

## A-LEVELS REQUIRED

History is recommended but is not a requirement.

## MINIMUM A-LEVEL GRADE REQUIREMENTS

AAA

## ADMISSIONS TEST

HAT – The History Aptitude Test, which consists of one question based on an extract from a primary source, to be answered in one hour. Candidates will be asked to offer thoughtful interpretations of the source without knowing anything about its context. The HAT is a test of skills, of comprehension and of reading- not historical knowledge. It is designed so that candidates should find it equally challenging, regardless of what period(s) they have studied or what school examinations they are taking. This format is new and as a result there are not many sample papers available – it is advised to look at Question 3 in the previous past papers as this is similar to the new style of the paper.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The History and Politics course brings together complementary but distinct disciplines to form a coherent and stimulating programme. The degree not only enables you to set contemporary political problems in their historical perspective, but also equips you to approach the study of the past with the conceptual rigour derived from political science. A special feature of the Oxford course is the chance to choose from a broad range of subjects across the two disciplines, making it possible, for example, to combine medieval history options with analysis of contemporary political systems. The intellectual rigour of this course benefits from the expertise of Oxford's political theorists and historians in the history of political thought. It is also strengthened by the thematic approach taken to European and World history teaching in the first year, combined with an emphasis on interdisciplinarity in a number of both Politics and History papers.

The degree spans three years. At the end of the first year are Preliminary examinations, designed to assess your progress. The final two years are assessed in the form of exams at the end of the third year, with a coursework dissertation (either in history or politics) included as part of the overall grade. The scope of choice is vast, with options to pick more modules in history over politics and vice versa. The following section will proceed to discuss the module choices in greater detail.

## STRUCTURE OF MODULES

### 1st year

In the first year, you will be required to take four modules, with four examinations at the end of the year. As well as this, there will be a coursework assessment on quantitative methods (known as QSTEP).

**In non chronological order, the four examined modules are as follows:**

- Either a period of British OR European history. There are 7 British periods and 4 European to pick from.
- An Introduction to the Theory of Politics OR Theories of the State.
- Practice of Politics
- An Optional Subject. (You will be provided with a list from which you can choose).

### 2nd year and 3rd year

In the second and third year, you will complete the modules needed to sit your final examinations. These will consist of *either* five written papers; one portfolio of submitted essays; one thesis in History or Politics OR four written papers; one portfolio of submitted essays; one extended essay; one thesis in History or Politics.

**The course for the final two years has seven components:**

- A period of the history of the British Isles
- A period of European/World history
- Any two of the five core subjects in Politics
- One of the following combinations:
  - A special subject in History (two papers) and an optional subject in Politics (*either* a core paper not yet taken *or* a further subject)
  - A further subject in History and two optional subjects in Politics
  - A further subject in History, one optional subject in Politics and one special subject in Politics
  - A thesis in *either* History *or* Politics

## APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF CONTACT HOURS PER WEEK

Tutorials: 1 to 2

Lectures: 5

## TUTORIAL & CLASS TESTIMONIAL

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The teaching, for both history and politics comprises of mainly tutorials. These are hour long sessions with yourself, your tutor and 1 to 3 other students. They are not classes in the ordinary sense, in that they are not 'taught'. Instead they follow a discussion based format, wherein you can debate and talk about your ideas with your peers under the guiding watch of your professor. There are approximately one to two of these each week and they will revolve around the essay topic you wrote about in the week leading up to the tutorial.

It is not an orthodox experience by any means, but the benefit in following this teaching structure is immense. It allows for the independent development of opinions, allowing for diverse, lively and vibrant conversations. The tutors will sometimes ask questions or challenge you with some of their ideas and it is up to you to continue their line of thought, either in agreement or disagreement. Altogether, the tutorials foster the academic environment that Oxford is renowned for and administer skills that are transferrable to whichever career route you follow.

## STUDYING & CAREERS

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For a History and Politics degree, contact hours are comparatively less. The degree involves a significant amount of independent study and research, designed to make you think critically and form opinions yourself. The number of tutorials and lectures vary from week to week. In terms of essays, you'll be set approximately 1 or 2 each week, often 1500-2000 words in length. This is where independency plays a large role. It is left to you to assign yourself time to read, to prepare material for and then write your essay. It is better to space it out across different days of the week. Reading is a principal part of this degree and often you'll spend more time reading historians' works than you will writing the essay. Take your time in both this and collecting all the relevant material to ensure that the essay is written in a as detailed and informed manner as possible.

There is no end to the number of career paths a History and Politics degree opens up. Whether you want to go into advanced research, the civil service, teaching, museum curatorship, law conversion- the options are wide reaching. The skills gained are transferrable to almost any job imaginable, which is the beauty of the degree.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT TIPS

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- Give unique interpretations – this may help lure tutors towards offering you an interview as it could provide a hook for discussion
- Display evidence of interest in the subject beyond the school curriculum – again, this will help show that you have genuine passion for the subject
- Grammar! Get someone to proofread your personal statement, especially if spelling and grammar aren't your strong points. This will no doubt make a difference to the impression that the tutors get from you through your written application
- Personal experience – it is a personal statement after all. Try and make yourself as best as possible stand out as an individual through offering insight into aspects of history that have particular significance to you

## INTERVIEW TIPS

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- Be relaxed. The tutors are primarily looking for a candidate suited to tutorial based teaching. Show that you are at ease discussing your subject with them.
- Be passionate. Convey through your language that a certain topic really interests you and you've really thought about it
- Especially with the politics interview, don't be afraid to debate and show your thought process out loud. The tutors are looking for creative minds, minds which think about the world in different ways.
- Make sure you know your personal statement inside out. The interviewers will often ask you questions revolved around the interests you mentioned in your application or the books that you read.

## HAT TIPS

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- Follow a structure – even if you're not able to think of loads of amazing points, a clear structure will make it a lot easier for the tutor marking your work to follow your thought process and generally to read what you've written
- Pay attention to detail – picking up on something relatively obscure is a great way to demonstrate that you are engaging with the historical source
- Read the footnotes! Very important information is often contained here
- Write what interests if you if nothing else; this will prove that you have engaged with the source
- Providence. Try and incorporate this smoothly if possible – it's probably better not just to chuck in a random sentence about the author's background for the sake of it. Though if there's no way other than doing this, at least make the sentence an insightful one!

## ONE THING I WISH I KNEW WHEN I WAS APPLYING

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That more so than knowledge, tutors are looking for students who show a passion and a willingness to learn. You really don't have to know everything.

# Recommended reading/viewing

## **History:**

1. **History: A Very Short Introduction** – John H. Arnold. This probably isn't one to mention on your personal statement (unless you particularly want to), but it will offer great insight into the study of history
2. **The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches** – Brian MacArthur. Again, maybe not a reading to specifically reference on your personal statement, though you could potentially cite any one of the number of speeches in this very useful book. The speeches tend to be ones given by prominent historical figures rather than just 'ordinary' people though so make sure that you are at least aware of this
3. **Postmodernism for Historians** – Callum G. Brown. Regardless of your thoughts on postmodernism, it will be useful to have some sort of understanding on the meaning and implications of the term since it will probably permeate the thought of a lot of the historians whose work you read
4. Suggestions on Modern European History:
  - **Blood and Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German Empire 1871-1918** - Katja Hoyer. This is a slightly niche book choice, however an incredibly good choice for understanding how the nation of Germany was formed and its structure prior to the two World Wars.
  - **The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923** - Robert Gerwarth.
  - **Risorgimento: The History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State** - Lucy Riall.
5. **YouTube!** Generally, this is a very useful way of keeping up with contemporary debate over certain issues. Historians do not just limit themselves to engaging with the past – their work is relevant to a lot of the hot topics that are debated today. It may even be a good idea to check out what some of the more controversial ones have to say about certain political issues, from a historical perspective
6. Books on Witchcraft :
  - **Thinking with Demons** by Stuart Clark
  - **Witches and Neighbour: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft** by R Briggs
7. Suggested general reading for History:
  - **What is history?** by E. H. Carr
  - **Big Questions in History** by Harriet Swain
8. Other interesting historical reads:
  - **The Silk Roads** by Peter Frankopan
  - **The Russia Revolution A People's Tragedy** by Orlando Figes
  - **The History of Algeria** by James Mcdougall
  - **The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation** by Bryan Ward-Perkins
  - **SPQR** by Mary Beard
  - **The Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1470 - 1700** by Diarmuid McCulloch
  - **A Little History of the World** by Ernst Gombrich
  - **1776** by David McCulloch
  - **Orientalism** by Edward W. Said
  - **The Return of Martin Guerre** by Natali Zemon Davis
  - **Imagined Communities** by Benedict Anderson
  - **Virtual History** by Niall Ferguson

# Recommended reading/viewing

## Politics:

1. **An Introduction to Political Philosophy** - Jonathan Wolff. A brilliant first read, as it brings the disciplines of history and politics nicely together (it approaches political theory from a historical perspective).
2. **Why We Get the Wrong Politicians** - Isabel Hardman. Gives a good understanding of contemporary politics. Provides insight into how the British Parliament works and picks out flaws of the system, but also accredits the positive elements.
3. **Why Nations Fail** - Daron Acemoglu & James A. Robinson.
4. **The End of History and the Last Man** - Francis Fukuyama. A thought provoking book which claims that no other form of government could rise to ascendancy or is superior to Western Liberal Democracy. This book is now around thirty years old, so it is interesting to assess in hindsight whether the authors political analyses of the time have proven to be consistent with the current political climate. This is a read which will make you think independently about liberal democracy as a concept.
5. **The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order** - Samuel P. Huntington. This is written from a perspective slightly contradictory to that of Fukuyama and is also an interesting read into the prediction of where democratisation would take the world.
6. Political Theory suggestions:
  - **The Communist Manifesto** - Karl Marx.
  - **On Liberty** - John Stuart Mill.
  - **The Social Contract** - Jean Jacques-Rousseau.
  - **Second Treatise of Government** - John Locke.
  - **Democracy in America** - Alexis de Tocqueville.
  - **On Revolution** - Hannah Arendt