



Aspirational & Oxbridge Pathway Pupil Guide



Wanstead High School

Getting Ready for Oxbridge and other top third universities

Year 12 programme

Super curricular activities and reading

Broader reading is essential for applications to Oxbridge. We will direct you to Oxbridge reading lists and subject specific, super curricular reading lists. These will broaden your knowledge of your subject, enhance the depth of your understanding and provide key points to discuss in your UCAS personal statement and interview. We will also encourage you to follow your own interests, current affairs and keep up to date with new research in your chosen academic field.

Extra-curricular activities

Oxbridge values excellence outside of the classroom, as it demonstrates that applicants are well-rounded individuals. We encourage pupils to demonstrate that they can serve the school and wider community and to be actively involved with the extracurricular life of the school.

EPQ

The EPQ is something Oxbridge Pathway pupils should consider. The EPQ is a 5000-word research project that also includes a formal presentation. The final presentations for pupils are presented to a small audience and this formal presentation further develops pupils' communication skills.

Subject study groups and Debating club

We encourage pupils to form small study and discussion groups for each subject and join the debating club. These can provide a forum for pupils to discuss their super-curricular activities and findings, promote essential thinking in their subjects and grow their confidence and ability to debate and present with flair.

University visits

Pupils will be taken on a visit to an Oxbridge university to experience the city, college-based environment, meet with tutors and where possible, attend guest lectures. Oxford and Cambridge are universities with years of history and ancient traditions, and this can be quite intimidating for many pupils, and so it is really important that some of the myths surrounding Oxbridge are challenged and demystified. Visiting supports the decision-making process for pupils.

Summer schools

Both Oxford and Cambridge run a number of summer school opportunities, alongside other organisations such as the Sutton Trust. We will advertise details of all of these opportunities for pupils and encourage them to apply and attend if they are at no cost or a low cost to pupils. These summer schools are often focused on the application process and how to succeed in getting a place, as well as providing academic enrichment based on subject interest.



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Did you know?

There are over 50,000 different university courses in the UK. There will be a course out there that's right for you. University graduates tend to earn more and graduates from top universities earn even more, so aim high. However, more than 41,000 students drop out of their course so do your research to make sure you pick the right course.

Some questions to consider and useful links:

Future Plans

What will you do next?

How will you select a university course?

<https://digital.ucas.com/search>

<https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/courses>

<https://www.unifrog.org/sign-in?return=/student/oxbridge/start>

How will you decide which universities you'll apply to?

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2023/sep/09/the-guardian-university-guide-2024-the-rankings>

How does student finance work?

<https://www.gov.uk/student-finance>

<https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/advice/student-finance/how-student-finance-actually-works>

<https://www.ucas.com/sfe>

Skills Development

What skills do you need to study your chosen course?

<https://digital.ucas.com/search>

<https://www.uniadmissions.co.uk/application-guides/6-essential-skills-for-university-students/>

<https://www.oxford-royale.com/articles/13-skills-university/>



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What super-curricular opportunities are there?

What are you going to do outside the classroom? Apply for activities and events (e.g. summer schools, open days, taster sessions).

<https://www.opendays.com/>

<https://summerschools.suttontrust.com/how-to-apply/>

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/widening-participation/learners/year-12-and-13/year-12-sutton-trust-summer-schools>

<https://www.unifrog.org/know-how/a-guide-to-summer-schools>

<https://www.unitasterdays.com/search.aspx?TID=9>

<https://www.ucas.com/advisers/help-and-training/develop-your-skills-adviser/events-and-summer-schools-prepare-students-higher-education>

<https://www.opendays.com/>

Making the most of existing resources (e.g. reading, pre-recorded sessions, MOOCs)? Looking for ideas, try Unifrog for MOOCs and refer to both the Oxford and Cambridge resources lists.

Skills Showcase

Keep a record of super-curricular activities using the Super-curricular Reflective Log (What? So what? Now what?)

Draft your personal statement.



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Preparation

How are you going to prepare for interviews at Cambridge, Oxford and for Medicine? How are you going to prepare for admissions tests?

Oxford

https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Oxford%20admissions%20tests%20-%20candidate%20preparation%20checklist.pdf

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/guide/admissions-tests>

Cambridge

<https://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/preparation-materials/#:~:text=We%20recommend%20that%20you%20prepare,that%20you%20may%20be%20asked>

<https://www.admissionstesting.org/blog/preparing-for-a-university-admissions-test/>

Medicine

<https://www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/making-an-application/admissions-tests>

<https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/applying-to-uni/medicine-admissions-tests>

<https://www.admissionstesting.org/for-test-takers/bmat/preparing-for-bmat/>

<https://www.ucat.ac.uk/prepare/>



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Year 13 programme and continued support

UCAS support

Pupils applying for these courses must submit their UCAS application by early-October which is earlier than the UCAS deadline for other courses. Through workshops and drop-down day activities, we ensure that pupils are ready for this earlier deadline and that their application reflects the skills required for these courses.

Personal statement support

In addition to your tutor support and support from the Sixth Form team, Access Wadham College supports our pupils with personal statement workshops and guidance related to the Oxbridge process.

Aptitude test support

Oxford and Cambridge run their own subject based aptitude tests, for example Oxford runs an exam called the History Aptitude Test (HAT) for history. Subject study groups will focus on providing exam guidance, past papers, mark schemes and a marked mock exam, before entry to the tests themselves which occur in late October / start of November. These are tests that are not examining A Level subject content, but seek to provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in new contexts, or grapple with completely unfamiliar concepts. These tests are challenging, but most pupils who undertake them find them an interesting and enjoyable insight into study at a higher level. We have links with Access Wadham College who give additional guidance to our pupils related to these tests.

Interview preparation

The most distinctive feature of the Oxbridge application process is the formal interview. These occur at the end of December half term and involve the pupils travelling to the university. Our programme will provide support, guidance, practice and mock interviews in the lead up to the interview, to ensure that pupils are as prepared as can be.

Academic support

The final challenge for all Oxbridge candidates is ensuring that they get the grades they need to meet their offers. Oxbridge usually give a grade combination to the effect of A*AA or A*A*A. The Sixth Form team will support you to ensure that you achieve the grades you need.



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Super-Curricular Reflective Log

We advise that you keep a super-curricular reflective log and regularly update this in preparation of writing your personal statement and completing your application. Set yourself some goals, for example it could be to watch a relevant Podcast or TED talk once per week, or to boost your wider reading around your areas of interest by reading a new book or article each half-term. It is not enough to simply list the things you have done. What is important is that you reflect and communicate: what you learnt / found interesting and what it prompted you to do next (another super-curricular activity for example). There are many different experiences you could reflect upon. Some of the main ones include:

Reading (book, article etc)
Podcast/online lecture/TED talk
EPQ

Summer school/Taster Day
Attending a club/discussion
Writing an article/essay competition

Online course (e.g., MOOC from Unifrog)
Giving or seeing a presentation
Work experience/volunteering

Access Wadham College suggested format for your reflective log

	WHAT? What you did	SO WHAT? What you learnt	NOW WHAT? What you did next	
Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the activity and reference the source A description of what happened. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did you find most interesting and why? Give academic detail. Has this experience changed your perspective or left you with further questions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are you going to do next? Are you going to sign up to an online course to explore this topic further? Are you going to research the work of a particular academic? 	Links/Notes



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Super-Curricular Reflective Log



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Guide to completing the Super-curricular Reflective log

Access Wadham College suggests using these paragraph scaffolds and sentence starters as a guide to help you begin constructing your personal statement and incorporate elements of your super-curricular activities into it.

Paragraph Scaffold	Sentence Starters
1) WHAT? Select something that you have done	WHAT? Reading / Attending / Listening / Work Experience in / Participating in / Visiting
2) SO WHAT? What were you struck by? What questions did it raise?	SO WHAT? I was struck by / I was particularly interested in / This linked to
3) NOW WHAT? What did you do to find out more?	NOW WHAT? This led me to / To further my understanding/ In response, I / Fascinated, I / Extending my knowledge, I
4) What struck you about this?	

Access Wadham College examples for Biochemistry and Maths- not to be plagiarised!

Reading A Very Short Introduction to Molecular Biology **(1)**, I was struck by a segment on regulatory RNA molecules. I was particularly fascinated by the concept of RNA used in the regulation of gene expression **(2)**. This led me to a Nature article about Riboswitches: RNA molecules that can bind to a ligand and change their physical conformation **(3)**. This happens in the expression region of the riboswitch, and determines whether the RNA is transcribed or not... Taking biochemistry at degree level would allow me to learn more about cell function and control... **(4)**"

Biochemistry



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Guide to completing the Super-curricular Reflective log

Before reading "Finding Moonshine" by Marcus du Sautoy **(1)**, I had only considered symmetries as a property of shapes which appear the same on both sides of a line, but through reading this book I discovered that symmetries are wider reaching than I had expected. These symmetries can even be used to prove things including the inexistence of a formula to solve quintic equations: despite their seeming irrelevance to algebra and polynomials **(2)**. Reading this book was conveniently timed with further research on Group Theory **(3)**; this allowed me to understand what du Sautoy described in the later parts of the book, especially the chapter which dramatized the race to find new sporadic groups in the 20th century **(4)**.

Maths

Using this guidance, try to create your own subject specific paragraph below.

Wider Reading

What is wider reading?

Wider reading is going beyond what is covered in class. Wider reading covers more than just reading too, you can watch documentaries, enter competitions and more.

Wider reading is a personal exploration of the subjects you enjoy. It will show your A-level examiners that you have a good understanding of the subject and demonstrate your passion for the degree during a university interview. Through reading, you will also gain a deeper interest before you start your degree.

Why Is Wider Reading Important?

Wider reading is important when writing your personal statement as it is your opportunity to talk passionately about the subject and show you are taking an invested interest in it.

It is important to read critically by thinking carefully about the arguments, assumptions and evidence presented by the author. The Admissions Tutor is likely to ask you questions on this during your Interview, so be prepared with your thoughts and opinions.

Wider reading journal

Book Title & Author:
Date Read:
Author's Main Argument & Key Ideas: Look out for any points of view which the author supports or challenges. Make note of any new concepts that the author proposes and any key debates with which the author engages.
Useful Facts Learnt: Note down any interesting/useful bits of information you picked up.
Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is the author? Are they known for advocating a particular position?• Type of source? What are the limitations of this text as a source?• Are there any challenges I make to the author's argument? How does their argument fit with the time/geography/politics of writing?• What might or might not affect any bias of the source? Which bits do I agree or disagree with?• What questions might I like to ask the author?

Wider reading journal

Book Title & Author:
Date Read:
Author's Main Argument & Key Ideas: Look out for any points of view which the author supports or challenges. Make note of any new concepts that the author proposes and any key debates with which the author engages.
Useful Facts Learnt: Note down any interesting/useful bits of information you picked up.
Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is the author? Are they known for advocating a particular position?• Type of source? What are the limitations of this text as a source?• Are there any challenges I make to the author's argument? How does their argument fit with the time/geography/politics of writing?• What might or might not affect any bias of the source? Which bits do I agree or disagree with?• What questions might I like to ask the author?

Wider reading journal

Book Title & Author:
Date Read:
Author's Main Argument & Key Ideas: Look out for any points of view which the author supports or challenges. Make note of any new concepts that the author proposes and any key debates with which the author engages.
Useful Facts Learnt: Note down any interesting/useful bits of information you picked up.
Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is the author? Are they known for advocating a particular position?• Type of source? What are the limitations of this text as a source?• Are there any challenges I make to the author's argument? How does their argument fit with the time/geography/politics of writing?• What might or might not affect any bias of the source? Which bits do I agree or disagree with?• What questions might I like to ask the author?