

*This guide is a summary of the information available on both Oxford and Cambridge's websites, with advice you can give to students, and suggestions on how to run mock interviews. The aim is to help students feel more confident in what to expect, more comfortable with the process, and to overcome any worries they might have. If you have any questions or would like any support please contact [admissions@chch.ox.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@chch.ox.ac.uk) For your reference everything you need to know can also be found in Oxford's Teachers' E-guide: [www.oxford-admissions-webapp.org](http://www.oxford-admissions-webapp.org) and guidance for applicants: [www.ox.ac.uk/interviews](http://www.ox.ac.uk/interviews)*

## What should I tell students?

Direct students towards our 'Interviews and Tests' sheet, which will have all the advice and guidance they need (it's also worth a read yourself if you're preparing to give mock interviews). An important message to get across is that interviews are designed so that they \*don't\* require extensive preparation, but mock interviews are useful because they help students feel more comfortable and confident about the process. Students who are 'trained' or who have prepared speeches perform badly at interview because they tend not to be able to think on the spot, which is what we're looking for. It's not necessary for students to learn anything beyond what they're studying in school.

## How do I recreate the interview setting and style?

We'd recommend the interviewer be a senior or unfamiliar teacher, if possible also in an unfamiliar location. Some schools arrange to exchange students to achieve an even more unfamiliar setting. The interviewer doesn't necessarily need to be a subject specialist, just to be able to challenge a student's opinions and make them explain and defend what they say. The real interviews will be about 20-30 minutes long, so it's useful if the mock interview is about the same length. The real interviewer will be taking notes during the interview, so it's useful to do this too (even if it's just doodling!) so the candidate gets used to it. While obviously there are a series of questions to be asked, the interview is more of a tutorial than a quiz so it's useful to try and replicate this style. This can be done by:

- **Prompting.** If a student is struggling to find an answer, it's fine to nudge them in the right direction, e.g. rephrasing a question, approaching a problem from a different angle, or even asking a leading question. The questions in the real interview will be complex and challenging and it's very likely the interviewer will do this.
- **Responding to answers.** A student's answer to the initial question can be the starting point for further discussion and more complex questions. Most questions won't have an immediate or even right or wrong answer, but rather be something the candidate and tutor can work through together.
- **Asking for explanations and clarification.** Candidates will be asked to be precise in what they are saying and explain their opinions, so it's useful to ask things like 'what exactly do you mean by that?', 'how would you define that word?', 'why do you think that?' or 'can you give an example?'
- **Playing devil's advocate.** This is particularly useful in the more philosophical or ethical subjects – really challenge students to defend their opinions and think about their arguments. This could be done by questioning flaws in their arguments, proposing different scenarios, or even asking the student to argue from the opposite side. Students should be prepared to be pushed to the limits of their ability and be really made to think about things.

## Format and questions

Oxford interviews are purely academic, based on knowledge the student will have learnt in school and applying that to new problems. There is no 'typical' Oxford interview – the interview format and questions will be unique to the interviewer and interviewee, but as a rough guide:

The interview often starts with a broad and open question relating to the subject, allowing the candidate to discuss their interests, e.g. 'What is the most important issue in your subject?'. After discussing this, they will go on to more focussed questions, examples of which can be found here:

[www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/interviews/sample-interview-questions](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/interviews/sample-interview-questions) The nature of the questions will vary by subject, but there are some common question types:

- Analysis of a prepared text. In many subjects, e.g. English, candidates are given a passage to read before interview, which is then discussed.
- Description and discussion of an object or image. E.g. Anthropology – a candidate may be given an artefact to describe, and then deduce its origin, material, use etc.
- Practical problems. In Maths and Science-related subjects, candidates will often work through a problem on paper with the interviewer.
- Scenarios. Often used in PPE or Law interviews. There will be rules and changing parameters to apply to a scenario, which will need to be thought through logically.
- Discussion of submitted written work or answers in the admissions test.
- Discussion of reading/experiences from the personal statement
- Current affairs. Candidates are not expected to have an in depth knowledge of the news, but should have an interest in issues relating to their subject, e.g. a Medicine applicant may be asked to discuss the Ebola outbreak.

The interview may only have about 3 main questions or problems, with sub-questions, prompts and discussion within each one. At the end of the interview, the candidate will be asked if they have any questions. It's absolutely fine if they don't have any.

## Arts mock interviews

For many arts subjects it is very common to have an unseen text (e.g. a poem or historical source) which the candidate reads 30 mins before the interview, and then analyses within the interview. One source of suitable practice texts is the admissions tests, e.g. <http://tinyurl.com/ELATpastpapers> and [tinyurl.com/HATpastpapers](http://tinyurl.com/HATpastpapers) The interview could begin with a discussion of the text, e.g. 'when do you think this was written?', or 'what does this tell you about the place and time it is from?'. The next questions could be from the sample questions (see link above), or asking a student about something they've said in their personal statement.

## Biological sciences and medicine mock interviews

The starting question could be something very open, e.g. what they think the most important issue in Medicine is. The sample questions can be used, and an object or image –based question. Sourcing 'props' needn't be difficult – an office pot plant will do! Analysis of a graph or data is also common – something from a text book would be fine. For Medicine, 'suitability to practice' questions are also used, e.g. discussing an ethical issue, or how you would explain something to a patient.

## Physical sciences and maths mock interviews

These are likely to be more problem-based – writing on paper more than talking. Again the sample questions are useful (and can be used fairly interchangeably between subjects). Another source of suitable problems is the Maths and Physics admissions tests: [tinyurl.com/MATpastpapers](https://tinyurl.com/MATpastpapers) and [tinyurl.com/PATpastpapers](https://tinyurl.com/PATpastpapers)

## Giving feedback to students on mock interviews

The main objective of a mock interview is to simply have experienced it, and be comfortable with the style and format of questions. The most useful feedback is general advice, e.g. take your time and think out loud. The mock interview can be a good way to identify and address any gaps in the student's preparation, e.g. particular topics that they need to revise more thoroughly, or books they've read that they need to spend some time reflecting on.

## Group interview workshops

As an alternative (or additional) activity to mock interviews, group discussions can also be a useful form of preparation, especially if you have several Oxbridge applicants you can split between arts and sciences (this works well with groups of 2 to 10 students). Students can look through and discuss sample interview questions together, or work in pairs to role play an interview. Another approach is to have a single interviewer, who then asks each student a few questions in turn (in a similar style to a mock interview). This can be very helpful for the students as they get to experience each other's questions and answers as well as their own, and makes for a more tutorial-style atmosphere, with other students as well as the interviewer being able to challenge and discuss the interviewee's responses.