



English at Oxford



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

●● *I like the way English moves through history.
If you are studying stories, I think it is really
important to make sure that you cover that
historical ground. You're looking at the
development of an art form, you're looking
at the development of culture. ●●*

Barbara, Wadham College

Why English?

English is a deeply rewarding degree subject, which affords a unique way of appreciating the cultural history of England and of other countries in which English has been a major literary medium. You will study a challenging and diverse range of literature, including poetry, fiction, drama, and prose, and get to know the writings of particular authors, movements and periods in great detail.

At Oxford we are looking for English students who would consider the prospect of reading a hundred or more books a year a pleasurable challenge. You must be prepared to work hard, and you should enjoy writing and want to develop your skills as a critic – you will be required to produce a substantial amount of written work every term. You will need to be able to work independently, as well as respond to guidance given by your tutors.

At the end of three years we hope you will have an extensive and detailed knowledge of the history of English language and literature, and that you will have had the chance to specialise in those areas that particularly interest you.

An English degree will equip you with analytical and writing skills that are readily transferable into many other situations and professions. English graduates go on into a great variety of careers; some of our recent students talk about what their degree has meant for their life after Oxford at the end of this prospectus.

●● The unique thing about the Oxford course is that it takes you from the very beginning of English literature to the present day. This doesn't just mean you come out having studied all periods, but more that you develop a real understanding of how language evolved, seeing how one era leads on to the next. It's amazing to study an Old English myth in first year and then see its themes or images reappear again and again in works written hundreds of years later.

Teaching is done through tutorials, which are sessions with a couple of students and a tutor where you discuss your essays or classwork. Before I came here, tutorials were the thing that I both liked and feared most about Oxford. I got it into my head that they would be terrifying. Actually, they're the most helpful and inspiring way of being taught; you can ask your tutors any questions you have, and you really get to work through your own ideas with them, seeing where they work and where they don't. English at Oxford isn't just about learning facts, it's about developing your own thoughts, and I really can't think of a more fun way to approach texts. ●●

●● *In English you get to look at everything – philosophy, history, the arts. In a way it's like a degree in conversation.* ●●

Cassie, Regent's Park College



Emma

St Anne's College

4

●● I loved English at school because I found it brought together so many ideas from other subjects. At Oxford it just gets even better! You have the luxury of your work revolving around reading your favourite novels and poems, and discussing them with tutors. The combination of breadth and depth means that you can hone your skills of analysis and explanation on a weekly basis. Your ideas are always shifting and changing, both inside the library and out, which is one of the most rewarding things about the Oxford experience.

I found the admissions process a little overwhelming, but it helps if you take it one step at a time and try to see it as rewarding in itself. Discussing your ideas in front of a world expert is nerve-wracking but thrilling, and the tutors are always keen to draw out your best. It's a good idea to practise reading unfamiliar poetry, just to get used to the idea of processing your own ideas. Everything you read will be helpful, and seize every chance to discuss your passion with other people – vocalising your ideas in front of parents, teachers, friends and even pets will make sitting down for interview more comfortable! ●●

Kathryn

St Edmund Hall



Why Oxford?

We believe that Oxford offers the best English course in the country, along with outstanding tuition, unsurpassed library resources, and impressive IT facilities.

Here, you have the benefit of being taught both in your college and in the Faculty of English. College teaching is the bedrock of the undergraduate experience at Oxford. In each term your tutors will arrange a combination of tutorials (one or two students with a tutor) and classes (with your college year group), so that you benefit both from the intensive individual attention of the tutorial and from discussing your ideas with your peers. It is usual to have one tutor for each paper, and this means that the tutor gets to know you and your work well, and is able to tailor the course according to your own individual interests, while guiding your progress throughout. The weekly tutorial, often based around your own essay, gives you the chance to explore and clarify your ideas about the author or subject.

In the English Faculty, lectures are given by tutors from all colleges, which supplement and complement your college work, so you have access to the expertise of tutors from the whole University as well as those in your college. Oxford tutors are active academic researchers at the forefront of their specialisms, so whether you are attending tutorials or lectures, the opportunity to study a tutor's own particular area of research is extremely advantageous for you as a student.

During most of your undergraduate career you will be studying one or two papers in each term, and will thus have two or three tutorials a fortnight, supplemented by one or two college classes each week. Most tutors will require you to write an essay for discussion at each tutorial. You will also normally attend a number of lecture courses and seminars in the English Faculty – you can decide how best to fit these around your college work.

●● *Think aloud. Tutors are interested in the process that goes on in your head.* ●●

Mehrunissa, Merton College

Our English Course

The English degree at Oxford is one of the broadest in the country, allowing you to work on all historical periods of English literature and language from 650 AD to the present day, as well as allowing you to specialise through optional papers which cover particular authors or subjects, and to pursue research on a dissertation topic entirely of your choosing.

When you arrive in Oxford, you begin at either end of the spectrum, with first year papers on Early Medieval Literature, Victorian Literature, and Modern Literature, as well as an introductory course in Language and Literature, which is designed to furnish you with skills that you can draw on for the remainder of your studies.

As you progress into your second and third years, you will take papers covering the period 1350 – 1830, effectively completing the period span between the papers you took in first year. Our period papers are compulsory, but each offers an enormous amount of choice in terms of the particular authors you choose to study, and the approaches you decide to take in your work. Alongside this, you will study Shakespeare – our only compulsory author. The course is completed with two further papers giving a wide choice of specialism: a thematic and often cross-period paper, chosen from a long list of

options; and the dissertation, for which you will have a tutor's advice, but on which you will pursue independent research on a topic of your own choice.

Alternatively, in the second and third years, you can follow our specialist course in Medieval Language and Literature, or 'Course II'. Period papers for Course II cover the literatures of England from 650 to 1550, and you'll also be introduced to textual criticism (in which you will begin the study of many aspects of manuscript culture) and the history of the English language up to c. 1800.

At the end of your first year, there is a set of exams, one for each period you have studied, and a portfolio assessment for the introductory paper. You must pass each paper in order to pass your first year as a whole, and you must pass the year to progress into second year, although your marks will not be counted towards your final degree.

In the second and third years, the four period papers are assessed by three-hour examinations at the end of the third year. The Shakespeare paper is examined by a portfolio of written work, and the Special Option and Dissertation papers are examined by extended essays. This means that submitted work will comprise nearly half of your final assessment.

💡 I never planned to be a medievalist. I had never done any medieval literature before I started university, and I didn't know what to expect, but when I studied Middle English in my first year, I just fell in love with it. "Course II", as the medieval course is known, is great if you know what you feel passionately about, and you really want to throw yourself into studying it. It's only at a university like this that there would be a chance to study some of the more esoteric stuff that other undergraduate students would love to get their hands on.

Because there's a small group of people doing Course II each year, there's a good team spirit, and you're always getting together with people who are excited by the same kind of literature as you. You can get your teeth into the bits of literature most people don't normally explore, and in a depth no other undergraduate course can offer. It's a bit of an adventure, but I think by the end of first year you get to know what you like. If you liked languages at A-level, or if you just like doing something a little bit off-the-beaten track, Course II is probably for you! 💡💡



Claire

Lady Margaret Hall



Joint Courses with English

We run three joint honours programmes: English and Modern Languages, History and English, and Classics and English.

English and Modern Languages is a four year programme. You will study one modern language alongside English – the most popular languages are French, German, or Spanish, but it is also possible to study Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Modern Greek, Czech, or Celtic, some of them from scratch. You will have dedicated language teaching throughout the whole of your degree. Students spend their third year of the course abroad.

Classics and English students can specialise in Latin, Greek, or both. If you have learned classical languages in school, the course usually lasts three years, with dedicated language work throughout; if you don't have any Latin and Greek when you arrive, you can spend a preliminary year getting up to speed on your languages, making it a four year programme.

History and English is a three year programme. It requires you to think critically about how we define 'history' and 'literature', and about how the two disciplines interrelate and overlap.

In all three of these joint degrees, you select some papers from the normal range available in the courses of the two subjects you are studying.

You can work out a programme of study with your tutor that suits you best. It may be that you would like to take 'matching' papers across your subjects, giving you the chance, for example, to study medieval history and medieval literature side by side. On the other hand, there is no requirement that students specialise in particular areas across subjects, so you can also put together individual combinations of papers. In addition, each joint degree provides unique opportunities for you to take specialised interdisciplinary papers, known as Bridge Papers or Link Papers, which are expressly designed to connect the two sides of your subject together.

Our joint degrees generally best suit students who have a strong ability in and commitment to both subjects, and who can give evidence of a genuine intellectual curiosity about the way the two subjects inform one another. Students in this position often find our joint courses very rewarding, and do extremely well.

Unlike English, not all joint courses are offered at all undergraduate colleges, so do check the main University prospectus when deciding where to apply.

Read more at:

www.english.ox.ac.uk/prospective-undergraduates/joint-schools

Since I had no idea how to choose between Classics and English, life became easier when I found out a Joint Schools degree would allow me to study both. Since then, the trick has been learning to give equal attention to each aspect of my course: life is busy (but fun!) for a CLE student. The course is tailored to draw links between my two subjects – a highlight has been studying Renaissance literature, since sixteenth century authors were so influenced by classical precedents. I also concentrated on Latin Literature over a span of a few centuries, although Greek (or both languages, for the brave) is an option. At first, as the only CLE student in my year at Worcester College, I was worried I might feel isolated, but the school is so small that all the CLE students in the University are taught together, giving us a chance to catch up and compare notes!

I loved my first year as a Joint Honours student and am continuing to enjoy the course into my Finals. My subjects may seem disparate, but the course works to bring them together and I now feel the two are mutually dependent – I can't read Shakespeare without thinking about Ovid, and vice versa!

Laura

*Classics and English,
Worcester College*

Having studied the International Baccalaureate, I was accustomed to experiencing breadth and variety in my work, something that the Joint Honours English and Modern Languages course allows me to continue enjoying. I often find myself drawing interesting links between my reading in both languages, and find that the skills I develop in both subjects are incredibly complementary. During my first year, I found that my language work in French made me more attentive to the intricacies of the English language; through translating passages of French into English, I grew more aware of the stylistic decisions that authors are forced to make when composing a literary text.

Striking a balance between English and French is something that took a bit of practice, but my college structures my course so that I write an English essay one week and a French essay the next, filling the rest of my time with translation work for French and reading for English. When applying, I was a bit concerned about the workload of a Joint Honours degree but I have found that being able to alternate between two different subjects is very refreshing and means that my work routine feels less repetitive and more rewarding!

Emily

*English and French,
The Queen's College*





How to Apply

You apply for English and its joint courses at Oxford through UCAS, in the same way as for any other degree. In addition to your UCAS form, you will be required to submit one or more pieces of recent written work, and almost all applicants must also register for and take the English Literature Admissions Test. More information about the ELAT can be found at: www.elat.org.uk.

A step-by-step guide to the application process, detailing all entrance requirements, can be found in the University prospectus at: www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/apply

To become a student at Oxford you need to be accepted by a particular college, though you apply through a central admissions system. You can read English as a single subject at any of the undergraduate colleges, though the joint courses are not offered everywhere, so please check carefully when making your application. If you can't decide which college to name as your preference, you are welcome to make an open application and leave the choice to the Admissions Office computer – 20% of our applicants do this each year. Details of all the different undergraduate colleges can be found in the University prospectus at: www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/colleges

Applications must reach us by 15 October. Once you have submitted your application, it will be assessed on the basis of your UCAS personal statement, your school or college record (including your results or predicted results at A-level or equivalent), your submitted written work, and the results of your ELAT test, according to our published selection criteria. If you are shortlisted, you will be invited to interviews, which take place in December each year.

If shortlisted, you may be invited to interview at a different college from that of your original application. This is the result of a reallocation procedure undertaken by all colleges, in order to give everyone the fairest chance of gaining a place at Oxford. During your visit, you may also be interviewed by more than one college; this too helps to ensure that the best applicants get into Oxford, regardless of the strength of the competition at different colleges. Offers of places are made on the basis of your performance at interview, in addition to all of the criteria detailed above. We continue to work to refine our selection procedures, and our updated criteria and processes should be consulted on the website before you make an application.

Open Days

You are welcome to visit Oxford at any time, and it is a great idea to do so in advance of your application, so that you can get a sense of the city and the different colleges. However, the very best time to come and visit is during college and University open days, which take place on various dates throughout the year. Open days give you the chance to meet current students and staff, and often involve subject-specific talks and lectures.

The English Faculty takes part in two University-wide open days each year, in June and September. Further details of all open days can be found at:

<http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/opendays>

Interviews

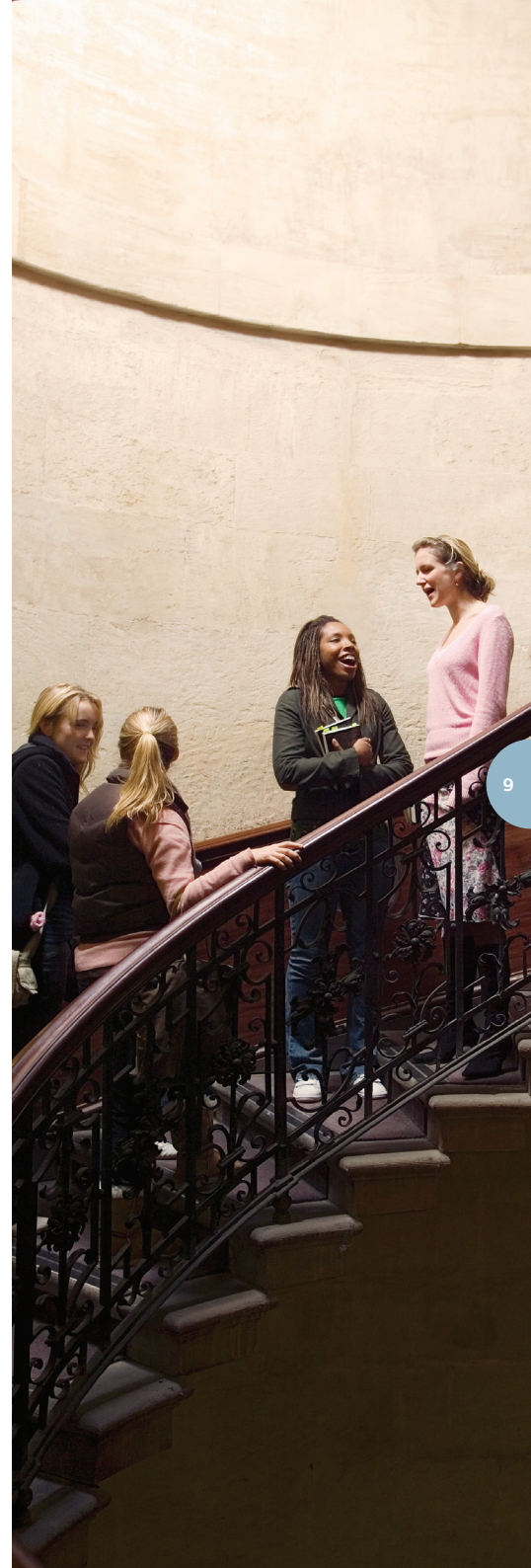
The aim of Oxford interviews is to find out whether you have the potential both to enjoy and to do well in the course here. Entrance for English is very competitive, so the interview gives admissions tutors further evidence to help distinguish between applicants who are equally well-qualified on paper. It is not designed to be an interrogation, and there are no 'right' answers you must give, or stances you must adopt in order to secure a place to study here. The interview is intended to be a stimulating, friendly, and exploratory exercise – a bit like a mini-tutorial.

English tutors will particularly want to talk to you about your reading, and your response to the things you have read. It is therefore a very good idea to brush up on the syllabus texts you have studied in school, as well as devoting some of your own time to additional reading. We don't mind what you read – there are no set texts! However, as for any English degree, it is good preparation to vary your reading between drama, poetry, and prose, and to choose texts from a range of historical periods.

In an interview, you may also be given a short piece of unseen poetry or prose to discuss with tutors. Don't worry if you don't recognise the piece – indeed, that is usually the idea. Just relax and approach it like you would any other text.

You can find out more about Oxford interviews at:

<http://www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/interviews>



Careers



After reading English at Somerville College, I ended up applying for a job in the events industry. I'm currently employed in Bath by a company called Carsonified as an Events Producer, running the "Future of Web Design" conference series. The shows involve international speakers, audiences of 600 to 1300 attendees and run over three days at a time in London, New York and Las Vegas. I'm responsible for my events at every level – from sticking to budget to selling seats.

Although a good portion of my day is spent trawling Facebook and Twitter, it's not all procrastination! A good understanding of social media, to reach our techie target audience and to spot new trends in the industry, is absolutely vital to my job. Getting involved with college arts festivals, university societies and club night promotion during my time at Oxford helped immeasurably in getting a solid grounding in this, so I'd definitely recommend getting proactively stuck into that side of university life.

My day to day work changes depending on whether we're out at a show or back at base planning the next event. There's a good amount of travel, mostly to America, in addition to the more logistical side of event production. When you're juggling so many elements of the event at the same time, great communication and good time management skills are vital – but anyone who's gone through a demanding degree programme will have had these put to the test already! ♥♥

Catherine Clark
Events Producer



Towards the end of my undergraduate degree at Exeter College, I decided that three years of studying English just wasn't enough for me and that I wanted to pursue postgraduate study. I was accepted onto the MSt in English and American Studies at Oxford, a course I chose because of its breadth, the quality of teaching and the library facilities. The MSt was a great experience. I loved being able to study my favourite period, the nineteenth-century, in more depth and the mix of teaching and independent research allowed for freedom whilst not making the transition from undergraduate work too overwhelming. I liked it so much that I applied for PhD studentships, and am now at Keele University writing a thesis on Herman Melville.

Graduate study isn't the best remunerated of professions, even for those of us who have scholarships. The hours are long and you spend a lot of time alone, thinking about a topic that only a handful of others are interested in; you need to be self-motivated. But in intellectual terms, it's very rewarding. Writing a PhD gives you the opportunity to research a subject about which you're truly fascinated, and to (hopefully!) add to the sum of human knowledge. There are also possibilities for travel; I attended a conference in Germany last year. I've also recently taken on some undergraduate teaching, and I'm really enjoying engaging with bright and motivated students and hearing their thoughts on the texts we study – even if it doesn't seem very long since I was in their place! ♥♥


Katie McGettigan
PhD student, Keele University



Having studied Course II for the final two years of my degree, I finished without a clear plan of what I wanted to do and decided that I needed some time to think about it further. I had been granted a scholarship to study in China between my second and third years, so taking some time out to teach English there seemed a natural gap year choice. Through a placement with the British Council I ended up living in a city of more than 12m people, teaching college students and having a fantastic opportunity to immerse myself in a foreign culture.

On returning home just over a year later, I took a job as a Financial Services Auditor with Ernst & Young, working mostly with stockbrokers and banks. I would be the first to admit that Medieval English to Accountancy isn't the most obvious progression. Nevertheless, those oft-mentioned transferable skills that I gained at Oxford have come to use. Skills such as analysing information, assessing arguments, working to deadlines and being able to articulate your opinion, all of which are fostered by studying English at Oxford, will stand you in good stead no matter how near or far from the subject matter your career may end up. ♥♥

Martin Grosvenor
Financial Services Audit Associate



☯☯ Try and read as widely as possible.
Read something that you like the
name of, or read something unexpected,
because the wider your reading,
the easier it is to form opinions. ☯☯

Adam, Worcester College

