

Dan – Applying to Cambridge

In this piece, Dan discusses his application to Cambridge University.

Although Oxford and Cambridge are undoubtedly fantastic universities, it is important to bear in mind that they are not the only fantastic universities in the country, far from it. When I chose to apply to Cambridge last year to study Human, Social and Political Sciences, it was because the course was the most exciting that I had found for my subject. It is important to make your decision based on what is the right course for you, don't choose Oxford because it's Oxford, or Cambridge because it's Cambridge, choose a course that you will enjoy studying for three or four years.



Once you have decided on either Oxford or Cambridge and have sent them your personal statement that will go to all of your universities that you have chosen, you will hopefully be asked to go down for an interview. The only slight difference between Oxford and Cambridge applications, is that Cambridge request your AS UMS scores, whereas Oxford do not.

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Before I went to my interview, everyone told me to enjoy it, be confident and be yourself. Obviously this is easier said than done. But it is so important to sound natural and be comfortable with what you are saying, the things that you have read and the opinions that you have drawn. Talk to yourself out loud, even if it makes you look slightly weird.

If your subject really gets you going, the interview can be a brilliant opportunity to talk to some incredible professors who are equally as passionate about your subject. It does sound clichéd, but really do enjoy the interview, they want you to do well!

Of course the interview panel will ask you some difficult questions that really force you in to a corner, it's not supposed to be easy. Try to avoid thinking "what do they want from me?" or "what do they want me to say?" There are no right or wrong answers. The interviewers want to see how you can cope in a tricky situation and how your mind works

and what your thought processes are like. They are not expecting the finished article in front of them, but someone who is obviously eager and excited by their subject with potential.

Despite having applied to do Politics and International Relations, the Archaeology professor absolutely grilled me on, “how would you know that your school had been a school if you travelled there in a time machine 400 years in the future?” How on earth was I supposed to answer that question?

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This is where mock interviews are so important. If you go to your Oxbridge interview, without ever having had the experience of being completely torn to shreds, you will become stuck in the real thing. There really is nothing worse than the feeling of being completely and utterly unprepared or unable to answer a question. Therefore, the best advice I can give is to level the playing field; you wouldn't sit an exam without revising, take your Grade 8 piano without practicing, or run a marathon without training! Arrange yourself three or four mock interviews, with different people, to help you to articulate your opinions and prepare for some questions that catch you off guard.

If you are lucky enough to get an offer, make sure you work incredibly hard and earn your place. The offer I received was A*A*AA, there really is no room for complacency. It doesn't sound glamorous, but you have to work bloody hard. I have always found, with whatever subjects that I have taken, that you get out what you put in.

So, in terms of your application for Oxbridge, remember that there are brilliant courses out there at amazing universities, really make sure that Oxbridge is the right course for you

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before you decide to apply. Be yourself and be natural, if you don't believe what you are saying, they won't. And finally, level the playing field. Schools like Eton will have interview practice every week. Give yourself a fighting chance with some mock interviews so you know what to expect when you get asked an unexpected question. Good luck, and whatever way your

application goes, you will end up in the right place for you!