

Interview Podcast Transcript

The transcription does not include speech errors, false starts, and various filler words.

[0:00] [Music: Little Idea by scottholmesmusic.com]

[0:07] Narrator: All shortlisted applicants are invited for interview in Oxford. Interviews happen over a few weeks in December and you'll find out whether you've been invited about a week to ten days before. The invitation will usually come from the college considering your application but not always.

People often worry about being interviewed, particularly if they haven't experienced anything like this before. So we thought we'd try and explain what it might be like when you're here, so you can know what to expect.

[0:36] [Music fades out. Sounds of traffic and bicycle bell fade in]

[0:39] Narrator: Applicants make their own way to Oxford by public transport or some even get a lift with family, friends or supporters.

If you need help with the cost of getting to Oxford, and you're coming from somewhere in the UK, just let the college that's invited you to interview know. Nelli, the Access Officer at University college, is here to tell you a bit more about this.

[0:57] [Sounds of traffic fade out. Sounds of typing on a computer and clicking the computer mouse fade in]

[0:59] Access Officer, University college: We are really aware that for some students they're booking to come from quite far away at very short notice and so for students within the UK we have some ability to help out with the cost of travel to interview and this is for students that are eligible for free school meals at school, maybe have been in local authority care or for some other reason would find it really hard to fund the cost of travel. And what we can do is provide you with some funding to support that travel via public transport to Oxford to make it slightly easier for you to come to Oxford to interview.

[1:40] Narrator: When you get to college, you'll arrive at the entrance lodge, all colleges have one—they're a bit like a reception and are staffed by porters.

[1:47] [Sound of porter welcoming student to Keble college; lodge door opens and closes. Voice fades out]

[1:52] Narrator: Usually porters are around most hours of the day to look out for you. Like Mick, a porter at University college, for example.

[1:58] Porter (University college): It is going to be an exciting time, a bit of a nervy time for everyone. 24/7 we're here to provide support for all of the students, so during admissions, unfamiliar territory, etc. at least there's one place that they know they can go to.

[2:14] Narrator: There are also student helpers on hand to look out for you, to help you find your room when you arrive [sound of keys] and to show you around college [sound of walking around quad]. You'll have your own room and accommodation and food is free while you're here.

[2:25] [Music: Little Idea by scottholmesmusic.com]

[2:26] Narrator: But what about the interviews themselves? Most people will have two or more interviews but this varies depending on the course.

Interviews normally take place in colleges but some subjects interview in the department. Don't worry, you'll be told where you need to be and at what time, and the student helpers and porters we mentioned earlier will help you get there.

[2:44] [Music fades out. Sound of porter giving directions fades in and then out again.]

[2:47] Narrator: But why do we even interview? We asked Tamsin, a tutor in Earth Sciences, why it's helpful.

[2:53] Tamsin (Earth Sciences tutor): So we do interviews to probe potential. So we're lucky enough to get more applicants who on paper qualify for our course than we're able to make offers to, so we need to go a bit deeper than the UCAS form. And we also want to look at somebody's potential to get a lot out of being at Oxford, a lot out of our course and to develop as a student during the course. And so that's why we interview people really, to understand that and to understand their motivation for the course.

[3:22] Narrator: And don't worry if you're nervous. It's normal to be a bit nervous beforehand. Jemima who is now a Geography student at Oxford was really nervous for her interview.

[3:31] Jemima (student): Before the interviews, it was obviously quite a nerve-wracking experience. Apart from the odd time that maybe I'd practised with my teachers, I'd never really had a conversation with an academic before and that can be quite a daunting prospect but actually once you get in there and you realise they're human beings [laughs], they're kind of like your teachers, they want you to do well. They're not out there to catch you out. The questions that they ask you can be challenging but they're trying to get you to think in different ways and actually it's really fun to have that kind of conversation. I'd never had a conversation like that before with someone.

[4:18] Narrator: Tutors will do their best to put you at ease, like Matt who's a Politics tutor.

[4:22] [Sound of door opening. Matt welcomes student called Rosie into the interview room.]

[4:27] Matt (Politics tutor): So to put candidates at ease at the start of an interview we will just start very gently by introducing ourselves and usually offering a glass of water and just saying who everyone in the room is, so it's just a bit of small talk to make sure that the candidate is clear what's going on, who's around and they just feel immediately at ease, is the aim. We will then usually explain the parameters of the interview, so how long it is and how many questions are likely to be discussed, so again that the applicant just gets a sense of what's likely to happen.

[5:01] Narrator: The structure of your interview might be a bit different, depending on the course you're applying for. You might be given something to look at beforehand, like a problem sheet or a literary extract, or you might be given something to look at when you're in the interview itself.

[5:12] Tamsin (Earth Sciences tutor): Quite a few of my colleagues will bring different rock specimens in with something particular about them.

[5:17] Narrator: Tamsin, an Earth Sciences tutor.

[5:19] Tamsin (Earth Sciences tutor): And, first of all, it will just be...can you describe what you're seeing, describe this rock? And then there'll be some particular observation that they'll try and tease out and then start to think about what the physical processes are behind creating that particular feature of the rock, for example.

[5:38] Narrator: Nick, a Psychology tutor.

[5:40] Nick (Psychology tutor): So sometimes it's like a psychology experiment, so one I've used in the past is about an experiment that was done many years ago where they measured people's ability to remember numbers in English or in Welsh, and it turns out that this ability's slightly reduced in Welsh speakers and sort of think about why that might be.

[5:59] Narrator: Matt, a Politics tutor.

[6:00] Matt (Politics tutor): In my interviews for Politics, I always used a reading prompt, so I would give the students about fifteen or twenty minutes before the interview to read a passage and then start by asking them first of all just to comprehend what was said in that passage and then ask them some more broader analytical questions about it.

[6:19] Narrator: But what happens if you get stuck solving the problem you've been given, or aren't sure how to interpret the data or pre-reading you've been asked to look at? What if tutors ask you a difficult question that you're not sure how to answer?

[6:29] Nick (Psychology tutor): In every interview I want to get to a point where the person doesn't immediately know the answer because one of the really important things that we want to look at is, how does the person think when they don't already know the answer.

[6:39] Narrator: Nick, a Psychology tutor.

[6:41] Nick (Psychology tutor): Certainly we are ready to prompt them and we don't want anybody to be sitting there for minutes, but I think one of the things we'll do in an interview is give people the space and time to think and we might, if they're sitting there a bit puzzled, we might ask somebody to start thinking out loud, say what their first thoughts are and then develop it from there.

[7:02] Narrator: Many students at Oxford, like Ope who is now a student in Law, will look back on their interview and remember not knowing how to answer all the questions they were asked.

[7:10] Ope (student): At any moment where your mind goes blank or you're struggling to answer the question, they're quite helpful in terms of prompting. They might be really good in terms of rephrasing the question to make it more clear. One thing I just recommend in general is any time you are stuck or struggling, just feel free to ask questions because at the end of the day they want to see you think and they want you to be in a position where you can understand the question.

[7:37] Narrator: So any advice from tutors for preparing for interviews?

[7:41] Nick (Psychology tutor): So for me the most important thing, in terms of preparation, is being ready to enter into an academic discussion. So being ready to think about information that you're given, think about it critically and creatively. If you're asked a question, to be prepared to stop for a moment and, not say the first thing that comes into your head, but be prepared to think about the question, why you're being asked it, what it might mean.

[8:04] Tamsin (Earth Sciences tutor): If something's on your personal statement, have some thoughts on the matter, because that's often the question that you'll get asked, you'll get asked something from your personal statement as the kind of 'setting you at your ease' question.

[8:15] Matt (Politics tutor): Reading around your subject, especially into topics that you really find interesting I think is valuable preparation because it's just more enjoyable, so if students read, let's say they're particularly interested in human rights in Africa, if they read some stuff about that, that would be really good preparation, especially if, as they're reading it, they are thinking constantly: do

I agree with this? Is this actually a convincing argument? Is this person using the right sort of evidence? Could I propose some ways to improve this work? That sort of critical reading is really valuable.

[08:51] [Music: Little Idea by scottholmesmusic.com]

[08:53] Narrator: Once your interviews are over for the day, you might like to relax in the Junior Common Room with student helpers and other students here for interviews [sounds of JCR (pool table, talking, piano playing)] or go for a walk around town. You might have time during the day to do this too as there can be a bit of waiting around.

[09:10] [Sounds of lunch hall fades in]

[09:13] Narrator: When it comes to meal times, you can eat in the college dining hall. Did I already say that food is free?

[09:19] Connie (student): So it was quite handy at the time that we were at interview that we were able to eat three meals a day in hall.

[09:25] [Sounds of lunch hall stop]

[09:25] Narrator: This is Connie, she's now a PPE student at Oxford.

[09:28] [Sounds of lunch hall begin again]

[09:28] Connie (student): This was really convenient and it does get you quite in the swing of things of being in college. We also got to hang out with other students who were interviewing at the same time as us and meal times became quite a social space, which was really good especially if you didn't want to get involved in the activities. For example, I had my A-level mocks in the same week as my Oxford interviews so I was doing quite a bit of studying outside of my interviews, so it was quite nice to be able to meet other people at meal times.

[09:58] [Lunch sounds fade]

[09:59] Narrator: When your interviews are all done, and you've been told you can leave Oxford, it's time to head home and relax.

[10:03] [Sound of kettle boiling and mugs clinking]

[10:07] Narrator: It's really hard to know how the interviews went and even students that get an offer can feel like their interviews didn't go very well. It's easy to dwell on the things you wish you had and hadn't said but, try not to worry, everyone's in the same boat!

[10:19] Connie (student): On the journey home, my friend and I who I travelled down with were a bit, like, [laughs], we're never going back there again, but then we got offers.

[10:27] Luke (student): So after my interviews at Oxford I felt quite happy. I came out and I felt, that was the best I could do.

[10:36] Ope (student): So I actually had mixed feelings, just because of how I thought both interviews went. I thought one of them was just ok and the other was really, really difficult, I thought I'd completely failed that actually. I think how you feel after the interview is hardly a reflection of how it actually went, it's really difficult to tell.

[10:52] Narrator: And it won't be too long to wait before you find out if you've got an offer, you should hear by mid-January.

[10:57] [Music: Little Idea by scottholmesmusic.com]

[11:03] Narrator: Special thanks goes to University college, Keble college and all the people that participated in this podcast.

[11:17] [Music fades out]

[11:19] END