

## A-LEVELS REQUIRED

History

## 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, 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 Oxford History degree offers immense scope for choice, perhaps more so than any other course. You'll learn not just what 'happened' but develop historical skills that will hopefully enable you to gain more of a nuanced understanding for when it comes to interpreting sources. Studying History at Oxford allows for huge flexibility in terms of tailoring your degree to study what you are interested in. The course allows you to study options on any part of British and European history from the declining years of the Roman Empire to the present day. The geographical range is also broad: there are options on North American, Latin American, Asian and African history and you are encouraged to explore history's relationship with other disciplines such as archaeology, economics, politics etc. Most significantly, studying History at Oxford is a unique experience thanks to the tutorial system which gives you one on one access to some of the leading academics on different historical periods.

The History course is three years long and the minimum entry requirement is three As. You aren't assessed on anything in the first year of your degree and are required to take a paper for British History, European History, Historical Methods and can also choose from a range of optional subjects in the last term. There'll be even more scope for choice in second and third year as your studies will incorporate a further subject, special subject and a 12,000 word thesis written on any topic of your interest! Arguably the most important trait required of you as an historian is to have an intrigued mind and thirst for knowledge. Throughout the application process you should seek to demonstrate your critical thinking skills and ability to pay attention to detail.

## STRUCTURE OF MODULES

### 1st year

- History of the British Isles
- European and world history
- Historical methods (choice of Approaches to history; Historiography: Tacitus to Weber; Quantification; one of several foreign text papers)
- Optional subject (choice of around 20 including: Theories of the state; Making England Protestant, 1558–1642; The rise and crises of European socialisms, 1881–1921; Radicalism in Britain, 1965–75)
- **First University examinations: Four written papers**
- **Final University examinations: Four written papers; one portfolio of submitted essays; one extended essay; one thesis; an additional thesis may be offered**
- **Some essays are submitted in year 2**

### 2nd year and 3rd year

Six courses are taken:

- History of the British Isles
- European and world history
- Further subject (choice of about 35, including: China since 1900; The Near East in the age of Justinian and Muhammad, c527–700; The Middle East in the age of empire, 1830–1971; The authority of nature: Race, heredity and crime, 1800–1940; Culture, politics & identity in Cold War Europe 1945–68; Britain at the movies: Film & national identity since 1914)
- Special subject: a paper and an extended essay (choice of about 30, including: The Norman conquest of England; Politics, art and culture in the Italian Renaissance, Venice and Florence c1475–1525; The Scientific Movement in the 17th century; English architecture, 1660–1720; Race, religion and resistance in the US, from Jim Crow to Civil Rights; Britain in the seventies; Terror and forced labour in Stalin's Russia; From Gandhi to the Green Revolution: India, independence and modernity, 1947–73; Nazi Germany, a racial order, 1933–45; The Northern Ireland troubles, 1965–85)
- Disciplines of History
- Thesis

## APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF CONTACT HOURS PER WEEK

Tutorials: 1-2 tutorials a week, depending on your college and what papers you are taking

Lectures: Between 2-4 a week, also depending on which papers you have chosen. However, the lectures for other papers are available for anyone to walk into and there are a number of special lecture series that are run which can also be useful to your papers.

## TUTORIAL & CLASS TESTIMONIAL

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The teaching consists of both tutorials (smaller groups) and classes (bigger groups, more discussion based). Tutorials are the main way that history students are taught and it is their main source of contact time. They are weekly hour long discussions based on the essay that you have submitted in advance. It is an opportunity for your tutor to convey feedback about your essays and for you to discuss the reading you have done that week in detail. Tutorials are a great opportunity to discuss areas that you found particularly interesting and the fact that they are only a small group (between 1-3 people) allows you to receive targeted feedback and discussion. Tutorials are also very useful in helping you prepare for interviews later in life. In order to prepare for history tutorials it is important that you have read well surrounding the topic you are studying so that you can learn and discuss as much as you can during the session. The number of tutorial partners you have will vary depending on the paper you pick, however, on average it will probably be around 2 – though one-on-one tutorials are certainly not unusual.

## STUDYING & CAREERS

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For an Oxford History degree, the brutal truth is that there are not many contact hours. You will have around 3-5 of these a week and are therefore, expected to undertake a lot of independent study. You'll probably be set 1-2 essays a week and be expected to attend one or two lectures for each. Most tutors recommend that you spend three days planning/reading for an essay and one day writing. For the weeks where you are set two essays, you may have a two-week deadline for one of these. The idea is that you allocate different days within the fortnight to each essay – you probably shouldn't just leave one week for both! Writing essays can be, but does not have to be, chaotic as there are enough days in the fortnight (or week if you are just being set one), for you to allocate days for reading, and even take a couple off!

The career prospects for a History degree are endless. Some alumni may choose to do a law conversion course, others might pursue a career in politics or journalism and a considerable few might decide to do something completely different altogether as the course is not a vocational one.

## 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 yourself – after all, these people could potentially end up being your tutors, there's no use pretending to be someone you're not. Also, there's probably something appealing to tutors about a candidate who's able to engage in open and honest conversation
- Look engaged - this is important because it will help make it clear that you do have genuine interest in your subject; to a large extent, tutors are looking for someone who is eager to learn
- Be polite – politeness always goes a long way!
- Smile - again, this will also go a long way towards making you appear 'teachable' and as someone who can remain optimistic despite having to potentially work long hours
- Remain confident – just remember that you've made it to the interview so you're good enough on paper! Even if you're nervous, this does not necessarily have to detract from your self-confidence; while it's probably a good idea not to appear overly confident, retaining some level of self-assuredness can go a long way!

## 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 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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Time management is a really important skill to have when studying History. You don't have many contact hours and you are expected to do a lot of work on your own so reading around the subject, both during the week and before term starts is really important.

# Recommended reading/viewing

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. **The Return of Martin Guerre** – Natalie Zemon Davis. An amusing microhistory which tells the tale of an early modern French imposter. Just be aware if you mention this, that the tutors may potentially ask how you came across the reading as it does not focus on any one broad historical theme or typically known event
5. **The Story of American Freedom** – Eric Foner. This is potentially quite niche but a good read if you're interested in American history
6. **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
7. Books on Witchcraft :
  - o **Thinking with Demons** by Stuart Clark
  - o **Witches and Neighbour: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft** by R Briggs
8. Suggested general reading for History:
  - o **What is history?** by E. H. Carr
  - o **Big Questions in History** by Harriet Swain
9. Other interesting historical reads:
  - o **The Silk Roads** by Peter Frankopan
  - o **The Russia Revolution A People's Tragedy** by Orlando Figes
  - o **The History of Algeria** by James Mcdougall
  - o **The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation** by Bryan Ward-Perkins
  - o **SPQR** by Mary Beard
  - o **The Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1470 - 1700** by Diarmid McCulloch
  - o **A Little History of the World** by Ernst Gombrich
  - o **1776** by David McCulloch
  - o **The Communist Manifesto** by Karl Marx
  - o **Orientalism** by Edward W. Said
  - o **The Return of Martin Guerre** by Natali Zemon Davis
  - o **Imagined Communities** by Benedict Anderson
  - o **Virtual History** by Niall Ferguson