for

mobile devices.

Rivalry - September 11, 2014, 9:39 am

(Sep 11, 2014 03:06 AM)kiwiz Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) could anyone help me ps making magazine newspaper article that will be distributed to youths around the UK. The essence of the article is to encourage youths to develop Apps for mobile devices.

This isn't a homework service, so I'm not up for writing your article for you. What is it exactly that you need help with?

Rivalry - October 10, 2014, 11:17 am

Shoving this back to the top for anyone who needs help in UK University season. Good luck to you all with your offers :)

Rivalry - November 21, 2014, 2:09 pm

Uni admissions season continues apace. Lmk if you need any help or advice!

?Saadi - November 21, 2014, 3:36 pm

Currently doing my AS Levels in the following subjects:- (Will appear in June 2015 session)

Maths - Edexcel (C1,C2,S1)

Physics - Edexcel

Chemistry - Edexcel

Applied ICT - CIE

Any tips for Physics especially? I seem to be struggling in it as of now.

Also, I wasn't sure if i should've taken Computing or Computer Science or Applied ICT.. However I still have the choice to change it.. What would y'all recommend ?

Rivalry - November 22, 2014, 8:31 am

(Nov 21, 2014 04:36 PM)?Saadi Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Currently doing my AS Levels in the following subjects:- (Will appear in June 2015 session)

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Any tips for Physics especially? I seem to be struggling in it as of now.

Also, I wasn't sure if i should've taken Computing or Computer Science or Applied ICT.. However I still have the choice to change it.. What would y'all recommend ?

Applied ICT is certainly the least academic of the three, but without knowing what you want to do at uni I can't really advise. I know a few people who did Computing AS and afaiK it's the most academic of the three that you've put forward, but as I said it really depends on what you want to do at university.

I took humanities, but for sciences I'd imagine the same practices hold. Start revising early, use a lot of practice papers, and plug holes in your knowledge asap. AS Levels are a bit frantic, especially towards the start of the year. I wouldn't sweat it too much if everything seems a bit overwhelming right now, because you're being asked to learn a vast amount of content in a very small amount of time. Everything will start to come together of its own accord as you move through the year, but maybe just help it along a bit by consolidating at home what you've done in lessons.

Cyvre - November 22, 2014, 10:01 am

Its nice to see someone else who has high expectations :) As a 15/10 student, have you gotten an interview from cambridge yet? and if you have what was the offer?

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I did AS Physics and Chemistry, i had 294 UMS for physics and 283 for Chem :P Honestly with physics its all about getting that Unit 1 Test down. If i was you, i would have done mechanics instead of statistics for your math module since it helps so much with your unit 1. Unit 1 is literally all calculations and math, so its the easiest to score full marks in. The unit 3 paper is also pretty easy. I only dropped marks on the unit 2, and thats because its a lot more about being able to communicate your ideas as opposed to math :P

With maths, just do the questoins in the textbook, use mymaths.co.uk for extra resources. Its all about practice with c1 and c2, and statistics is basically punching numbers into your calculator (i did both m1 and s1, and tbh m1 is soooooo much better)

Chem. Buy the CGP revision book. That literally tells you everything you need to know for edexcel AS Chem. Born Haber and Hess Law can be a bitch but the CGP book covers the calculations well.

Rivalry - November 22, 2014, 10:25 am

(Nov 22, 2014 11:01 AM)Cyvre Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Its nice to see someone else who has high expectations :) As a 15/10 student, have you gotten an interview from cambridge yet? and if you have what was the offer?

Not yet :/

My college/subject are apparently the slowest to get interviews out across the entire university, so I'm still waiting to see if I got one whilst literally EVERYONE else has been invited. Sigh.

I had one at UCL a couple of weeks ago, which was... interesting. The interviewer decided not to ask me about anything on my personal statement, and instead randomly started asking me about Emily Bronte (whom I hate). Who knows.

Wbu?

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Thank you for the recommendation, I may change it to computing..

Anyways, Definitely AS Levels is a huge jump from IGCSE's (scored 8 A*'s 1A).. As of now, It's seems very hard to keep up with the studies.. and Yes I'm definitely giving like 2 to 3 hours per day at home.

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Regarding the Physics Unit 1, I've heard and seen the past papers of Edexcel.. they seem to be totally out of the world.. to me .. Like 50-60% of the things they ask aren't even in the book. Majority of the past students in my school, didn't achieve good marks in Unit 1 Physics.. Chemistry Unit 1 on the otherhand, seems to be ALOT easier compared to Physics Unit 1.

Even Unit 3 (IAL - Written Paper Not coursework)- which i'm studying alongwith Unit 1 right now seems to be hard aswell.. How can you even predict the Practicals that are gonna come? Every paper has one big question of practicals..

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What would you recommend me for Physics, I'm definitely struggling the most in it. Also did you do Edexcel AS Levels?

Cyvre - November 23, 2014, 8:04 am

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I did edexcel too. I did International As Levels for Physics and chem, just like you, and i also did the written paper :) You attending a british school abroad?

What i did was i ended up doing a lot of OCR papers for physics, since the questions that come up in edexcel papers are quite similar. What physics textbook do you have? Tbh their all pretty bad, so what i did was i went to a library and borrowed a couple different ones and just took notes from them all. its time consuming but if you start early youll have a nice notebook by the time you get to may/june.

The practical paper is quite easy too. If you check thestudentroom.co.uk they always have a list of practicals you should know, and which ones will be likely to come up. Studentroom is great. Dont believe everything on there though, sometimes retards answer the questions :P

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I'll pm you regarding what my school info etc.

Florist - November 23, 2014, 2:34 pm

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I did OCR but did a few of the Edexcel past papers haha what even is multiple choice????

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Practice-Physics-4th-George-Bennet/dp/1444121251/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1416782019&sr=8-1&keywords=practice+in+physics

This is the best book ever for Physics. Just do questions till your eyes bleed.

(Nov 22, 2014 11:25 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Not yet :/

My college/subject are apparently the slowest to get interviews out across the entire university, so I'm still waiting to see if I got one whilst literally EVERYONE else has been invited. Sigh.

I had one at UCL a couple of weeks ago, which was... interesting. The interviewer decided not to ask me about anything on my personal statement, and instead randomly started asking me about Emily Bronte (whom I hate). Who knows.

Wbu?

Sounds like you know what's up with sciences! I'll defer to your judgement :P
whats's your college?

Mine sent out saying we had interviews last week dead early, but haven't confirmed the date yet ?

Rivalry - November 24, 2014, 9:23 am

(Nov 23, 2014 03:34 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) whats's your college?

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Pembroke, wbu?

Urgh mine told me (after I'd submitted my essays) when the interview window was, all of the protocol for them etc etc etc

They've basically done everything OTHER than tell me I've got one ;_;

It's slightly mitigated because today I got a UCL offer, which is probs my insurance (since Durham want A*AA and don't even give them out until like March) :D

Thought I'd screwed up their interview/exam as well, so I'm really happy rn!

Florist - November 24, 2014, 10:03 am

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Clare!!

Got my interview date today :OOOO

Rivalry - November 24, 2014, 10:08 am

(Nov 24, 2014 11:03 AM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Clare!!

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Ooh, good luck mayn. When is it?

35 characters

Florist - November 24, 2014, 4:30 pm

(Nov 24, 2014 11:08 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Ooh, good luck mayn. When is it?

35 characters

the 9th of december

should be fun :)

Darn two concurrent interviewers

Cyvre - November 25, 2014, 8:56 am

Gl with your interviews mate, tell us how they go :) You prepared for them? Mock interviews?

Florist - December 1, 2014, 3:43 pm

(Nov 24, 2014 11:08 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Ooh, good luck mayn. When is it?

35 charactersgot your interview date yet? Surely the college has set them

Rivalry - December 2, 2014, 10:08 am

(Dec 1, 2014 04:43 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) got your interview date yet? Surely the college has set them

I'm in next Monday for one :s

acters

Blacklisted. - December 2, 2014, 10:12 am

I go to a private school and the choices for GCSE's are so limited it's unbelievable.

Cyvre - December 2, 2014, 11:25 am

(Dec 2, 2014 11:12 AM)? Fade Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) I go to a private school and the choices for GCSE's are so limited it's unbelievable.

At the end of the day, most A Level courses don't even need the equivalent GCSEs (at least in my school), unless it's something like math or sciences. Your GCSEs determine what sixth form you go to, but it's the A levels you later pick up which decide your uni.

BrokenScreen - December 3, 2014, 11:17 am

Hey Rivalry,

Do you have any tips to maximize one's score in an aptitude test?

Rivalry - December 3, 2014, 11:28 am

(Dec 3, 2014 12:17 PM)MysteriousMage Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Hey Rivalry,

Do you have any tips to maximize one's score in an aptitude test?

Critical Thinking is a subject that teaches you exactly how to destroy aptitude tests (well, most bits of them anyway). I'm not sure which country you're talking about (hopefully, given the thread title, the UK), but the BMAT/TSA/LNAT and others all have a big Critical Thinking section. If you want specific help on this, PM me.

Debating helps you with essay writing (part of the BMAT/ELAT and others) by teaching you how to construct a bulletproof argument very quickly, and knock down counter-points.

The maths sections on many aptitude tests are harder to prepare for. Unless you have natural ability, you'll need to just hammer out loads of practice papers and get to know the sort of questions that they like to ask you, but beyond that there's not an awful lot you can do.

Then there are the basic exam tips like don't mess about with gimmicks like water bottles (aptitude tests deliberately massively constrict the amount of time you have to do them, which is what makes them hard, so by bringing water in you're basically inviting yourself to fail by wasting time), don't get flustered, if you can't answer a question move on, get lots of sleep the night before, and just relax during the test.

Good luck!

Florist - December 3, 2014, 5:07 pm

(Dec 2, 2014 11:08 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) I'm in next Monday for one :s

acters

Aw I'm heading down monday evening for a tuesday one ;)

Cyvre - December 9, 2014, 8:45 am

Since i don't live in the UK, i've got a skype interview with Imperial tomorrow :P Shitting myself atm hahahahaha

Rivalry - December 9, 2014, 9:00 am

(Dec 9, 2014 09:45 AM)Cyvre Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Since i don't live in the UK, i've got a skype interview with Imperial tomorrow :P Shitting myself atm hahahahaha

(Dec 3, 2014 06:07 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Aw I'm heading down monday evening for a tuesday one ;)

You two have to let us all know how they go :)

Mine was fun, but idk how well it went. I guess we shall see. I suppose the main thing's that I enjoyed it though, so.

Theodore 'T-bag' Bagwell - December 9, 2014, 10:51 am

Do you know anything about Accounting? University level

Rivalry - December 9, 2014, 10:57 am

(Dec 9, 2014 11:51 AM)Theodore T-bag' Bagwell Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Do you know anything about Accounting? University level

Not specifically, but depending on your question I may be able to offer some advice.

Florist - December 9, 2014, 1:44 pm

(Dec 9, 2014 11:57 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Not specifically, but depending on your question I may be able to offer some advice.

Had interviews today :D think they went well; obviously there's lots of applicants so might not be the best.

Rivalry - May 24, 2015, 12:07 pm

Exam time! Anyone need any help?

Rivalry - June 5, 2015, 9:07 am

Exams start next week (well, for some of us)! I've helped a few people via PM, but if you have any questions or just want someone to talk to, you know where to find me :)

Florist - August 26, 2015, 2:36 pm

(Jun 5, 2015 09:07 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Exams start next week (well, for some of us)! I've helped a few people via PM, but if you have any questions or just want someone to talk to, you know where to find me :)

How you do in your exams brah?

Rivalry - August 30, 2015, 7:51 am

(Aug 26, 2015 02:36 PM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) How you do in your exams brah?

2A*s (English Lit, Geography)

3As (EPQ, Politics [getting a remark, pretty sure this'll go up], German)

Met my offer and confirmed the place at Cam :)

How about you?

MrJamieMcC - August 30, 2015, 7:57 am

OP Im also going to University this year in Cambridge, although ARU. HMU and we can grab a few beers or something

Florist - August 30, 2015, 8:34 am

(Aug 30, 2015 07:51 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) 2A*s (English Lit, Geography)

3As (EPQ, Politics [getting a remark, pretty sure this'll go up], German)

Met my offer and confirmed the place at Cam :)

How about you?

3A*s in my maths chem and physics; confirmed at manchester and adjusted the course to include a year in industry :)

Rivalry - August 30, 2015, 8:52 am

(Aug 30, 2015 08:34 AM)Florist Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) 3A*s in my maths chem and physics; confirmed at manchester and adjusted the course to include a year in industry :)

Holy mackerel, nice one! A year in industry sounds like such a nice break from solid studying; I wish I could have one for English.

When does term start for you?

Florist - August 30, 2015, 4:12 pm

(Aug 30, 2015 08:52 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Holy mackerel, nice one! A year in industry sounds like such a nice break from solid studying; I wish I could have one for English.

When does term start for you?
September 17, so super soon :)

Yea the year in industry should help me with my pitiful financial condition by giving me some income along with the reduced fees?
Cam has a later start I imagine?

Happeh - August 30, 2015, 6:45 pm

New kids, going into my second year of University as a Media student; not as clever as Rivalry and not to hijack his thread but if you want any help or have questions on Uni life ask away.

winterfox89 - August 31, 2015, 3:38 pm

Congrats on getting into Cambridge! How were your A Level and GCSE results? How did you prepare for your interview? Thanks!

Also what extra curricular activities do you take part in?

Rivalry - September 1, 2015, 6:15 am

(Aug 30, 2015 09:13 AM)Synch Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) I did my GCSE's in June and I'm not happy with my results whatsoever, I'm not as "bright" as you are and I disliked school but I'm now starting to regret not studying or doing any revision before my exams. I'll be going to job training in September, instead of college as I feel like I'm not ready for college yet. I plan on resitting my exams but before doing that, what's the best way to boost my knowledge?

I'm glad there's someone like you that's willing to help others on HF with education related stuff, you seem like a genuine guy and I'm happy that you got a place in Cambridge university.
Hiya :)

GCSEs are really tough because you have a LOT of exams in a short space of time in subjects that you mostly hate. I remember I was absolutely exhausted after my GCSEs, and it takes a really rigorous plan to do well in them.

I've written a thread in the past about some tips to do well in exams, which you can read here:
<https://hackforums.net/showthread.php?tid=4150830>

The good news for you is that GCSEs aren't necessarily about being some young Einstein or hoarding ridiculous numbers of facts and figures; we mere mortals can also do well in them. The best way to do that is to exploit the weaknesses of a standardised system of exams. By this I mean that every GCSE paper in every subject is marked extremely quickly by some examiner who is probably mega tired and bored and is marking from a standardised mark scheme. This means that so long as you are aware of exactly what you have to do to get the top marks on the mark scheme, and as long as you make it as easy as possible for the examiner to give you full marks, you'll do really well fairly effortlessly. So- read the thread linked above. Read the mark schemes for the papers you'll be sitting and learn what they want (they often have examples of work that scored full

marks on their websites too so you can read these and get an understanding of what they want you to do). Signpost VERY clearly in your writing; for example this year in English Lit I had to include a certain number of contextual points to get full marks on the mark scheme, so I made it ridiculously obvious to the examiner whenever I did so by literally writing 'one contextual point to consider here is...' to make their job as easy as possible. In subjects like Geography and History remember that factual accuracy isn't necessarily vital; I scored full marks in Geography GCSE despite inventing a completely fictional windfarm and writing an entire essay on that in the exam simply because the arguments I used were convincing and I knew what to do to get full marks on the mark scheme. I'm not suggesting that you should do that all the time because obviously it's not an ideal situation to be inventing windfarms in the exam, but don't worry if you can't remember individual facts and stats and things because these examiners are marking your paper insanely fast and don't have time to look up and verify the truth of what you're saying. So long as your argument is good, it doesn't matter if 25% or 35% of Britons are opposed to immigration, for example. Just make it sound plausible.

Good luck :)

(Aug 30, 2015 04:12 PM)Florist Wrote: [CITE](#) September 17, so super soon :)

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Cam has a later start I imagine?

Oh wow, yeah that is soon! And exactly, that's why I wish I had one :(

Cam starts on October 4th and I'm not ready at all haha. Need to buy so much stuff and get everything sorted still, because I have no idea how my student finance is going to pan out :s

(Aug 31, 2015 03:38 PM)winterfox89 Wrote: [CITE](#) Congrats on getting into Cambridge! How were your A Level and GCSE results? How did you prepare for your interview? Thanks!

Also what extra curricular activities do you take part in?

Thanks!

GCSE- 10A*s

AS- 5As

A2- 2A*s, 3As

AS is the most important year to nail, because that's the exam set that universities weight most heavily. Now that the government is scrapping AS exams, this means that extra-curricular stuff and GCSEs become much more important, so it pays to concentrate on those.

For my interviews I firstly researched a bit about my interviewers (where applicable). Cambridge told me in advance who I was going to be interviewed by, so I Googled them and found out their subject specialisms. I then read intensively in those specialist areas, thinking that if I could have an intelligent conversation with them about something they enjoyed then my chances of making a good impression would be much higher. I also made a wall chart of key books and poets from every century going back to the 16th century. This was because the course I applied to (English) was highly chronological, so it's important to have a knowledge of material from all periods of literature. I then basically just read a little bit of everything on this chart, which was useful because my UCL interview consisted in large part of them asking which 17th century etc authors I'd read, just as a means of checking my well-roundedness.

The other important thing to do regardless of subject is to practise. I had about seven mock interviews; five of them were with subject teachers at my school (some of whom I knew, and some

of whom I'd never been taught by), and two were with non-specialists just to see what kind of questions they'd ask me. The more practice you can get the better, especially if you practise with a large variety of people. Aside from that, I made sure to get to my interviews early and to sit in the quiet coach on the trains so I could get into a calm state of mind.

The only other thing I'd say is to ignore people who say that Oxbridge interview questions are things like 'what kind of fruit would you be?', because that's complete nonsense; nobody I know who applied to Oxford/Cambridge at any college for any subject was ever asked anything remotely like this, because interviews are only ~25 minutes long and so asking irrelevant questions about bananas is a waste of everyone's time.

ECAs were debating (do this and you'll nail your interviews), Model UN, Duke of Edinburgh Gold, business and enterprise things, Politics Society (I founded it, which they liked), History Society, German Society, Literature Society, and a load of other English related things and academic journals I'd written for. I wasn't asked at all during my Cambridge Interview about any of this, but UCL asked me a few things about them.

xxreama - September 1, 2015, 6:17 am

Starting Sixth Form, any tips?

I can't even Pm you ;(

rip reama.

winterfox89 - September 1, 2015, 10:05 am

(Sep 1, 2015 06:15 AM)Rivalry Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Thanks!

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Very useful thank you. I suppose a lot of the ECAs you do should be related to what subjects you are studying. However, are they not interested in physical activities such as swimming, playing football etc.? Are they irrelevant to secure University places?

Would you consider yourself to be quite a social person? For me personally, I feel I can definitely make the grades but my communication skills aren't great. I'm okay with talking to two or three people but I find it difficult to talk in front of a group unless I'm well prepared.

Finally, did you get an opportunity to become a prefect at school?

Thanks for your time.

Rivalry - September 2, 2015, 2:53 am

(Sep 1, 2015 10:05 AM)winterfox89 Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Very useful thank you. I suppose a lot of the ECAs you do should be related to what subjects you are studying. However, are they not interested in physical activities such as swimming, playing football etc.? Are they irrelevant to secure University places?

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Thanks for your time.

There are two kinds of ECAs. There are traditional extra-curriculars like swimming and things. Then there are super-curriculars, which are activities that aim to extend subjects you do in the classroom. For example, Politics Society is a super-curricular activity because it's related to a subject that you study, but it takes that subject further.

It depends on the university as to whether they'll be more bothered about ECAs or SCAs. Generally SCAs are more desirable, because they show a genuine interest in academic studies and a desire to further your knowledge. However, it's also important to do some ECAs to show that you're human and well-rounded etc. A sporting university like Loughborough will care a lot more about ECAs than an academic university like UCL.

That said, neither of these are anywhere near as important as the grades you get, so focus on exams above all else.

I'm slightly extroverted and I've been debating competitively for almost a decade so I find it easy to address lots of people and interviews were perfect for me (hence why I applied for Cambridge rather than Oxford). I'd say that unfortunately in my experience communication and interview skills are

pivotal; when I went for my Cambridge interview I met four other English applicants on the day. Three of us were nationally ranked debaters and the other two had never debated before. All three debaters got in, and neither of the others did. This is a shame because we were all similarly prepared and qualified on paper, so it does come down to how well you can articulate yourself and argue a case in an interview (particularly for something like English). The best advice I can give is to start debating as soon as possible to get experience of creating and deconstructing arguments as fast as possible. If you're going into your AS year, find some way to take an AS-Level in Critical Thinking, because that will really help you out. Finally, just relax. They won't expect you to be able to give stunning answers to every question, so just breathe, calm down, and try and enjoy the interview (which are more like conversations than interviews in any case).

I was shortlisted to become Head Boy of the school, but I didn't make it. I was an ambassador for the school instead, and my only other leadership roles were being President of the Debating Society, and President of the Politics Society, iirc. I also edited an academic journal. I'm not sure how much universities really care about these leadership places, so long as you can show that you're an independent thinker.

Meow - September 3, 2015, 4:30 am

Bumping this so you could get PM's.

Rivalry - September 22, 2015, 2:48 am

(Sep 3, 2015 04:30 AM)Meow? Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Bumping this so you could get PM's.

Thanks, Meow :)

It's UCAS season. If you want a hand with university applications, interview tips, or personal statements, I check this thread regularly and you can also reach me via PM (do NOT post your personal statement publicly).