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Issue 1 November 2013

Schools' Magazine

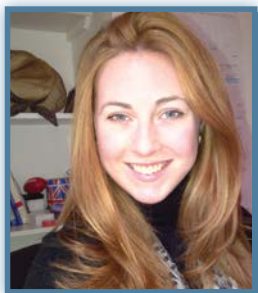
Supporting applications to Oxbridge since 1999

# The world is looking at Oxbridge





# The Oxbridge Opportunity



We are thrilled to introduce the first issue of our new quarterly, the Oxbridge Applications Schools' Magazine. At Oxbridge Applications, we are passionate about helping to ensure that each student with the talent and the drive to study at two of the world's most prestigious and stimulating universities has a fair chance to do so. Competition now is a global affair (page 3) and our events in schools all over the UK and worldwide show applicants are more clued up than ever which is a delight to see. However, with the standard of applications from schools dramatically improving, each individual has their work cut out for them just to keep up with the crowd.

The unique quality of the Oxbridge process is all about that individual element. Both the application and the undergraduate course are underpinned by a principle of extremely personal contact between tutor and student. Indeed, convincing that tutor to take you under his or her wing is exactly what makes the application to Oxbridge so competitive. This is why, although based in busy London, our Oxbridge-graduate tutors travel throughout the country - and now throughout the world - to conduct subject-specific tutorials, admissions test seminars, and mock interviews with students from all backgrounds so that more and more bright students can have a glimpse of that subject-specific personal touch that Oxbridge can offer them. This is also the purpose of our online resources and our book which all students and teachers receive when they register with us.

This first issue of our magazine explains more about the access and information we can provide to you and your students, along with the wide range of free resources found on our website, to encourage ideas and confidence in teachers and students working towards gaining the Oxbridge opportunity.

Happy reading!

Lucinda Fraser,  
Managing Director, Oxbridge Applications

Edited by Olivia Haywood



## Our Access Scheme

We still have plenty of places left on our Access Scheme for bright students aiming for Oxbridge currently on the 16-19 bursary.

This scheme gives exclusive access to all our research and resources, as well as continuing phone support from our Oxbridge-graduate Consultants and attendance at our events. We are sure there are more students out there who could benefit from our help so please do put them in touch with our dedicated Access Scheme Consultant Marion Allard on **0207 499 2394**.



## Oxford & Cambridge: A worldly education

In a recent article, the New York Daily News reported that 11 of President Obama's innermost circle were educated at Oxford University. In fact, of the top players in the administration, a greater number hold graduate degrees from Oxford than from US graduate schools. Nestled at the core of the Whitehouse and the Pentagon and wielding the power to influence policy worldwide, they are evidence of one thing: a degree from Oxford or Cambridge commands attention on an international scale.

At a time when emerging markets are jostling to become serious competitors to the major Western super-powers, there is one area of export in which the US and UK still dominate: Higher Education. Increased mobility is pushing international applicant figures off the charts and many universities are enjoying international interest on an unprecedented scale. But the desired destinations remain the same, with the UK and the United States receiving the highest number of international applicants every year. Applications to Oxford have increased by 55% over the last 10 years, and of applicants hoping to begin their Oxford undergraduate studies in 2012, 31.3% were from overseas. At Cambridge in the same year, 34.6% of applicants were international.

Places at Oxford and Cambridge have always been hotly contested, but with increasing competition from a flood of talented

international applicants, the battle to win a place is fiercer than ever. Consider the traditional application process at Oxford and Cambridge. At the heart of selecting the best and the brightest is the all-important interview, designed to assess candidates on a personal, individual level. The admissions tutors rely on their human judgement, rather than a computerised system. Original thought, ingenuity, intellectual flexibility and the capacity to recognise nuance in thought are crucial skills a candidate needs to demonstrate to be successful. One of the reasons that Oxford and Cambridge remain among the most highly regarded institutions in the world is that they are committed to testing this in the only way possible: in meeting their future students one-on-one for an interview.

This individual and personalised approach poses difficulties when faced with rising

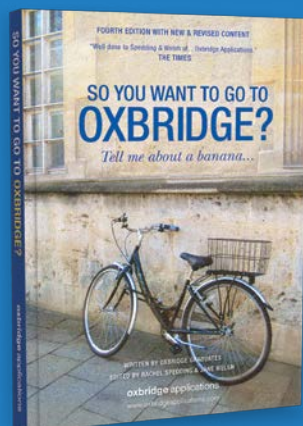
numbers of applications from abroad. The pressure on admissions tutors to make the best selections among these growing numbers is huge. Now, fewer students are reaching the interview stage and the admissions test stage of the application process is gathering increasing significance. More and more courses at Oxford in particular are requiring a formal admissions test ahead of the interview - from the MAT, to the PAT, LNAT, BMAT, HAT, ELAT and so on.

Currently, if a student applying to Oxford or Cambridge to read Medicine fails to achieve a certain mark in the Biomedical Admissions Test, (BMAT) they are automatically rejected before interview. It is no longer an option to apply with sub-standard grades and try to make it up with sparkling wit in the interview either - you simply won't get to that stage. Less than 35% of applicants to Oxford for Medicine are invited for an interview based on their test score and grades.

This shift in the admissions process has its upsides. Each admissions tutor now considers an individual applicant with a greater variety of information, arguably enabling them to make a more accurate choice. When a tutor

*Continued on page 4*

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***So you want to go to Oxbridge? Tell me about a banana...***

The ultimate compendium on applying to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, written by over 1000 Oxbridge graduates.

**Simply register at**

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...continued from page 3

assesses a student, laid before them are school exam results, predictions, teacher references, a personal statement, admissions test scores and in many cases extra written submissions. In submitting this plethora of output, a properly prepared student has greater opportunity to demonstrate what they're truly capable of, and make it to that crucial interview stage.

One thing we can be sure of:

the popularity of the top UK universities on a global scale results in ever-more stringent application requirements. This in turn ensures that the academic calibre of applicants winning places is exceptionally high. The news regarding Obama's administration reveals what might be described as a self-confirming cycle: graduates from these hotly contested places are desired for the most competitive roles in future careers, thus making a

degree from a world-leading institution increasingly valuable and the resulting global surge in applications for those places inevitable.



# Interview Focus

...as featured in the Independent

## Practice early and often

Interviews are an alien phenomenon to most young students. You don't want the process itself to baffle you, even if the questions do.

## Know how to use examples

Bringing in examples shows your interests and wider reading but it also, more importantly, cements an argument and demonstrates your ability to draw ideas from substance.

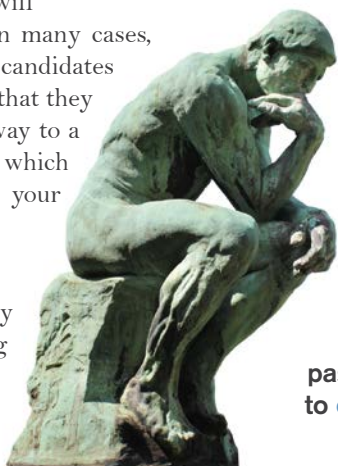
## Build up a bank of examples, to which you can confidently refer

There is no need to try to predict exactly what will come up in interview. In many cases, the most interesting candidates will apply whatever it is that they know about in a clever way to a strange question - a skill which is useful even through your Oxbridge final exams.

## Compare and contrast

Yes - it sounds very GCSE, but interesting ideas are naturally born this way.

**Interviews are an alien phenomenon to most young students. You don't want the process itself to baffle you, even if the questions do.**



## Know how to roll with the punches

Despite the myths, it is extremely rare for an admissions tutor to try to make your life difficult. They want to see what you can do and will usually try to make you feel at ease in order to demonstrate it. However, that doesn't mean that things won't get hard in the interview. Try not to be fazed when things don't feel like they're going your way. Tutors will often push you further than they think you can go in order to try to draw as much out of you as possible. So even when you don't know the answer, try to enjoy it.

## Understand what the interviewer is asking you to do

And if you can't, don't be afraid to ask for clarification! Better to take time to understand the question properly and then give a strong answer, than to blunder on blindly hoping for the best.

**For more guidance and real past interview questions, log on to [oxbridgeapplications.com](http://oxbridgeapplications.com).**

## Fast Facts

In our survey last year, **79%** of applicants were most worried about their interview

Mock interviews made as much as **20%** difference to success rates

**57%** of successful Cambridge applicants last year got A\* A\* A\* at A level, compared with **37%** at Oxford



## Did you know?

You can stagger applications so universities don't know you've applied to Oxbridge, but you can't make changes.

Pooling is different at Oxford and Cambridge. Oxford pool you on the spot. At Cambridge you'll have to go back for more interviews.



# Are you an Oxbridge-level thinker?

We asked our top Oxford and Cambridge graduate tutors to show us how they would answer real past interview questions.

Try your hand at some of these...

## Mathematics

### 1. Prove $m^3 - m$ is always divisible by 6.

**A mathematical mystery, but can you break it down like our maths maestro Mathangi?**

Using the method of 'Proof by induction', I'll first start off with the basic case, and test the expression for when  $m=1$ .  
 $1^3 - 1 = 0$  satisfies the expression. Then, rearrange:

$$m^3 - m = m(m^2 - 1) = m(m+1)(m-1), \text{ i.e. } (m-1)m(m+1)$$

Next, I want to test what happens when I try the next number up from  $m$ , i.e.  $(m+1)$  in the expression. This gives me  $m(m+1)(m+2)$ .

Now I want to see what the 'jump' is in the successive terms of the series that this expression gives, i.e. the difference between the two consecutive terms, as calculated for  $m$  and  $(m+1)$ :

$$m(m+1)(m+2) - (m-1)m(m+1)$$

$$m(m+1)\{m+2 - (m-1)\} = 3m(m+1)$$

There is clearly a factor of 3. But also,  $m$  and  $(m+1)$  are consecutive numbers, so one of these two numbers will be even, so we can pull out a factor of 2 as well. Hence, the difference has a factor of  $3 \times 2 = 6$ .

And the expression works for the case  $m=1$ . So starting there, each successive term has a factor of 6. Therefore, the given expression is always divisible by 6.

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# Our Work with Schools

We work directly with over 400 schools every year and support students from UK state, grammar and independent schools, as well as a growing number of schools around the world.

As well as supporting and guiding teachers and schools with resources and information, we are able to visit your school to give practical interview and admissions test support to any sixth form students aiming for Oxford, Cambridge, Law and Medical School.

Many thanks for all your help arranging the day. We look forward to doing it all again next year.

John, State School Teacher, 2012



## Workshops

A team of Oxbridge-graduate consultants and tutors can conduct tailored workshops on every aspect of the application – from how to write a strong personal statement to how to prepare for an academic interview. All our support is subject-specific, and is designed to give students the knowledge and experience necessary to excel in the application process for their chosen course.

## Admissions Test Seminars

We can run Admissions Test Seminars in any of the Oxbridge admissions tests, which will be led by test experts. These will focus on how to prepare for and tackle each test with confidence, are fully interactive, and include a copy of one of our practice papers.

## Head Start Days

Our Head Start Days are run by experienced Oxbridge graduate consultants and interviewers, who conduct subject-specific workshops and mock interviews, including verbal and written feedback and guidance on students' performance.

Your event last Monday went beautifully. The girls got a lot out of it and the tutors were all excellent. They motivated, questioned, challenged and inspired – we could have wished for no more than that!

Elodie, Independent School Teacher, 2012



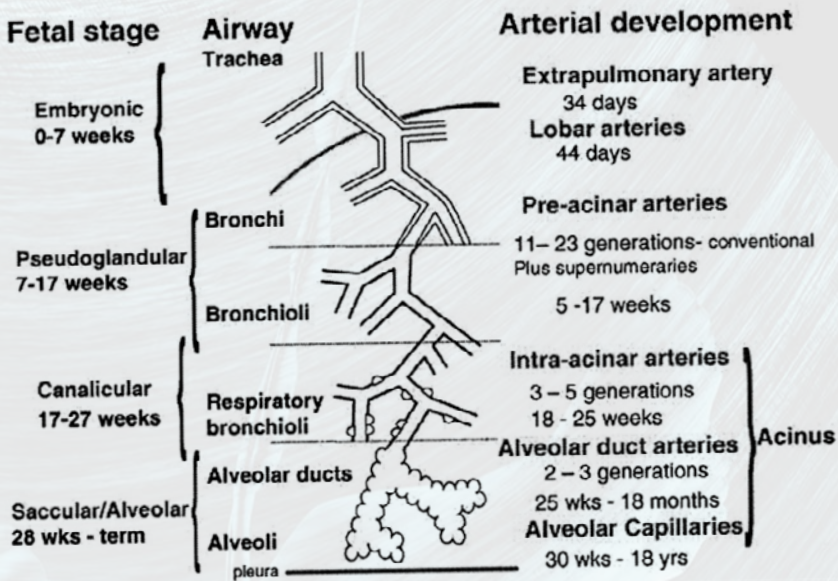
For more information on our work with schools, see our website [www.oxbridgeapplications.com](http://www.oxbridgeapplications.com) or call us directly on 020 7499 2394.



2

Look at the graph of fetal lung development shown below. Describe and explain it. A baby is born after 26 weeks of gestation, 14 weeks premature. What implications would this have for the baby's breathing?

A medical mind-trip, but do you approach the question like our medical expert Tristan...?



The key with this question is to do as the interviewer asks. First describe the diagram, then explain it.

**Description:** I'd point out that this is a diagram comparing the different stages of fetal lung development looking at both the airways and the arterial development. Then I'd move on to more specific descriptions: the airways stages are broken down into embryonic, pseudoglandular etc etc. Mention the specific weeks that these stages occur in. Do the same for arterial development. Then talk about how you can see the airways developing first the trachea, then bronchi, and so on until finally the alveoli develop.

**Explanation:** Explain the various features that you have just described, starting with the more simple descriptions you gave and move on to the more complex ones. So, it is clear that fetal lungs develop gradually over time, from the first few weeks up until term (when the baby is born). At first the simple structures develop, such as the trachea, but these structures are made to carry air through them, not to allow gas exchange to take place. This cannot occur until the alveoli have developed which only happens from 28 weeks onwards. Similarly, the small blood vessels suitable to allow diffusion across their walls don't develop until later in gestation.

With regards to the premature baby, always go back to basics and think about what the organ in question is actually for. Gas exchange is the main function of the lungs after birth, and is the means by which the body oxygenates the blood. It therefore follows that if a baby is born after only 26 weeks, it will not have developed the necessary alveoli to oxygenate its blood. Indeed the baby's airways are still in the canalicular stage. Looking at the diagram, we can see that there are a few alveoli in this stage, so perhaps the baby would be able to get enough oxygen into its blood to survive, but on the other hand it would be severely restricted in this respect. The baby would need to breathe harder and deeper to maintain oxygen levels required to supply the brain and other organs. At the same time, the muscles used for breathing are probably less well developed (don't forget the baby is not expecting to have to breathe for itself for another 14 weeks, as it would normally receive everything it needs through the umbilical cord!)

3

Could the sentence 'Tom failed to catch the train on time again' be said to be poetry?

An English enigma, but can you tackle it like James our resident James Joyce?

To approach this question we would need to decide how to best define 'poetry'. The standard publisher's definition of poetry is roughly 'text that is not justified to the margins'. This means that where a line ends on the page is significant. Whereas with prose, traditionally, you can narrow and widen the printed page so that the ends of the lines change without effecting the meaning, supposedly with poetry this is not possible. For example if we read Ezra Pound's 'In a Station of The Metro' as "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; petals on a wet, black bough." it would be arguably a different experience from

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

With this in mind we would have to put the sentence 'Tom failed to catch the train on time again' in some kind of context in order to say whether it was poetry or not. This does not just mean the context of the printed page. If 'Tom failed to catch the train on time again' was an untitled line on a scrap of paper in Emily Dickinson's trunk it might achieve the status of poetry but if it was a line found on a post-it note on a posthumous Carol Ann Duffy's kitchen table and she happened to have a nephew named Tom it might not. In defining forms of literature context is key. It might be possible, however, to point out that the sentence 'Tom failed to catch the train on time again' exhibits devices often seen in poetry: alliteration (Tom..train...time), rhyme, (train..again) and can even be scanned as iambic pentameter having 10 syllables that can be split into 5 feet of unstressed/stressed syllables like so:

*Tom failed | to catch | the train | on time | again*  
(unstressed: regular, stressed: bold, | denotes a foot)

But, admittedly, even that is a matter of context.

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Introducing our new, fully downloadable resources, coming to you in 2014...

In 2014, Oxbridge Applications launches a brand new website, with updated, interactive resources.

Register for free to receive a copy of our book *'So You Want To Go To Oxbridge? Tell me about a banana...'* and to access exclusive advice and guidance such as:

- Real sample successful personal statements with full annotation from their Oxbridge-graduate authors
- Downloadable mini-papers for all the Oxford and Cambridge Admissions Tests, with detailed answers written by test experts
- Real past interview questions, complete with Oxbridge graduates' thorough explanation of how to answer them
- Video examples of good and bad interviews
- Subject-specific, up-to-date reading lists



4. A father promises to give his daughter £100 a week during her time at university. After the first term, he decides she needs to be more self-reliant and stops paying her. Can she sue him for breach of contract?

A barrister's brain-teaser, but would you look at it like our lovely litigator, Lafferty?

On the face of it, the father's promise fulfils all the criteria of a contract: a clear offer, which his daughter seems to accept by relying on him paying the money. The contract has a clear length too. The problem is the relationship between the parties. The law tends to treat family relationships as different from other ones. A contract requires an 'intention to create legal relations'. The law presumes that parties who are families do not intend to create legal relations in their domestic arrangements. However, evidence to the contrary can prove otherwise. The facts in our scenario are pretty scant, so why not compare them against these two cases and see which one you think fits our scenario more closely:

**Case 1: Errington v Errington Woods [1952]** 1 KB 290 Court of Appeal

A father-in-law purchased a house for his son and daughter-in-law to live in. The house was put in the father's name alone. He paid the deposit as a wedding gift and promised the couple that if they paid the mortgage instalments, the father would transfer the house to them. The father then became ill and died. The mother inherited the house. After the father's death the son went to live with his mother but the wife refused to live with the mother and continued to pay the mortgage instalments. The mother brought an action to remove the wife from the house.

**Held:** The wife was entitled to remain in the house. The father had made the couple a unilateral offer. The wife was in course of performing the acceptance of the offer by continuing to meet the mortgage payments. Under normal contract principles an offer may be revoked at any time before acceptance takes place, however, with unilateral contracts acceptance takes place only on full performance. Lord Denning held that once performance had commenced the mother was stopped from revoking the offer since it would be unconscionable for her to do so. Furthermore there was an intention to create legal relations despite it being a family agreement.

**Case 2: Jones v Padavatton [1969]** 1 WLR 328 Court of Appeal

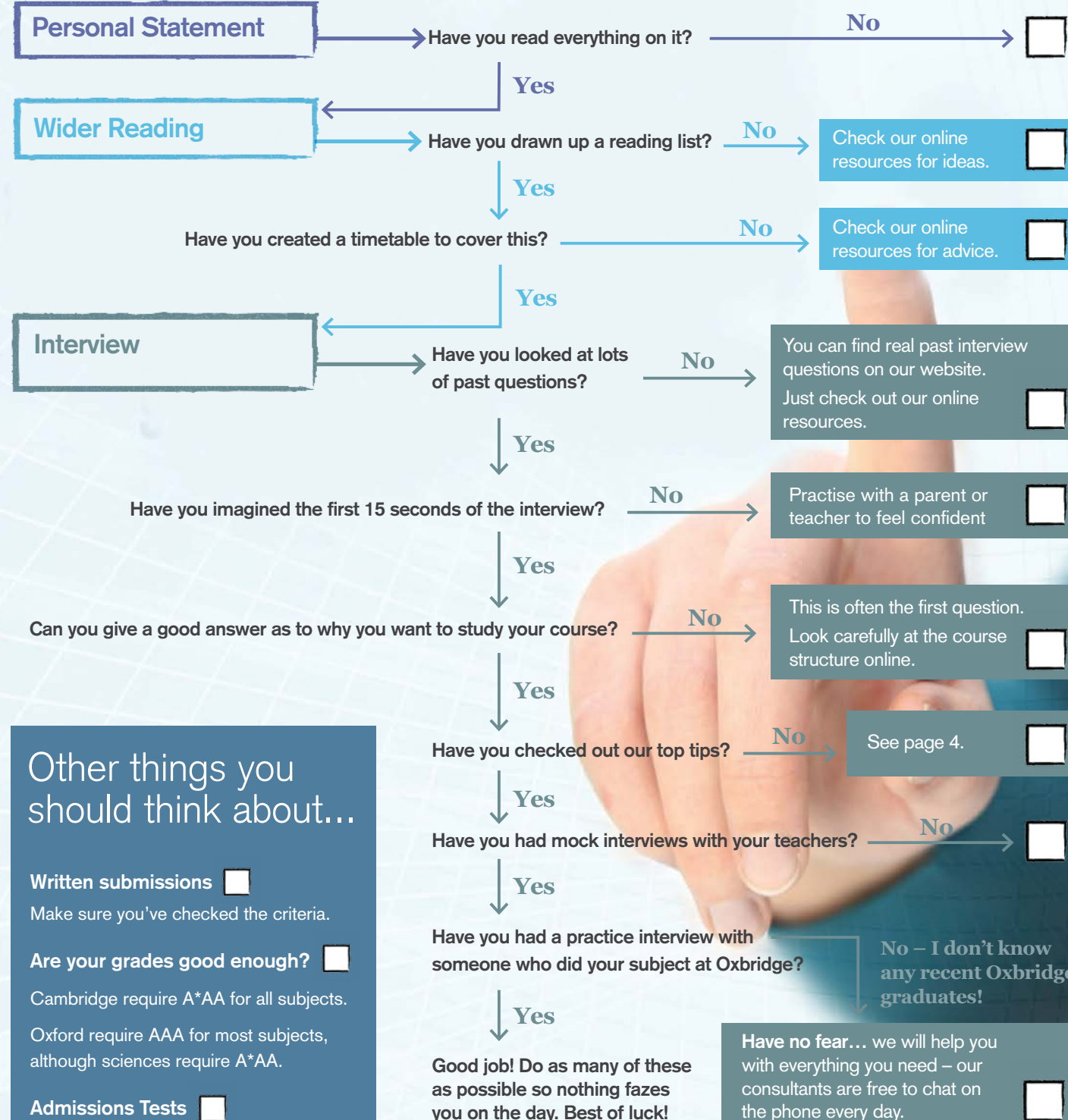
A mother promised to pay her daughter \$200 per month if she gave up her job in the US and went to London to study for the bar. The daughter was reluctant to do so at first as she had a well paid job with the Indian embassy in Washington and was quite happy and settled, however, the mother persuaded her that it would be in her interest to do so. The mother's idea was that the daughter could then join her in Trinidad as a lawyer. This initial agreement wasn't working out as the daughter believed the \$200 was US dollars whereas the mother meant Trinidad dollars which was about less than half what she was expecting. This meant the daughter could only afford to rent one room for her and her son to live in. The mother then agreed to purchase a house for the daughter to live in. She purchased a large house so that the daughter could rent out other rooms and use the income as her maintenance. The daughter then married and did not complete her studies. The mother sought possession of the house. The question for the court was whether there existed a legally binding agreement between the mother and daughter or whether the agreement was merely a family agreement not intended to be binding.

**Held:** The agreement was purely a domestic agreement which raises a presumption that the parties do not intend to be legally bound by the agreement. There was no evidence to rebut this presumption.

# Your Application Check List

ARE YOU READY?

Now that you've sent off your application, what should you be doing to prepare..?



## Other things you should think about...

**Written submissions** ☐

Make sure you've checked the criteria.

**Are your grades good enough?** ☐

Cambridge require A\*AA for all subjects.

Oxford require AAA for most subjects, although sciences require A\*AA.

**Admissions Tests** ☐

If you have to sit a test at Cambridge in December, have you done plenty of mock papers?

Have no fear... we will help you with everything you need – our consultants are free to chat on the phone every day.



# Interview Preparation Days

Our Interview Preparation Days are designed to help students develop the **skills** and **confidence** needed to excel at interview. The days, led by a team of **Oxbridge-graduate mentors** and **consultants**, are interactive and intensive, combining subject-specific **academic study** and **communications skills workshops** with mock interviews and **personalised feedback**.

This year, our Interview Preparation Days take place in **Bristol**, **Birmingham**, **Manchester** and **London**.

## How to Book

We provide a **50% discount** to any students who book on through their school.

<b>Gold Package (four mock interviews)</b>	<b>£170 (£340)</b>
<b>Silver Package (two mock interviews)</b>	<b>£125 (£250)</b>

To book your students a place, email our dedicated Schools Liaison Officer at **[schools@oxbridgeapplications.com](mailto:schools@oxbridgeapplications.com)**, or call us on **+44 (0)207 499 2394**.

**Alternatively, fill in the booking form included with this magazine and send in to us at:**

Oxbridge Applications,  
13-14 New Bond Street,  
London, W1S 3SX



It was a fabulous day, I got a lot out of it and I now know what I need to focus on: from reading up on Economics to more stylistic things like pacing myself and taking time to reflect before I give an answer.

Ali, Successful applicant, 2012

**50% OFF**

