

**ST EDMUND HALL**

# **STUDY SKILLS**



First Edition August 2000  
Revised re-print August 2001

Second Edition July 2003  
Revised re-print July 2004, July 2005

Third Edition July 2006  
Revised re-print July 2007, July 2008

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## ***From the Principal***

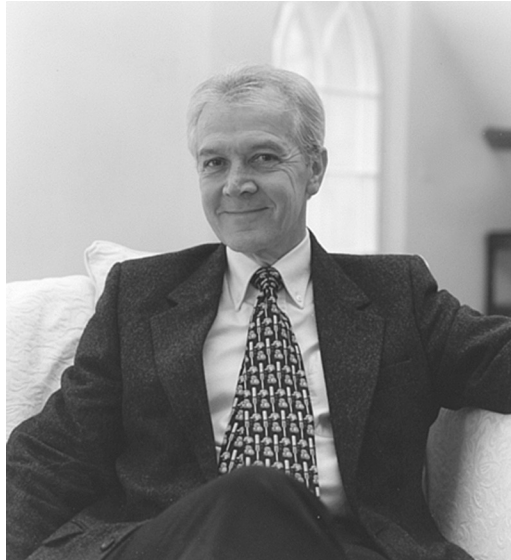
Welcome to St Edmund Hall – I hope that your experience at the College will prove to be successful in every way and that you will look back on your time in the University and at the College as a very formative stage in your career and more generally in your personal development.

Making the most of your Oxford experience will require you to manage your time so that you achieve a suitable balance between your academic studies, your extra curricular activities and your social interactions. The aim of this Study Guide is to provide you with some helpful advice for handling your academic responsibilities. Besides allocating an appropriate amount of time to your academic studies it is also important to use that time in a way that it is productive and effective. A major difference between school and university is that the final responsibility for ensuring that you consult and use the appropriate sources, and that the work of a sufficiently high standard is handed in on time, is yours alone. The Study Skills Guide has been written to help smooth the transition from school to university by providing helpful general advice which is applicable to all subjects, and also some subject-specific advice.

Most of what is written in the general section is common sense and there are no difficult concepts to be overcome. However, they are still worth noting, because if they are appreciated and assimilated at this stage, they will enable you to reach a higher academic level and express your talents and efforts to best effect. It is rather like taking up a new sport or activity – a small amount of time devoted to gaining familiarity with the essential moves or strokes can enable you to develop your game to a higher level. If you have to discover these skills for yourself you may end up wasting a lot of time at the initial stages and fall behind your colleagues. The short 8-week Oxford University terms do not incorporate the luxury of building these skills gradually and you will find that you are expected to be researching and writing your first essays or solving numerical problems within a week of arriving. So please take the time to assimilate the relevant sections of the Study Skills Guide and get yourself off to a great start.

Arriving at Oxford, you will probably share a common and natural concern that there are many others on your course who are more intelligent than you. I can tell you from many, many years in academic life that a high IQ does not correlate with final degree result and therefore you may be focusing your fears on the wrong parameter. It is those students who appreciate what is expected in their subject quickly who do best. They use the appropriate sources efficiently to understand the essential nature of the argument and record the relevant quotations and references efficiently to produce written work of the highest standard. We hope that the Study Skills Guide helps you identify and develop these skills.

Good luck !



Professor Michael Mingos, FRS  
Principal

## ***From the JCR President***

Having completed two years here and come into contact with a great number of fellow undergraduates, I feel I can say with confidence that your time at St Edmund Hall will be highly enjoyable and extremely enriching in a wide variety of ways. The focus of your time here is undoubtedly the degree you are studying for, and it is crucial to consider the degree course before arriving here. It has different demands from A-level courses and requires different methods of study. For example you will have to carry out considerably more independent study here and you will thus have to manage your own study time effectively. You will also have to do a considerable amount of primary reading, often during the vacations. Meanwhile you will continually develop the techniques required for note taking, numerical skills, lab work and essay writing. This Study Skills booklet is extremely helpful as it makes explicit all the practical requirements of the courses and advises how to negotiate them most profitably. Thus I would suggest that you read it carefully. It will help you to get to grips with the mechanisms of the course and it is important to do this as early as possible. You will get the most out the course in this way and, moreover, by **working efficiently** you will also have plenty of time to pursue other interests, socialise and take advantage of the many opportunities on offer to students here.

Also remember that throughout your time at the college, you should feel free to approach members of the JCR committee with any queries or problems you may have and we can give you guidance or point you in the right direction!

Good luck!

Charlie Southern  
3rd Year History  
JCR President

# ***Study Skills for Undergraduates at St Edmund Hall***

## **1. Introduction**

Studying for a degree at Oxford is likely to be one of the most exciting and demanding experiences of your life. You will have the opportunity to read widely and deeply. Through a combination of tutorials, seminars and lectures you will learn about your chosen subject in new and challenging ways. You will be working with tutors who are leading researchers in their field, surrounded by some of the brightest students in the country, who come from all kinds of different backgrounds. Your intellects and personalities will be enriched, not just by your academic work but by the varied cultural resources available at Oxford. Hopefully, as well as working hard for your studies, you will find time to enter into some of the extra-curricular activities for which St Edmund Hall is renowned – whether in drama, journalism, poetry, music, or sport. It is probable that while you are here you will make some of the most important friendships of your life. And when you leave St Edmund Hall, having successfully completed your degree, we hope that you will look back on your time here as stimulating, happy and productive.

A degree-course at Oxford is demanding, but your tutors, in offering you a place, know that you are well able to meet these demands. It is important to bear in mind, however, that study at university is very different from sixth-form work: you are expected to study independently more of the time, and this requires you to organise your time more carefully. The purpose of this guide is to help you make the transition from sixth form to University work.

Throughout your time at St Edmund Hall, you will need to be able to keep up with all that is asked of you academically. In addition to your weekly tutorials in College, you will be expected to attend university lectures/seminars, and perhaps also classes. Scientists will be expected to do practicals in the laboratory, which can often take most of the day to complete, so time-management is essential. Oxford is an exciting place to be a student, and many other activities will make further demands on you. The first few weeks here, which for some of you are the first time away from home, will be particularly full and intense, so it is important that you use those weeks not just to make friends and enter into extra-curricular activities, but also to settle yourself into a study-routine that works for you. The guidelines that follow are intended to give you some idea of what is expected of you by your tutors at St Edmund Hall. Advice that is specific to individual subjects follows later in this booklet.

## 2. Time Management

Terms at Oxford are short and a great deal has to be packed in; so you may well find the pace difficult to keep up with by comparison with sixth form studies. Some undergraduates find particularly difficult the transition from a structured working day (periods for different lessons at different lessons at school) to one in which they have to do the planning for themselves. It is vital that you use the vacations wisely, getting ahead with the reading your tutors expect you to do, or you will find that you fall behind during term. Tutors will understand that during part of your vacation you may need to take a job; but they will also give you reading-lists which should be taken seriously. Most tutors will set 'Collections' (beginning of term tests) to help you monitor your progress. If you are having problems with using your vacations to read (for instance because you have to spend most of them earning money, or because libraries are inaccessible, or because you have problems at home), please let your tutors know as soon as possible and they will do their best to help. Similarly, let them know sooner rather than later of any difficulties you are having with the workload/timetable during term.

It is important to establish a working-routine as soon as possible after you arrive. Make sure you find quiet working-spaces for yourself - university libraries, college library, and your room. Arts students find that the mornings are spent attending lectures, whereas the afternoons are for private study. But for scientists laboratory work often takes all day and tutorials/classes are mostly in the afternoons, after lectures. Some students find that they work best in a nine-five pattern, others that they are most efficient in the evening. Finding out where you feel most comfortable working is also an individual matter, so experiment early on with a variety of different possibilities. The following tips are worth bearing in mind:

\* As a rule of thumb, you will on average need to do five-six hours of academic work per day for six days a week, not including lectures. It is worth mapping out the week ahead of time, allowing for tutorials, classes, lectures, practicals in the lab, independent reading and writing and breaks for other things. Ensure that your timetable includes quite long study-periods, uninterrupted by socialising or other commitments.

\* If you are working in your college room, you may get interrupted by friends who are not working, and a lot of time can slip by like this, which you need to be sure you can afford. 'Do not Disturb' notices on the door might help, but going to the library is probably more efficient.

\* Wherever you are working, remember that your concentration-span is limited. Try timing how long you can read without your mind beginning to wander. When you have discovered what your concentration-span is, plan a rhythm of work that takes this into account. (A short break will often be beneficial; and if you find yourself staring into space, you probably do need to take a break. Sometimes just walking over to the window and looking out will be enough to refresh you.) If you find that you are having real problems in concentrating, do talk to your tutor about this.



### 3. Making the best use of Tutorials

Oxford prides itself on its tutorial system, which is designed to make learning the shared responsibility of tutor and student. Tutorials are not about passing a body of facts from one person to another; they are about thinking in new ways about how and what we know. They vary in their quality and effectiveness, according to how they are used. An effective tutorial involves the student and the tutor working a problem or idea out between them. A less effective tutorial is one in which the tutor and student fell back on passive learning: that is, on the absorption and re-cycling of facts, opinions, and theories. To make the best use of tutorials, it is important to give yourselves the maximum possibility for **active learning**. You will need to pace your study carefully, allowing yourselves plenty of time to think about the material studied. Do not rush to 'cram' material at the last minute; and do not assume that amount studied necessarily correlates with amount understood. It is more important that you learn to think in a new way than that you absorb more. If you find that the work-load is bigger than you can manage, and that it is forcing you into superficial learning, talk to your tutor about how to make it manageable. Remember, above all, that there is no time during a very hectic term to do vast amounts of reading; so if yours is a subject that involves long reading-lists (and long texts), make sure that you get the bulk of the reading done out of term.

Because tutorials are either individual or paired, maximum attention can be given by the tutor to the development and presentation of students' ideas. In arts subjects, tutorials help to foster your skills in presenting arguments orally, whereas in science-subjects, they are a tool for expressing analysis and synthesis. However, it is hard to generalise about the form a tutorial will take, since different tutors have different methods, so you should not feel disoriented if a friend in a different college reading the same subject (or one in this college reading a different subject) is being taught in a different way. Tutorials are mostly every week and 'paired' (that is, they involve you and another student in your year, together with your tutor). Less often they are fortnightly and 'single' (involving just you and your tutor). Some tutors may ask for written assignments to be handed in before a tutorial; some may take in an essay that has been read out.

Whichever pattern your tutor follows, much of what goes on in the tutorial will arise from the material you have written. You and the tutor are *jointly responsible* for setting the baseline standard of the discussion. It stands to reason that the more preparation made for a tutorial the better the discussion will be. The following points are worth bearing in mind, as you start to get accustomed to a system which depends so heavily on your input:

\* You should have done enough reading and thinking about your topic to sustain discussion for an hour. Try coming to the tutorial with notes on any of the difficulties you have encountered during the week's work; any unresolved problems which are left after writing your essay; or any questions about further reading.

\* It is important to listen carefully to your tutor and tutorial partner in order to be able to develop your own arguments and add significant points to theirs. Try to anticipate the counter-arguments that will be made to your own. Debating something in your head

beforehand will help you to be articulate in defending (and flexible in modifying) your position.

\* Always come to a tutorial with paper and something to write with; also the textbooks/texts you have been working on. Take notes of important points during tutorials, and if possible revisit these later the same day to make sure you have understood what has been said. Always ask if you do not understand something.

\* Your tutor will have many other duties and will probably be unable to reorganise the time of a tutorial because you have a play rehearsal, sporting-fixture or suchlike. Missing a tutorial is a very serious matter. If you cannot attend your tutorial because you are ill, or for some family emergency, let your tutor know, and make arrangements with him or her to catch up on work you have missed. If you do miss a tutorial without good reason, immediately explain, and let your tutor have the written work which you would have brought to your tutorial.

\* Much of your happiness and efficiency during your time here will depend on tutorials going well. If you are having tutorial-problems of any kind, it is very important to talk with your tutor about these as early as possible.

\* **Please note** that in the 3rd or 4th week of your first term at St Edmund Hall your tutor will arrange to see you individually, to check that everything is going smoothly. Make sure that you use this opportunity to voice any concerns you have about your progress or welfare.

#### 4. Active Learning

The most important study-skill you will develop as an undergraduate is **active learning**. You will have begun already to acquire this skill, but it is only with further exercise that you will reach your full intellectual potential. Remember that whatever task you undertake, your goal is not mechanically to assimilate what everyone else has said on your subject but to make a coherent argument of your own. Bear the following in mind:

\* Some books and lectures may be obligatory, but with the exception of these it is important to be selective. Life is too short to give the same intensity of concentration to all your reading tasks. Sometimes you only need to browse through a book, or scan it quickly; at other times you need to consult it for specific factual information, or follow it for its contribution to an ongoing intellectual debate, or become familiar with all the stages by which it establishes a complex argument/proof. Try to identify as quickly as possible what function each book is performing for you, and what your task is in reading it. This will help you to work out how much time to assign to your reading.

\* In arts subjects, most tutors will hand out reading-lists on a given subject, and will guide you at the beginning of term about which lectures to attend. If you are unsure, try checking with students who are a year ahead of you. If you are still unsure, try getting hold of the recommended books and skimming through them, to see which you find most

interesting; and arrange with friends in your own year to sample the available lectures to find out which are most stimulating. Remember, though, that someone else's preference may not be your own, and that it is important to make up your mind for yourself: try attending a good number of lectures the first week of term, and then continue with those that seem promising.

\* Whatever you are reading or listening to, keep asking yourself, 'Why is this important?', 'What does it add up to?', 'How does this change the way I think?' 'Do I agree with this or not?' Talk as much as possible with your friends about books and lectures. If material you have been given to read is compulsory, and you find it difficult or unhelpful, discuss your difficulties with your tutor; if the material is optional and you find you are getting little from it, be prepared to drop it and move on to something else. Wading through material just for the sake of it will not help you to learn, just as regurgitating other people's ideas will not help you to clarify your own.

## 5. Taking notes

Taking notes efficiently is the most important skill you can acquire to promote active learning. Whether you are listening to lectures or reading books, remember the following:

\* Always read or listen with a pen or pencil in hand. You might want to mark passages in a book (unless it is a library book) which are interesting to you, and you will need a memo of lectures. If you own the book from which you are working (i.e. if it is a text-book or primary literature) it is crucial to annotate the pages in pencil, underlining important passages and making short comments in the margin. But be sure to keep a separate record of the passages that are most important, so that you can identify them later. (Much of your vacation reading will depend on this kind of preparation.)

\* When you are working on a particular assignment, you will need to take separate notes which should act as a summary of the material you are absorbing, to remind you of key points. Do not try to get down the whole of an argument, and try not to get distracted by details. Make a note of a question that occurs to you in reading/listening. Be prepared to return to it. This will help you to read and listen actively.

\* Use clear headings and sub-headings, so that you can grasp the main lines of argument when returning to the notes later.

\* Try to recall the argument of a lecture or book some time after you have listened to or read it. Often this can be done by summarising it for someone else.

\* **Always** head your notes with a record of the date of the lecture, name of the lecturer and topic; or with the author and title of the book you are reading. This will help you to avoid borrowing material without acknowledging where it comes from. (Plagiarism is a serious academic offence; see separate heading.)

\* When taking notes from books/articles, don't forget to include page numbers which will help you to identify a passage when you return to the notes later. There is nothing that is more frustrating and time-consuming than hunting for a lost passage, especially when you need to refer to a work in a bibliography or to return to it for the purpose of revision.

\* Develop a good filing-system as early as possible, and stick to it. Efficient revision for exams is dependent on notes being neatly filed and readily accessible. Keep your reading-lists in a safe place, preferably with the relevant notes and essays.

\* **Always** back-up files of essays written on computer. Lost work is one of the most common explanations for under-performance in exams.

## 6. Planning and content of essays

The task of writing an essay can feel daunting, and for this reason it is only too tempting to put it off. Remember that a good essay cannot be written in haste - it takes a good five-six hours. Allow time for planning it, and try not to be up all night before a tutorial. The following points are important:

\* The best essays are not necessarily the longest. Clarity of argument and exposition should come first. A lot of this depends on careful planning. It is potentially disastrous to start writing with some rather vague ideas in mind, not being sure of where you are going to end up.

\* There are many ways of planning the initial stages of an essay, all of which are equally effective:

- brainstorming, with a blank sheet of paper in front of you to write down every idea you think of;
- selection of key points, with headings and sub-headings;
- trawling through your notes and organising the material in them into some sort of coherent order, perhaps by numbering or colour-coding ideas that belong together;
- drawing diagrams with arrows that indicate how one point may connect with another.

Finding what works best for you will be an experimental process, and you will have plenty of scope for trying out essay writing styles and finding what is most effective. Ask for careful feedback from tutors about what works.

\* Always try to construct a coherent argument. Write with the aim of persuading your tutor or tutorial partner of your point of view. Remember there is no rule against being controversial, so long as you can back up your position rationally and persuasively. Make sure you consider counter-arguments to your thesis.

- \* Don't try to include everything in your essay. Be selective in the topics you discuss and in the examples you choose. (You can always keep certain points and examples in reserve for the tutorial or for later use: make a separate note of them, and don't regard material you have come across as wasted unless it goes into an essay. It forms a part of your background knowledge and will be useful in ways you may not be able to foresee.)
- \* Always engage with the question, and ensure that you define your terms at the beginning.
- \* Try to structure the argument of your essay clearly so that it has a beginning, middle and end. Give signposts to your reader, to indicate where the argument is going. Round the essay off with a confident clinching point.
- \* Be specific. Vague generalisations never get you very far. This is true whether you are engaged in a close textual argument or discussing a large conceptual issue. Always pin your argument down to specific texts, specific evidence, or specific examples. (Even when your work is highly theoretical, you will need to adduce examples to pin things down.)
- \* Avoid repetitiveness and unsubstantiated argument.
- \* Quotations from primary and secondary texts should be kept short, and should only be used to illustrate key points. Never use quotations to 'pad out' your argument.
- \* Often it will be necessary to summarise someone else's argument before proceeding to your own: make sure that you do this accurately, but try not to get distracted by details.
- \* Your tutor will explain the accepted practices for quoting from and referring to source material. If you get into the habit of using these early on in your course-work, you will find that they become second-nature to you. This will help you if and when you come to do extended-essay work in Finals.
- \* Presentation is important. If you have problems with spelling and/or grammar, these should be addressed as early as possible in your course. Some tutors will require you to submit word-processed essays, but legible handwriting is a significant factor in exam-success, so it is important to ensure that you keep in practice. Talk to your tutor about this if it gives you concern.
- \* You are all encouraged to read George Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language' essay (originally published in the Horizon journal in 1946) for guidance on writing in a clear style. This essay is available at:  
[www.george-orwell.org/Politics\\_and\\_the\\_English\\_Language/0.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/Politics_and_the_English_Language/0.html)

## 7. Improving your essay-style

You may want to develop your own written style so that it has distinctive features. But remember that your first task in writing an essay is to communicate your ideas clearly to your reader. Keep your sentences short and simple. Use active verbs as much as possible. Read your writing out loud to yourself. If you listen, it should be obvious where your sentences should be broken up, or combined. Use obscure words only if they are appropriate, and never use a word you are unsure about before looking up its meaning in a dictionary. Try varying your sentence structure, and especially your sentence beginnings. Make good use of semi-colons and dashes.

Chatty colloquialisms are best avoided, but don't go to the other extreme and become pompous. A direct, uncluttered style is usually the most convincing.

Avoid clichés, and also terms of condemnation or commendation which have no real content. (e.g. 'effective argument' - effective in what way?) If you want to widen your vocabulary, the best thing to do is to read more widely. But you might also try consulting Roget's *Thesaurus*, which will provide you with synonyms for the words you are using too often. You can buy the concise version at a reasonable price, and it would be a useful book to have on your desk when you are writing your essays.

If you feel unsure about your essay style, try the following: (1) talking to your tutor; (2) comparing notes with other students; (3) taking as your model an essay-style you particularly admire. It might also help you to develop a good writing-style if you read the leaders in a serious newspaper.

## 8. Revising for exams

Preparing for exams can be an anxious business, especially in a place like Oxford where standards are high. It is important to keep calm and healthy during the period leading up to your exams; and to watch out for signs of anxiety in yourself. If you are having trouble concentrating, if you are procrastinating unduly, if you are not getting enough sleep at night, talk first to your tutor and then if necessary to your parents or a doctor about strategies for winding down. Sometimes this can be a simple matter of introducing physical exercise into your revision schedule.

Revision will take very different forms according to the subject you are studying; but the following general points can be made:

\* You need to begin by defining the tasks ahead. Make sure you know what the exams you are taking consist of. Consult the past examination papers which are available in the College and University libraries and on the internet. If necessary, make copies so you can take them away.

- \* Identify the weakest areas in your coverage of the course, and plug any obvious gaps in the vacation just before the exams. Consult with your tutors about the quickest and most efficient way of dealing with material you have covered inadequately.
- \* Look at Examiners' Reports for the last five years or so. These will help you to identify areas of weakness to which examiners have paid particular notice. (You will find these reports in College and University Libraries. Some departments include them on their websites.)
- \* Plan an overall strategy for revising all the questions you are likely to be answering. Map out a timetable that is realistic and that gives some variety to your day. You will not use your time efficiently if you make an over-ambitious schedule, so break tasks down into manageable parts. Establish deadlines for the revision of each part of your subject. Observe your concentration-span and don't try to exceed it.
- \* Remember the importance of selectivity. It is best to know well the subjects on which you have worked and not to try and get up new ones. You cannot hope to re-read everything you have covered in your course. When going back to long primary texts, do so with an eye to key passages. Look through your notes to find out which these are. If you are making new notes, try to make them in the form of concise summaries that can be consulted the night before the exam.
- \* Remember that the best answers in exams, like the best essays in tutorials, are those which have a strong argument. Illustrations, examples and quotations are important, but they should not overwhelm the essay's structure. Relevance and conciseness are virtues; length and writing down everything you know are not.
- \* Try writing summaries of essays, and then timed essays. If you are unconfident about writing under exam conditions, you could ask your tutor to arrange a collection a few weeks away from the exam.
- \* Your answers should be legible as well as interesting.
- \* The very best examination answers will be distinguished by their freshness, very wide and detailed knowledge, analytical thought, rational argument, well chosen and accurate illustrations and good style.

## **9. Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas without acknowledging their source. It can involve published or unpublished material; whole essays and single paragraphs or sentences. It is to be avoided, not just because it is bad academic practice but because the consequences of discovery may well be severe. All tutors will take a very dim view of students who re-hash essays written by other students, or who reproduce word-for-word a published article. Even the verbatim regurgitation of a paragraph or sentence here and there will be regarded as shoddy. Examiners will take this even more

seriously. In extreme cases, the penalty for plagiarism has been disqualification from the exams. In less serious instances, it has involved reduction in the class of degree.

A difficulty here is that ‘originality’ (a problematic term at the best of times) is not easily achievable within the time constraints of a degree-course; and quite often the material you are producing will require the re-marshalling of arguments that have been used before. (We would, after all, be unreasonable tutors and examiners if we expected everything you said to be entirely your own.) This sense of a woolliness or slipperiness in the definition of what is ‘your’ idea may lead you quite quickly into problems of derivativeness which can themselves slide into problems of plagiarism. Sometimes you may be so short of time that re-hashing an essay or lifting a paragraph here and there will feel like a tempting short-cut. More likely still, you may be working from sloppily taken notes, and not notice that you are regurgitating ideas. All the more reason to develop careful, tidy habits of note-taking and to put in inverted commas anything that is a direct quote.

The best rule of thumb is **always to play safe**: check carefully to ensure that the words you are using are your own. If you are borrowing someone else's ideas but using your own words, you should nonetheless acknowledge the source of your argument, even if only briefly, by putting the author's surname in brackets alongside the relevant summary. Do this with ideas you are borrowing from lectures, as well as with those you borrow from books.

Please take note of the official University definition and guidance on plagiarism presented below (taken from [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism)). These webpages include some examples of what is and is not classed as plagiarism, an online course to test your skills, and links to various style guides.

\* What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the copying or paraphrasing of other people’s work or ideas into your own work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition.

Collusion is another form of plagiarism involving the unauthorised collaboration of students (or others) in a piece of work.

Cases of suspected plagiarism in assessed work are investigated under the disciplinary regulations concerning conduct in examinations. Intentional or reckless plagiarism may incur severe penalties, including failure of your degree or expulsion from the university.

\* Why does plagiarism matter?

It would be wrong to describe plagiarism as only a minor form of cheating, or as merely a matter of academic etiquette. On the contrary, it is important to understand that plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity. It is a principle of intellectual honesty that all members of the academic community should acknowledge their debt to the originators of the ideas, words, and data which form the basis for their own work. Passing off another’s work as your own is not only poor scholarship, but also means that you have failed to complete the



learning process. Deliberate plagiarism is unethical and can have serious consequences for your future career; it also undermines the standards of your institution and of the degrees it issues.

\* What forms can plagiarism take?

- Verbatim quotation of other people's intellectual work without clear acknowledgement. Quotations must always be identified as such by the use of either quotation marks or indentation, with adequate citation. It must always be apparent to the reader which parts are your own independent work and where you have drawn on someone else's ideas and language.

- Paraphrasing the work of others by altering a few words and changing their order, or by closely following the structure of their argument, is plagiarism because you are deriving your words and ideas from their work without giving due acknowledgement. Even if you include a reference to the original author in your own text you are still creating a misleading impression that the paraphrased wording is entirely your own. It is better to write a brief summary of the author's overall argument in your own words than to paraphrase particular sections of his or her writing. This will ensure you have a genuine grasp of the argument and will avoid the difficulty of paraphrasing without plagiarising. You must also properly attribute all material you derive from lectures.

- Cutting and pasting from the Internet. Information derived from the Internet must be adequately referenced and included in the bibliography. It is important to evaluate carefully all material found on the Internet, as it is less likely to have been through the same process of scholarly peer review as published sources.

- Collusion. This can involve unauthorised collaboration between students, failure to attribute assistance received, or failure to follow precisely regulations on group work projects. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are entirely clear about the extent of collaboration permitted, and which parts of the work must be your own.

- Inaccurate citation. It is important to cite correctly, according to the conventions of your discipline. Additionally, you should not include anything in a footnote or bibliography that you have not actually consulted. If you cannot gain access to a primary source you must make it clear in your citation that your knowledge of the work has been derived from a secondary text (e.g. Bradshaw, D. Title of Book, discussed in Wilson, E., Title of Book (London, 2004), p. 189).

- Failure to acknowledge. You must clearly acknowledge all assistance which has contributed to the production of your work, such as advice from fellow students, laboratory technicians, and other external sources. This need not apply to the assistance provided by your tutor or supervisor, nor to ordinary proofreading, but it is necessary to acknowledge other guidance which leads to substantive changes of content or approach.

- Professional agencies. You should neither make use of professional agencies in the production of your work nor submit material which has been written for you. It is vital to

your intellectual training and development that you should undertake the research process unaided.

- Autoplagiarism. You must not submit work for assessment which you have already submitted (partially or in full) to fulfil the requirements of another degree course or examination.

\* Not just printed text!

The necessity to reference applies not only to text, but also to other media, such as computer code, illustrations, graphs etc. It applies equally to published text drawn from books and journals, and to unpublished text, whether from lecture handouts, theses or other students' essays. You must also attribute text or other resources downloaded from web sites.

## 10. Cheating and 'collusion'

Cheating in exams is extremely risky and foolish. Ten to one you will be caught, with severe consequences. 'Collusion' is defined in the Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum as 'getting your work done by somebody else'. It usually comes to light when exam-scripts or extended essays resemble each other very closely. Like cheating it has serious penalties, all the more painful if the collusion has arisen unwittingly. Some students who work collaboratively are not careful enough in giving their shared ideas individual expression.

However, collaborative work is to be encouraged, so do by all means pass round your essays, share your ideas; discuss the content of lectures, tutorials, demonstrations and practicals with your fellow-students. This is all part of the experience of learning and being excited by ideas. But make sure that, when you come to write something down for tutorials and exams, you distinguish it from the work of your friends by choosing your own words.

It is a comforting thought that if you follow the guidelines offered in this booklet, and think all your ideas through actively rather than passively, you are unlikely to find your essay so closely resembling someone else's that it is not identifiable as your own.

## 11. Further information about Study Skills

The **St Edmund Hall Library** has recently been stocked with guides on Study-Skills for undergraduates and teachers. (You will find the relevant section to your left as you enter the library, on the shelves which house past examination-papers. Please ask the Librarian for help if you need to.) Among the twenty or so books available, you will find a dozen that have been published in the last two years. They represent up-to-date thinking by experts on such topics as essay-planning and writing, note-taking, revising for exams, and information technology. You will also find copies of *Fresher Pressure* by Aidan McFarlane and Ann McPherson, an extremely readable book which places your academic

welfare in the context of your life as a happy and well-balanced person. We recommend this book highly as a supplement to the advice given in our own booklet.

In addition, the following resources may be useful:

The **Counselling Service** have a section on their website on how to deal with revision and exams: See: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/shw/revision.shtml](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/shw/revision.shtml).

**Grammar:** one helpful introduction to grammatical terms and usage is *Introduction to Traditional Grammar*, by Bella Millett: [www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/notes/grammar.htm](http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/notes/grammar.htm)

## 12. Stay healthy!

You have been successful in gaining a place here, under very competitive conditions, and now you are here you are surrounded by people as intellectually able and highly motivated as yourself. This is a challenging experience, and it can produce a sense of pressure. You will need to keep this under control if you are to make the best use of your time. Everyone has their own way of coping with pressure, and you have some experience behind you already. You will know how important it is to keep healthy -eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, relax and enjoy yourself in moderation. Alcohol, in moderation, can help you to relax, and is enjoyable as part of socializing activities. But be sensible and don't be pressured by your friends into drinking more than you are comfortable with. And remember that alcohol, taken in excess, will damage your health and seriously impair your ability to study.

## 13. Disabilities

The College maintains a register of students with disabilities (for example: dyslexia, dyspraxia, blindness, hearing impairment, mobility difficulties, autism or Autistic Spectrum Disorder, mental health difficulties, diabetes or epilepsy), the contents of which are confidential, but which is designed and intended to facilitate student welfare and education, including the possibility of special arrangements at examinations.

The College has designated the Home Bursar as Disability Officer with overall responsibility for the coordination of disability support, and students are encouraged to notify him of any disabilities which may affect academic study or their life at Oxford. It is important to do so as early as possible, as assessment and the making of special provisions can take some time. Where a disability appears to have purely academic implications the Home Bursar will delegate the College Office to make the appropriate arrangements.

Further information can be obtained from the Home Bursar or his PA. The central University also has disability officers who can advise on special facilities and possible financial assistance (see: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/disab](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/disab)).

## 14. What to do if things go wrong

If you find yourself in difficulty with any aspect of your course, the first person to consult is normally your tutor. If any of your problems relate to someone who is teaching you (for example, if something crops up that you need to discuss in relation to a tutor in College, or another lecturer), go in the first instance to see the senior tutor in your subject. If this is awkward or impractical, or indeed if the problem relates to this particular tutor, the person to approach is the Tutor for Undergraduates, who is in charge of academic matters. You could also go to the student advisors. In very serious cases, or if absolutely all else fails, you should consider approaching the Principal. Difficulties relating to College teaching and its organisation come under the College's jurisdiction, not that of the University, and they need to be sorted out here. Whatever your problem might be, somebody here will know how to help you, so don't let any difficulties build up.



Professor Lucy Newlyn  
Fellow and Tutor in English

# ***Tutorial Responsibilities Agreement***

## **I. General Recommendations**

Every student may expect to:

1. Be assigned to a college advisor who will be available in case of academic and pastoral need. College advisors will normally be one of the Fellows or subject tutors.
2. Have an appropriate amount of time to complete any work set, e.g., 3 days for a tutorial essay. Every student is in turn expected to comply with these assignments. Required written work must be completed punctually, presentably, and to an adequate standard.
3. Be directed by the tutor to the relevant lecture timetable on the web or in printed form by the end of 0<sup>th</sup> week of each term. Every student is in turn expected to attend lectures as appropriate.
4. Be informed at the end of each term in what papers written Collections are to be set at the beginning of the following term. Every student is in turn expected to revise for and attend Collections when assigned.

## **II. Feedback**

Every student may expect to:

1. Receive appraisals for all pieces of tutorial work. Tutors are strongly encouraged to enunciate at the beginning of the course what their grading policy is, and whether they will or will not give grades to individual pieces of work. Even where grades are not given, tutors should include comments on possible areas for improvement and on the general standard of the work.
2. Receive a written report at the end of term in the context of College Collections. Some collections will involve detailed feedback from college tutors only; others will involve a brief meeting with the Principal in the presence of subject-tutors. In the case of first-year undergraduates, it is expected that the advisor will see them briefly on an individual basis for an *additional, informal assessment* half way through the first term of their course.
3. Be able to read their termly reports on OxCORT.
4. Request a change of tutor, to the extent possible, should insuperable difficulties arise.

### **III. Academic Discipline**

Every student should be aware that:

1. The academic progress of junior members is monitored by the college's Tutorial Committee.
2. In the event of unsatisfactory work, or failure to attend tutorials, tutorial classes, tutorial meetings or Collections without adequate reason, sanctions may be applied as defined by "The Grey Book" (*Information and Regulations for Junior Members of the College*); and that students will be expected to make up a backlog of incomplete work.
3. The Statutes give Junior Members the right to a fair hearing whenever the Governing Body is minded to rusticate, send down or expel them according to procedures defined in the Grey Book and the College By-Laws.
4. The College By-Laws provide that a Junior Member who is to be rusticated, sent down or expelled for academic reasons may appeal against the decision. The Principal will advise on procedure.

### **IV. Reciprocal Code of Conduct for Tutorials for Tutors and Students**

All those who take part in tutorials are expected to be aware of, and comply with, the College's regulations regarding Freedom of Speech (Grey Book, VIII.11) and Harassment (Grey Book, VIII.12), and the University's rules as set out in The Grey Book and in *Essential Information for Students* ([www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/pam/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/pam/)).

Adopted by the Governing Body of St Edmund Hall  
February 2007

## ***From the Tutor for Undergraduates***

Oxford's admissions criteria are stringent and competition is fierce. Therefore, the fact that you have been offered a place at St Edmund Hall must mean that you are among the most able students, and that you have a proven academic track record. In this light, it may seem strange that we produce a booklet telling you about the correct way to study. You must by now have developed your own study skills, and have an idea what works best for you. However, I urge you to examine carefully the ideas offered in the booklet, some of which you may not have yet considered and which may well be particular to the Oxford tutorial system.

You should be aware that Oxford terms are short and the pace of work is, of necessity, fast. It is therefore of vital importance that you make the transition from pre-university education to tutorial teaching as soon as possible. There is a change in culture because, unlike the situation at school where your participation in learning was more passive (the teachers took charge of what you should learn, and by when you should learn it), here at Oxford you are expected to take charge of, and be responsible for your own programme of study. Learning has to happen before the tutorials (and, to a fair measure, before the lectures) take place; your interaction with your tutors will be that much more rewarding (for you and your tutor) when you are able to be an active participant in the various tutorial discussions. A key ingredient in this is motivation: if you are sufficiently interested, you can get on top of any topic, no matter how hard. You must of course supplement motivation with hard work. The two are interdependent: the more you know/understand, the more confident you will become, and with it will come increased enthusiasm for your subject. And remember that there are enough hours in each day for you to do your academic work as well as enjoy the many extra-mural joys of Oxford. Your academic work, and in particular your tutorial work clearly must be given top priority, but beyond that there is plenty more to enjoy: all that is required is careful time management.

General advice about tutorial work is given by tutors at the beginning of term, and often this is followed up by further communications (almost exclusively nowadays by email – get in the habit of checking your inbox regularly). You must make sure you know what you are supposed to be doing, and by when you are supposed to be doing it. Then when you are doing it, make sure you check that you understand what you are doing; skipping or fudging will not be of any use to you and will not fool your tutors. In addition you must read chapter II of the “Grey Book” (*Information and Regulations for Junior Members of the College*): pay special attention to section II.2, which outlines the standard expectations tutors have of their pupils. These expectations are so basic and minimal that they count as obligations on your part. Also examine carefully section II.7 which is about plagiarism; you must make sure you know what it is and how to avoid it. Finally, so far as rules and regulations are concerned (and this includes examination requirements), read them all; and if anything is left unclear, then find out about it.

Your time at university, and at Oxford in particular, offers you a unique opportunity to expand (both academically and in your personal experience of life). You could make it the best time of your life in every respect, and to do this you must be informed on academic procedures and expectations, and must apply careful time management.

Professor Basil Kouvaritakis  
Tutor for Undergraduates



## ***Getting the most out of the Library***

St Edmund Hall's Library offers you an excellent variety of sources for the information you need to complete your studies and prepare for your examinations. Its collection comprises 50,000 books, 33 journals and serials, and a selection of electronic media – videos, cassettes and CD-ROMs. There are four computers in the main library, which are solely for access to the university's on-line library resources site, as well as fourteen laptop "carrels" with cables for Internet access, and, in the Library Tower, there are six computers plus two dedicated printers which are extensions of the Hall's JCR and MCR computer rooms.

What are the best ways to make the optimum use of these resources? For your essays or tutorial discussions you will be given reading lists by your Tutors. If you are in the College Library you should check both the on-line book listings and the card catalogue to see if there is a copy of the book in our collection; both should be searched because not all of the Hall's books are on the electronic system yet. The on-line system also allows you to see if the books you need are held in either the relevant Faculty library or in the Bodleian. Remember even if the exact book listed by your Tutor is not on the shelf, you can browse the same shelf area to see what other books on the subject have been written.

Also of use in planning for a tutorial are the wide variety of general reference books available in both on-line and paper copies: encyclopaedias, companions, dictionaries, compendia, etc., which often have excellent bibliographies at the end of each entry and so provide you with titles to read. These resources are also of the utmost importance when you are doing a special subject or if your school asks that you write a dissertation as part of the degree requirements.

In preparing for your Preliminary and Final Examinations, the section containing past examination papers will show you what questions were asked in previous years, and provide good opportunities to practice writing exams.

For both overall and specific help with essays or with study techniques you can look through the range of study aid books in the Reference Section. And, remember, the Library staff are there to help you with all your information resource needs.

Ms Blanca Martin, Assistant Librarian

## ***Computing in St Edmund Hall***

All students at St Edmund Hall are issued with a university e-mail account and an account on the college server when they first come to Oxford. University email accounts should be checked regularly, preferably daily, for messages relating to your studies.

The College provides excellent IT facilities, free of charge (apart from printing), for all students. There are three computer rooms: the JCR computer room (JCR CR) currently contains ten Windows PCs and one Apple Mac. All the PCs have MS Office 2003, SPSS 15, internet browsers and various other software packages installed, and more can be added on request. The MCR CR has the same configuration but currently with six PCs. A scanner is available in both rooms, as are mono laser printers (printing charge is 4p per page) and colour laser printers (printing charge is 16p per page). The third computer area in the college library tower contains a further six PCs and another mono laser printer. There are also four dedicated library PCs in the library itself. There is space to plug laptops into the University network in all the computer rooms.

Ethernet connections are available in all student rooms on and off-site, including 17, 19 and 26 Norham Gardens, the married flats behind 26 Norham Gardens, the Isis Hotel, William R Miller Building and 10a Circus Street. Students are strongly encouraged to bring their own computers and laptops and help will be provided by the college computer officers to connect them to the college and university network; students doing so should note that the installation and regular updating of anti-virus software is *compulsory*. Sophos anti-virus software is available at minimal cost from the University Computing Services or can be downloaded free of charge. NB: connection to the network is via an Ethernet card, not a modem. There is a limited public wireless service, which is visible in most public spaces, but not in all private rooms. If you wish to run your own server or wireless router while in College you **must** contact the IT Officers first.

Web pages dedicated to IT at St Edmund Hall are at [www.seh.ox.ac.uk/it](http://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/it). The IT Officers can be contacted by telephone (01865 279044) or e-mail ([postmaster@seh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:postmaster@seh.ox.ac.uk)).

Students working in science subjects will find most of their computing requirements catered for within their own departments. Furthermore, Oxford University Computing Services (see: [welcometoit.ox.ac.uk](http://welcometoit.ox.ac.uk)) offer facilities, training and advice to members of the University in all aspects of academic computing.

The University Rules for Computer Use are available on the web ([www.ict.ox.ac.uk/oxford/rules](http://www.ict.ox.ac.uk/oxford/rules)) and in the booklet *Essential Information for Students (Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum)*. Please read these rules carefully! Failure to obey them or to follow agreed procedures will result in the loss of access to all IT facilities and/or a handling charge levied by OUCS and a fine by the Dean. In particular it should be noted that the provision of these computing and e-mail facilities by the College is not to be taken as indicating that it will condone any breach of copyright and criminal law in respect of the unlawful copying, using, storage or disseminating of material or information.

Mr Michael McShane, IT Officer  
Dr Alan Perry, Assistant IT Officer  
Miss Angela Amphawan, Assistant IT Officer

# **Biochemistry**

## **1. Lectures**

The course and its examinations are largely based on the lecture courses. Attendance at lectures is therefore essential. Students differ in their abilities to take useable notes in lectures but, even if you have difficulty in doing this, being at the lectures gives you the necessary insight into the scope of the course. Biochemistry is such a large and rapidly expanding subject that undergraduates cannot on their own judge what is perceived as core material. Taking good notes in lectures is actually hard work. It is no use just jotting down the odd point that is written on the board or on an overhead/slide. Such jottings will be incomprehensible within a few hours of the lecture ending. Many lecturers give handouts. These are not meant to be complete transcripts of the lectures but are usually a method of giving you accurate factual information and diagrams which need to be digested afterwards. Often the handouts may be written on during the lectures so as to amplify the points they present. Even if you are good at taking lecture notes, you should go over them and annotate them soon after the lecture, whilst it is fresh in the mind. If necessary you may need to supplement them by following up the reading list. Note that the reading lists in the second, third and fourth years may be rather long. You are not usually expected to read everything; the lists are to help you find material if you need it. Of course, one might expect students who are aiming for a first class honours degree to digest more of the reading lists than those whose aspirations are lower.

## **2. Departmentally-organised practicals and data-handling**

The practicals are compulsory; remember that knowledge of them can be tested in the written examinations. Similar rules apply to the data handling exercises of years two and three. Note that the deadlines for submitting your 'write-ups' are serious. Thus it is necessary to plan your time appropriately.

## **3. Tutorials**

Tutorials are a valuable resource, and expensive to the University. Amongst their primary functions should be: (i) the opportunity for you to raise points that you do not understand or that you find interesting and would like to have amplified; (ii) the opportunity for the tutor to explore whether you have fully understood the material. From experience the tutor will often know what points are commonly misunderstood. You should never waste a tutor's time by turning up to a tutorial hoping for an impromptu dictation session in which the tutor will go over all the points that have been made, or will be made, in lectures, whilst you remain silent. If you go to a tutorial with no points that you wish to raise for discussion then your preparation has been inadequate. In fifteen years as a tutor I have only encountered a couple of students who rarely misunderstood anything and they

usually had interested enquiries on delving further into the tutorial topics. An important aspect of study is to recognise what you do not understand.

There is nothing more aggravating for a tutor than dealing with students who have no knowledge of a recent lecture course on the subject under discussion. Weak students often prepare tutorial material solely by reference to a textbook, even when the lecturer has explained that the textbook is out of date, or perhaps even incorrect (it does happen at this level!). It is very important to be able to integrate lecture material with book/article material in preparing an essay for a tutorial. However, not all tutorials take place **after** the lecture courses which deal with the subject matter. Logistically tutorials on some subjects must come before the relevant lectures. This order of events can help with the comprehension of the lectures, especially their finer points. There is no rule as to whether it is better for lectures to precede tutorials or *vice versa*.

**How long should a tutorial essay be?** There is obviously no simple answer to this often asked question. Some useful rules are: (i) prepare something that is going to be of use in future revision for examinations; (ii) it should be appropriately illustrated with diagrams; (iii) there is no point whatsoever in acting as a clerk and just transcribing large amounts of undigested text from books and articles. Perhaps the best advice is to imagine that you are trying to write a new textbook and thus explaining your facts, and the supporting experimental evidence, in a clear and logical fashion. **How much time should you spend on your tutorial work each week?** Again, there is no formula for answering this question. A rule of thumb might be that if you have one tutorial assignment in a week when you have ten lectures and twenty hours of practicals or practical write-ups, then you should not be expecting to spend less than ten hours on your tutorial work.

Most tutors allow the taking of notes during tutorials but there is a fine balance here between participating in the intellectual exchange of the tutorial (which is what it aims for) and taking dictation (which is not appropriate). You will almost certainly need to annotate any notes you take within a few hours of the end of the tutorial.

Finally, bear in mind that you will not have, nor are you intended to have, a tutorial which relates to every aspect of the course. In part, the tutorials are meant to be general education in how to think about things and tackle problems.

Professor Stuart Ferguson

# **Chemistry**

Chemistry students need a wide variety of study skills in order to master all three branches (organic, inorganic, and physical) of the subject. The specific skills that are needed for each branch are spelt out in chemistry tutorials. Here are just a few general points that apply to the subject as a whole.

## **1. Lectures**

The Oxford chemistry course is defined by the lectures, and you must therefore learn how to make lecture notes from which you can revise. If you find it difficult to do this during the lectures you should set aside some time after each lecture (preferably on the same day) specifically for this purpose.

## **2. Tutorials**

Always make a list of the things you don't understand when you are preparing your tutorial work and remember to ask about these things in the tutorial - there are some fairly subtle concepts in the course and being prepared to admit to a lack of understanding is probably the single most useful study skill you could have.

## **3. Practicals**

The key to successful practical work is (a) to work safely (as described in the practical handouts from the three laboratories) and (b) to be methodical. If you are methodical, you should be able to complete your practicals within the first two years, leaving your third year free for finer things (such as preparing for your Finals).

## **4. Problem solving**

This is what it is all about. There are several different techniques for solving problems in the three different branches of the subject, but they all have a great deal in common. All you really need is a good general understanding of the theory underlying the problem and an ability to pick out the remaining details (which you may have forgotten) from the problem itself. That, and a great deal of practice.

## **5. Essays**

Last and most definitely least. Absolutely no credit is given for flowery writing. Keep your sentences short and to the point. The marks attached to essay-type questions in chemistry are only ever given for the facts. All you have to do is string the right facts together in a sensible order with as few words as possible in between. Note also that one clearly annotated diagram is worth 1000 words, and takes a great deal less time to get down on paper.

Professor David Manolopoulos  
Professor Philip Mountford

## ***Economics, Economics and Management***

Economics requires a combination of analytical thinking, historical and current institutional knowledge, and the ability to assess what evidence does and does not support. In your first year, you will find that the most emphasis is placed on the first of these, although not to the complete exclusion of the other two. You may find that a little strange - many people's preconceptions focus more on the second - but it is an essential foundation for progress beyond an elementary and superficial level.

Economists tend to think in terms of "models" - working through from particular sets of assumptions to determine what their logical implications or conclusions would be. You should aim first to understand each model thoroughly in its own terms - what is its purpose, how does it work, which assumptions are the most important and which are less so, how would the conclusions be altered if the assumptions were, and so on. Secondly you should consider how useful it really is in the real world (this is not necessarily the same as how "realistic" it looks superficially). Economic models are represented by two main means: either graphically using diagrams and/or mathematically using equations and functions which capture the assumptions made in the model. You are often asked to "use the model to analyse" various questions. This means setting up and explaining the model, including its assumptions and showing diagrammatically what the model predicts at the very least. Some problems ask you to derive the predictions of the model mathematically. It is therefore essential that you learn the basic mathematical tools thoroughly during your first year. The *only way* to master maths is to *practise problems*. To this end the Department of Economics has published *Maths Workbook* (available online for free), and a substantial part of your first year economics study should be devoted to covering the material presented there.

First-year work is largely covered in major text-books, and you should not need to do much searching through journal articles until your second and third years. There is a wide range of text-books to choose from - you need not attempt to read all of them, but you are advised to make a habit of consulting at least two or three as they inevitably differ in the coverage they give to different topics, and it is important to realise that there can be several different approaches in economics to essentially the same subject-area.

You should also attend lectures, which you should treat as complementary to, and not substitutes for, your reading.

If you have studied A-level economics, do not be lulled into the false complacency of thinking you have already done the first-year work - although the subject-areas will be familiar, the approaches and the depth of treatment will not.



Read as widely as possible on current economic affairs, in the serious press, in journals like *The Economist*, and in popular paperbacks. In the first year the usefulness of this will be more indirect than direct, but it will be important for your long-term development.

Essays should be written in a clear and direct style - there is no need to look for literary flourishes, and you should definitely avoid vague and meaningless statements, journalistic exaggeration, clichés and other attempts to impress. Think of trying to explain the question to an equally intelligent person who is not an economist or who has not done the reading. You will be particularly marked down for imprecise terminology and imprecise use of logical reasoning. Use diagrams and/or algebra wherever they help the explanation - again, these should be clear and precise.

Above all, do not expect to solve all the world's problems in one year. There are almost certainly reasons (good or bad) why your pet panacea has not been universally adopted years ago, and it is an important part of your training to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents' arguments as well as your own. The subject-matter will broaden out in your second and third years, and will use the analytical foundations constructed in the first year, but even then there will be no single solution on offer.

Mr Martin Slater  
Dr Outi Aarnio  
Ms Suellen Littleton

# **Engineering**

Engineering at Oxford is mathematical and students often find it challenging. This is hardly surprising when one considers the amount of material that has to be covered in what amounts to a relatively short period of time. To ease the problem, the Department has responded by issuing pre-digested lecture notes; allowing for greater overlap between tutorial assignments and lecture notes, and between examination papers and tutorial assignments; setting laboratory experiments which are overly prescriptive; encouraging the use of “recipe books” such as HLT. All these measures have merit but may make you lose sight of the key fact that intrinsic learning can only take place with **your active and willing participation**. Oxford gives you the unique opportunity to **take responsibility for your own learning** and passes most of the initiative into your court. For that reason you must learn to manage your time wisely and must make allowances for going over the material several times before taking Prelims or Finals. In this last respect you will find written collections (the termly college exams) very useful.

## **Lectures**

You are expected to attend all lectures but there is little point in doing so unless you are prepared to concentrate for the full 50 minutes; you will find reading the lecture notes in advance will make attendance much more rewarding. Remember that neither the lectures nor the handouts define what you are expected to learn, so supplement lecture attendance with frequent visits to the library.

## **Tutorials**

Do not ever start on the tutorial assignment with the view to reading up only on the bits that you find difficult. This process is very inefficient! First spend a minimum of 10 hours reading around the subject (starting with your lecture notes) and then about 5 hours tackling the assignment. Do not ever allow yourself to simply transfer information from one of your sources onto your written work. Supplement your reading with regular checks that you can re-derive the material that you have read and that you can reconstruct the arguments for yourself. If you encounter difficulty in this, it is most likely to be due to lack of understanding rather than lapse of memory. Tutorials will be a waste of time unless you have had a thorough go at assimilating the relevant material before hand. A successful/enjoyable tutorial is one where you ask the questions, rather than the tutors having to search for your weaknesses in order to provide instruction.

## **Laboratories**

You must attend all laboratory sessions and you must get your work accepted within the prescribed deadlines. In so far as this is possible, try out your own hand rather than follow instructions mechanically. If you are unable to do this, get one of the demonstrators to help before giving up and acting like an automaton.

## **Essays**

Towards the end of the second year, you will be required to write two to three essays on “Engineering and Society” and “Safety and Risk”. By this stage, most of you will be out of practice in essay writing and you must allow for enough time to go through more than one draft. Make sure the final write-up is your own and proper reference is given to the work of others. For further information, see the section on essay writing in this booklet and the “Essay Writing Skills for Engineers” handout provided by the Department of Engineering Science.

Professor Basil Kouvaritakis  
Professor Alistair Borthwick  
Dr Amy Zavatsky

# **English**

The English Faculty publishes a booklet *Information on Undergraduate Studies in English*, in two editions, one designed for Mods and one for Schools. In addition, you are advised to attend the Induction session held in the English Faculty, and any Study Skills lectures that are on offer.

## **Difficulties with degree level work**

Most of the difficulties you encounter will be to do with moving from an 'A'-level standard to much more demanding work at degree-level. In your sixth form, you were used to working on a single text for as long as a term. Here, it is not uncommon to be writing two separate essays a week. For each essay you will be expected to cover either a topic, or the major writings of an author, as well as a number of critical works. (For this reason, we urge you to use vacations to get ahead with primary reading, so that you have time during term to think and consult the secondary literature.) Remember, though, when writing your essays, that you cannot cover everything. We will give you an essay-title, but it is up to you to set the parameters within which you approach it. It is very important that you do not lose depth of understanding as a result of increasing coverage. You should aim at all times for an active, questioning approach to your reading. Very soon, you will discover how much of the weekly reading-list you can cover to your own satisfaction; and if you find the workload is too big, please talk to your tutor as soon as possible.

If you write clearly, relevantly, persuasively, and stylishly, your work will be first class. It may take some time to settle into the different standard expected of you as an undergraduate; but most people are working happily and productively by the end of their first term.

## **Balancing the different areas of the course**

You have chosen a course distinguished for its comprehensive historical coverage of English language and literature. You will be expected to cover a lot of ground, and to be conscientious, even in the areas of the course that interest you least. During your first year, the course is designed to introduce you to the tools of your trade. Throughout your second and third years, you will be studying a relatively 'modern' paper alongside a relatively 'early' paper. You may encounter some difficulties with juggling the demands of the separate parts of the course. Talk with your tutors if you feel you aren't keeping up.

## **Function of lectures**

Lectures are optional, and it is only too easy to let the reading for your tutorial consume all your working-hours, at the expense of a wider interest in the subject. Remember that writing your tutorial essays is the minimum that is required for you to do well. We advise that you attend at least one lecture a day. Otherwise, you will be missing out on basic background information and a diversity of approaches to your subject, designed to enhance your understanding of the literature you are studying.

## **College classes**

College classes are compulsory, like tutorials. Group-work is challenging and rewarding. The more actively you contribute to classes, the higher your intellectual standing as a year-group will be.

## **How to use reading-lists**

Our reading-lists are often long. We do not expect you to read everything on them. Essential items are identified, and you must use your own judgment in selecting others that may be relevant. You need to learn the art of browsing and 'skip-reading'; you should also use the 'table of contents' and index. Alternative/supplementary reading lists are available in the English Faculty Library - but remember that they may reflect a very different approach.

## **Creative writing**

We strongly recommend attending the St Edmund Hall Poetry Workshops, at which you learn about poetic metre and form by writing poems yourself. The workshops help to sharpen the analytical skills you need for the rest of your course, as well as enabling you to develop creatively. If you want to see examples of poetry written by students in our workshops, please consult *Synergies: Creative Writing in Academic Practice*, edited by Lucy Newlyn and Jenny Lewis. Copies are available in the College Library, and can also be purchased from [joan.arthur@english.ox.ac.uk](mailto:joan.arthur@english.ox.ac.uk).

Professor Lucy Newlyn  
Dr Sharon Achinstein  
Dr Jenni Nuttall

## ***Fine Art***

A place at art school is the chance to experiment, and to devise ways of constructing a creative life in the company of others. Although 'research' is a grander term than 'finding out', for a practical subject like art you will need plenty of both. It is important that you recognise how 'seeing', 'looking', 'watching', 'contemplating', and 'doing' overlap. The making of artworks is motivated by desire, but achieved by critical and organisational skills. There are no substitutes for the qualities of persistence and critical vigilance. Humility, and recognising what you don't know, shared with others who are also inquisitive and exercising both their enthusiasm and their curiosity, add up to one of the best collaborative energies in an art school.

Interrogating both the cultural as well as the natural world is an artist's constant task. How do things develop and why? What are they made of, and how are they fashioned? What forces put them there, and keep them in place? In the world that surrounds us, what is a material and what is a product?

What records do you want to keep? Will they be sufficient for your long term needs? Written notes, drawings, cuttings, files, videos, photographs, trials, and errors? For whose consumption? What life span do you want these things to have? How will their status change over time?

No matter what talent, flair or skill young aspiring artists possess, it is disposition and temperament which count for most in the long run. Artists often need to use, extend or redeploy existing processes, and here constructive self-criticism and the diplomatic bag are the essential tools. Whether it is affecting patience whilst listening to somebody who may give access to information or facilities, or trying to prise a particular point of experience from a guarded practitioner, your critical and social skills will need to be at the ready. Since many of you will work internationally, the acquisition of a second language is a further resource.

No matter how you each decide to develop your personal strategies, you should always look widely to generate a lifelong sense of dynamic contradiction. The quality of practical resourcefulness needs to be always near the top of your list. This is sometimes known as 'learning to ask the right question' or 'making your own luck'.

Less subtle, but equally purposeful approaches can also be provocative tools. Look at as much as you can. Visit London regularly to see the shows. Talk about them. Don't accept any of them without testing them against your own thoughts and the thoughts of others – which is to say, be open and critical, and absolutely do not be dismissive. Whenever you can, visit exhibitions in other countries; things look very different there.

Whatever personal approach you develop, the way you manage your time will become the leading component in your education as an independent voice, as well as director of your own resources.

Michael Archer

# **Geography**

Geography is an inter-disciplinary subject and so demands a range of study skills.

## **Essay writing**

Geographers can expect to write at least one essay a week which will either be read out at the tutorial or handed in beforehand.

A weakness in many essays is a failure to address the question fully and it is a good idea to underline key words in the question before making your plan. The opening paragraph should be a kind of abstract, summarizing what you are going to say. You should organize your answer around an argument, using appropriate examples and illustrations, and ensure that each paragraph begins with a **strong** sentence. The conclusion should not be simple repetition of what you have already said, but perhaps highlight points of view that cannot be resolved and hint at alternative arguments. A bibliography is necessary to remind you of the sources you have used.

## **Fieldwork**

Fieldwork is an integral part of geographical study, both in the form of organized field trips and in the form of personal research for your dissertation. Field sketching is a useful skill to practise and you should always consider how your fieldwork fits into a wider sphere of geographical study.

The School of Geography provides useful notes on dissertation preparation and also classes on fieldwork techniques.



## **Laboratory and practical work**

Practical skills in handling data and other forms of geographical information are mostly acquired through class work at the School of Geography and it is vital to follow courses through to the end. The extent to which you will engage in laboratory work will depend on the nature of the options you choose, but for certain physical geography options lab work is an essential component and you will receive guidance as necessary. It is expected that all students will have basic computer and word-processing skills but it is important not to lose the art of handwriting, which you will need for examinations. When you are here you will also be required to familiarize yourself with library resources, including internet searching and use of electronic databases.

Professor Robert Whittaker  
Dr Lorraine Wild

# **Geology/ Earth Sciences**

The Geology and Earth Sciences degrees make use of a wide range of study skills.

## **Essay writing and numerical skills**

The complex nature of geological information means that essay writing is still a necessary skill for tutorials and examinations. The essay style to be aimed for here should generally be that of a short scientific review article. Non-numerical answers should be provided with a logical structure, introduction, clear headings, labelled figures, and a conclusion. Parts of the course (notably the geophysical options) draw more greatly upon numerical skills. These can be improved through a range of tutorial classes which are available.

## **Laboratory work**

Skills in handling geological materials are introduced during scheduled practical classes in the Department of Earth Sciences, and during tutorial classes. These materials will include sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rocks, fossils, structures, geological maps, geophysical and geochemical data. The interpretation of geological maps is considered a core skill, which requires three dimensional thinking. It is expected that students will have basic computer and word-processing skills. Practicals will include work in the Computing Laboratory, while preparation for essays and reports is likely to involve extensive use of library facilities and internet searches.

## **Field work**

There are up to ninety days of field work, including field training and a four to six week Independent (usually Mapping) Project, in the BA and MEdSc degrees. Careful observations on outcrops in the field note book should be accompanied by careful and reasonably accurate field sketches which should follow the OASIS rule (orientation, annotation, sketch what you see, interpretation, scale), together with quantitative measurements such as strike and dip. Careful organization, neat writing, and scientific drawing skills should be developed. Remember that the independent mapping project comprises over 15% of the Part A examination.

Dr Hugh Jenkyns  
Professor Martin Brasier

# **History**

## **The Oxford History syllabus**

The Oxford History syllabus is probably the most varied and wide-ranging in Britain, and students at St. Edmund Hall are encouraged to use this enormous range to explore periods, subjects and approaches that they have not studied before coming to University. The Faculty will impose some restrictions on your choice of options, to ensure that you study one or more papers from each of the medieval, early-modern and late-modern periods. But within these rules, it makes sense to select papers that bear some intellectual relationship to each other, and especially to study topics in the first and second year that will help to prepare you for more specialist work in the final year.

## **Tutorials, Lectures and Classes**

In the first year, you will find that the lectures and classes on offer will match what you are doing in tutorials very closely, and you will therefore lose out if you don't attend as many lectures as you reasonably can. The same is likely to be true for the Further Subject and Special Subject papers you study in the second and third years. In the second year, however, you may find that the lectures for the British and General History papers are more wide-ranging than the demands of the examination papers you have selected; but you can use this, too, to set your tutorial work in a wider historical context. If a paper is taught by classes, whether in the Hall or in the Faculty, tutors will often ask you to do some reading in advance of each meeting, and sometimes to prepare a short paper for presentation to the rest of the group. You will find it helpful to rehearse any presentation you have to make with a friend in advance, and to prepare a hand-out for the class, identifying the key stages of your argument.

## **Work schedule**

Make sure you plan your work schedule carefully. Oxford historians often find the concurrent cycles of weekly and fortnightly tutorials difficult to manage, especially in the first year. Make sure that you use the 'light' weeks to get ahead, and ensure that you plan your work carefully in advance so that you have time for all your obligations, academic and non-academic. It is essential also to set some time aside for study in each vacation. We know this is sometimes difficult, but you will find it enormously beneficial to prepare for the following term's tutorials, and especially to read the primary sources set for the Optional Subject in the first year, and the Further and Special Subjects in the second and third year. You will also need to use the summer vacation of the second year to research your thesis.

## **Essays or presentations**

When you are preparing an essay or a presentation, remember to look for the *argument* in the books and articles that you read. Don't get bogged down in factual details or the narrative of events. Always try to think analytically, and be prepared to read around the subject where necessary.

Your own work should always be structured as an argument. It is important before you start writing to identify the issues and problems posed by the question or title set. Ensure when you are writing that everything in your text relates back to that question or title, and contributes to your answer or conclusion. It is essential, too, to be able to place your argument in a wider historiographical context. Try to get behind the statements of historians to analyse and evaluate the evidence and the arguments they have used. Don't overload your text with too much information: one telling example, contemporary quotation, or statistic (as appropriate) is often sufficient to make your point. You will have to write a lot of essays during your time at Oxford, so don't try to write too much on any one occasion: somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 words should be enough to lay out your argument convincingly.

## **Tutors' comments**

Always pay attention to the spoken and written comments of your tutors, and try to act on them for the next piece of work you do. They will above all be seeking to encourage and develop your intellectual curiosity. You should therefore be prepared to exploit new approaches and types of evidence, and to engage your mind directly and critically with the methods and arguments used in historical debates.

## **Examinations**

The same qualities will be rewarded in examinations. You should be aware, though, that the questions set in the exams are unlikely to replicate exactly the topics you will have studied for tutorials. You must, therefore, be prepared to turn your mind and your material in new directions in the exam. Answer the questions the examiners have set, and not the questions you would have liked them to set: irrelevance and short-measure are perhaps the most common causes of low grades in both Prelims and Finals!

Dr David Priestland  
Mr Nicholas Davidson

# **Law**

## **Lectures and tutorials**

The course is organised around tutorials: these provide the backbone for how and what you will study. Typically you will have three tutorials per fortnight. All will involve your being given a list of cases, textbook references, and periodical articles to read; and an essay title (or problem question) to which to write. Sometimes these will require to be handed in in advance of the tutorial; usually they will be marked; always the writing of them is the educationally valuable part of the process.

Lectures may appear to be organised on a more hap-hazard basis, and this appearance is more or less the way it is. In the first two terms this presents few practical problems: you will be required to attend all lectures relating to the Mods papers. But it is also worth making two obvious points. First, if you wonder whether you will get more out of an hour's worth of your own reading of a textbook, or from the same time spent listening to someone who really knows his or her stuff delivering a lecture, it is pretty obvious that the second offers the greater benefit. Secondly, it is silly to elect to miss a lecture and then (photo)copy someone else's notes of what he or she thinks the lecturer said. This is a manifest waste of time, and has unlimited potential to mislead you. Don't even think of it.

The point of lectures is to listen, but not to play the role of stenographer. Notes jotted down as you listen (and written up afterwards) are likely to be valuable. Lectures are not practice for taking dictation, and more is lost by trying to "get everything down" than is missed by listening carefully and making briefer, interim, notes of what you hear. The point of tutorials is to do the writing after the reading, to understand, apply, and criticise the law which is called for in answer. Though you may believe that university is the place for creative thinking (and it is), legal creativity needs to operate within the context of the law. Just as mathematics and chemistry have facts, rules and doctrine which need to be understood, so does law: you cannot usefully make up "law" any more than a chemistry student can invent elements not found in the periodic table. One can derive satisfaction from the critical pulling apart of the law to show how asinine, or badly reasoned, it sometimes is. But one has to know what the law is - at least where the law is knowable - before one can make much intelligent headway in analysing it.

## **Learning the Law**

Tutorial reading lists will provide the starting point. To learn what the law is you have to read what Parliament has said it is (so read the statutes you are pointed towards) and what the judges have said it is (read the cases you are told to read). There is no rational point in reading a second-hand or remoter hand account of what some textbook writer thinks the law is: read the originals, using secondary sources only sparingly: after all, trying to deduce the law from chinese whispers is a singularly daft exercise. Of course you will have to learn to

read fast and efficiently, but if you read the headnote (the page or two which summarises the facts, argument, and court's holding), and then read the judgment, tending to skip lightly over the parts where the background and facts are recited, but concentrating in detail on the application of legal principles, you will learn the content of the law. But you will also see, and will absorb, the principles of legal argument. And it is ultimately this which you need to acquire: you need to be able to write answers to problem questions in a style reminiscent of the way a judge, or a party's legal adviser, would. You simply cannot get this from reading a textbook, any more than you can learn to be an actor, footballer, pianist or lover from poring over a textbook account of how someone thinks it is done. Read the source material, and then use your own hands and mind to play with it, and the style of legal reasoning will develop in you.

In tutorials, participate in the debate. Even less than lectures are these opportunities to practice taking dictation. Answer questions, but ask them as well; and if you do not understand something, ask again. The more you engage in intelligent debate, the greater the chance is that the penny will drop and the murky become clear, or (and probably even more usefully) things which appeared simple will be revealed to be more complex than you may have seen. Both processes contribute to increasing your understanding of the law and both require your input as asker as well as answerer.

## **Writing, again**

Problem questions often ask you to advise X what his or her remedies are on a given set of facts. So write it as an advice: do not write aimlessly about the general state of the law, and hope that this will look like an answer to a specific question, because it won't. Instead, advise X what is the basis for bringing or resisting, as the case may be, a particular claim. Justify your answer by referring to the specific provisions of statute or case law which vouch for it, and explain, where it is not obvious, why these authorities support the conclusion for which you contend. In those cases where the law is uncertain or unknown, explain how you would expect a judge to navigate this uncharted territory, and say why this, as opposed to another, solution is more likely to be favoured. But remember that as well as being an opportunity to try out your thinking, essays and problem answers are also weekly rehearsal for the examination. So aim to say all that need to be said in no more paper than you can cover, writing fast, in 45 minutes spent in exam conditions. Take as many hours as it needs to do it as well as you possibly can, but limit your material to paper measured in this way. This will require you to discriminate between important and lesser material, and to be succinct, direct, and unrepentive in your explanations. This is a very significant virtue in the study of the law; if it seems daunting when set out as a list of abstract demands, remember that learning by doing is far more effective than learning by just listening. And as there will be plenty of doing, there ought to be plenty of learning.

Professor Adrian Briggs  
Professor Derrick Wyatt, QC

# **Materials Science**

The materials course at Oxford uses a very wide range of approaches, from the legwork of the 1<sup>st</sup> year to a lengthy original research project in the 4<sup>th</sup> year. You will need to develop a similarly wide range of skills to get the best out of the course.

The first two years are taught by a mixture of lectures, tutorials and practicals. In these two years you should be able to develop the skills needed to handle the advanced topics in the third year, and the more free-form Part 2 project.

**Lectures:** it is all too easy to regard lectures as a passive process, especially as a majority of the lectures give out comprehensive lecture handouts. *Don't*. If the lecturer doesn't give out handouts, you will have to learn to take good notes on the fly, notes that can be used later in tutorial work and for revision for exams. This involves careful listening and writing down what is important, not just trying to write down everything the lecturer says and writes. If the lecturer does give out handouts, you will have to listen just as carefully, as the lecturer will usually spend the lecture amplifying and discussing what is on the handouts – so you'll still have to make your own notes! Either way, the lectures don't tightly define the course: there are few things more annoying to a tutor than the excuse that something that was needed "wasn't in the notes". That's what libraries are for: use them.

**Tutorials:** I tend to set a mixture of types of tutorial work: essays, short (or long!) numerically based problems, and "estimates". The point of a tutorial is that you make your best attempt at the work set, and let me see what you have done *before* the tutorial itself. We can then use the tutorial to focus on problem areas or discuss the topic more widely.

**Essays** usually take the form of a technical report – I expect you to draw information from a range of sources, assess the information as rigorously as possible, and reach some firm conclusions based on the evidence. This means not just passively accepting information, but evaluating and developing it. Poor essays tend to be ill-focussed data-dumps with no structure or conclusions. Good ones set the scene well, review the field (using diagrams, graphs and tables as needed) fully, stick to the point, and state clearly what has been found out and why.

I usually set essays over the vacations, to give you a chance to look into some aspect of the subject in more depth than is easily possible in term time. You will need your technical writing skills increasingly as the course progresses: about 40% of your finals marks are given for the practical write-ups, project report and part 2 thesis.

**Numerical problems** are usually fairly closely defined, but still require particular skills: firstly in extracting the appropriate mathematical problem to be solved from the description of the overall problem; secondly, in the maths itself. The first of these is part of the art of physical science, and the insight required develops with practice. The second is more straightforward. The materials department runs courses in the advanced maths you will need to solve certain types of problem (e.g. partial differential equations), but you will also need to be confident in using basic algebra and calculus.

Other short “Problems” can be more like mini-essays. You’ll need all the skills discussed under “essays” as well as pretty ruthless conciseness. Tutors (and examiners) very soon lose patience with waffle.

**“Estimates”** are designed to develop your skills in order-of-magnitude maths based on approximations, for the sort of question where full information isn’t likely to be available. The idea is that you should look-up the absolute minimum of facts, working instead from what you know, can make reasoned estimates of, or can observe. Example: how much power is consumed by all the traffic lights in the UK?

**Practicals:** these are important: materials science is a practical subject. Practical reinforce stuff taught in lectures and tutorials, develop the hands-on skills you will need in your part 2 project, and put you face-to-face with a cussedness of the reality of experimental science. They can also be sociable and good fun. As well as particular skills, such as the operation of microscopes and how to polish and etch metals, you will need to learn patience (it is easy to wreck a two-day experiment in a single hasty moment) and judgement (seeing what is important in a micrograph or mass of data). You will also need to learn how to take good notes. Another less obvious skill is how to get the most out of the lab demonstrators. The lab technicians, senior and junior demonstrators are paid to be there to help you (though not to do the work for you): if you need help, ask them.

**Computing:** you get a basic course in your first couple of weeks, but the use of IT is pervasive throughout the course. You will need to learn how to process and present data for practicals and for essays, and how to use the web to search for information (at Oxford you have access to some very high quality information sources and databases, as well as what is on the web at large). Email has become the default mode of communication within the University: I will assume that you check your email frequently.



Does all this look horribly daunting? Possibly. There is a lot to learn and the time can disappear all too quickly. Perhaps the most important skill to develop is managing your time well, so that you are not always working hard up to deadlines, or beyond them, and so that work doesn't pile up into an insurmountable mountain – and so you have time to go potholing, rowing, acting or whatever as well as working.

You have four years, starting now – enjoy it.

Professor Steve Roberts

## ***Mathematics and Computer Science***

In the single subject or Joint Honour School Undergraduates reading Mathematics or Computer Science, or Joint Schools involving Mathematics or Computer Science, will already be familiar with the introductory Mathematical Institute notes entitled *How Do Undergraduates Do Mathematics?* Particularly important pointers for the successful study of Mathematics are the following:

1. Read all new material slowly and carefully and note down any elements of an argument you do not fully understand - a gap in a proof means there is no proof at all; trying to formulate on paper what you do not understand can often clear up the problem.
2. Practise techniques by tackling additional problems from old examination papers until you are fluent - remember that the best mathematics is a mixture of abstract thought and virtuoso technique.
3. List and prioritise problems for tutorials and discuss them with your tutorial partners beforehand - make the best use of limited tutorial time.
4. Go over tutorial notes soon after the tutorial - such re-enforcement and consolidation aids learning.
5. Develop your technique for taking lecture notes - what you need is readable notes to which you will wish to return; you want to avoid having to re-write them.
6. Get into the habit early of writing solutions out as if for an examination - it saves time and anguish along the way.
7. Consult your tutor earlier, rather than later, on any of the above and on any other problems you might experience.

Professor Barbara Niethammer  
Professor Oliver Riordan

# **Medicine**

First year Medical Students will have received the *Handbook for Pre-Clinical Medicine* from the Director of Pre-Clinical Studies. This handbook is a comprehensive guide to the course in Oxford: it covers how the course is structured, the role of University lectures, seminars, and practical classes, how college tutorials dovetail with University teaching, and the examination process. Useful sources of additional information are also highlighted. This handbook is your first port of call for guidance on getting the most from the medical course. Make sure you have a copy, follow its advice and keep it in a safe place.

The College Library keeps a collection of current textbooks, which you are advised to use in the first instance. Tutors and lecturers will recommend books; if they're missing or not available in sufficient numbers let us know - it may be possible to obtain additional copies. You may wish later to buy one or more of your favourite books. There is no obligation to do this, and the book you buy is very much a matter of individual choice - different books suit different people. It is nevertheless probably advisable to stick to books recommended by your tutors or by a lecturer. Always consult more than one textbook when studying a particular topic to identify the important issues and concepts. Make sure you use the most recent editions of textbooks to get the most up-to-date information. Use your textbooks in conjunction with the handouts you receive during your lectures. The handouts are succinct summaries of the topics you have studied, and should be kept for future reference.

You should attend all lectures and seminars, at which you'll need to take notes that summarise what was said. It may be necessary, especially early on, to consolidate these notes when you return to college. Practicals are obligatory. They take up a large amount of your time and will only be helpful if you read the instructions before you attend, and think about what you're doing during the class. College tutorials will complement the lectures and practicals: to gain the maximum from tutorials you should arrive on time, armed with a list of questions about the material, and prepared to contribute to the discussion.

Finally, communication is everything. Tell your tutors if you're unhappy or unwell; ask for help with difficult topics; speak up if you're struggling with the workload; warn tutors if you foresee problems attending a tutorial; reply to letters and e-mails from tutors.

Dr Robert Wilkins

## ***Modern Languages***

The Modern Languages course at Oxford is among the most stimulating in the country and it offers a huge range of language, linguistic and literary options. You will need to plan carefully and work consistently throughout in order to establish a sound working knowledge of the languages through which you are exploring cultural, literary and historical topics. While the literary and essay-writing skills have obvious affinities to other subjects, notably English and History, the conscious, consistent and regular practice of language is more like training for sport or playing musical instruments. Studying two languages requires very careful thought, and it should be remembered that the practical skills carry the extra bonus of fifty per cent of the marks in the Final examinations.

There are four particular skills involved in the study of modern languages: fast listening comprehension, fluent speaking, close reading and accurate writing. These are of such a kind that they cannot easily be acquired over night, but at the same time, each is easy enough in itself, moreover, they are complementary.

For listening and speaking, the Language Centre has much to offer, notably easy access to recorded TV material and to language courses, and some CALL (Computer-assisted language learning). These change, sometimes rapidly, but do ask us or the Language Centre for advice about where to look. The College's computers also allow you to access the Internet, where there are web-sites for the major foreign daily newspapers and sometimes to audio-news. The Modern Languages Faculty Library has collections of video-tapes in foreign languages, both its own, on free loan, but also some more commercial tapes which can be borrowed cheaply.

The stages prior to achieving fluent speaking can be embarrassing, but it is important to realize that even native speakers make many mistakes: your aim should be to make the mistakes they do, rather than fall into basic errors of gender, verb-forms and inappropriate vocabulary which reveal your incompetence. Some very basic forms need to be learned - genders, plurals, common irregular verbs - and this can only be done by practice.

If you need to improve your pronunciation of the foreign language, ask the lecturers, who are native speakers, or ask your tutor for help.

Close reading and accurate writing ought to go hand in hand: a good habit to get into is to 'parse' (i.e. analyse) the first and last sentence of whatever foreign passage you are dealing with: Do you follow all the structure? Do you know the genders of the words? And their plurals? Do you know why that case appears? Can you produce all the forms of the verbs? Can you explain why this or that verb should be in the subjunctive? Can you look up from the text and paraphrase the sentence in the foreign language? Can you make it into a question - or a command? Try to learn a few new words or constructions each day.

When translating from the languages into English, pay attention to the English as well and try to build up your vocabulary on both sides.

Make sure you browse along the dictionaries in the Library - if there is a new one we haven't got: Ask for it! And take some time during your prose work - which ought to take several hours if done properly - three or four - and follow up words in the dictionary: do you know synonyms (in English or German), antonyms, hyponyms etc.

Which brings us to technical terms:

Make sure that you know what the terms mean, and, especially in the case of literary terms, build a list of foreign equivalents in your languages so that you can talk in an informed way about your texts and sound professional - knowing the names for movements and metres, rhetorical tropes and devices. If you have hobbies or sports or pastimes, get a basic vocabulary in the subject areas so that you can chat to others, perhaps on the net, about what you enjoy most. The College and University have huge resources - magazines, newspapers, books, tapes and access to the internet: you should not pass any day without doing something in and with each language. If you do only some of these things, you will discover that in a few weeks you will be making progress.

We have emphasized the technical, linguistic skills because they are the key to so much else. For literary tutorials (and for the history of language) you should make sure that you know the basic material well and have made sensible and structured notes on it. These can be as long as you like, and as detailed as necessary. The character and shape of essays themselves should be discussed with the tutors - all of whom have different preferences, relating to handing in beforehand or reading out. You will also need to develop commentary technique which is one of the ways of testing your close reading of texts and should help you to become skilled at picking out important and relevant material and organizing it into a proper intellectual argument. Make sure that any material you quote is given with page and line refs. (where verse is involved), and that the secondary literature you have used is identifiable. Adducing sources or opinions and attempting to assess them critically as arguments is part of the discourse of literary study and sets it apart from impressionistic gushing. The bibliographies tutors provide can range from the voluminous to the bare minimum - and do not expect them to be aware of the up-to-the-minute state of research on all topics. If you have been attending lectures, you will quite probably know something they don't, which is important, because the ideal tutorial should be reciprocal! Remember that essays produced in the middle of the course can be exploratory, try out your own ideas and so on. But do not forget that these essays (and the notes which lie iceberg-like beneath them) are the basis for your examination revision and the very different sort of essay which needs to be written in 45 minutes (plus 15 to structure the plan!). Here it can be helpful to make a few brief notes after the tutorial, re-jigging the essay in terms of the major points and writing them down on the essay before filing it away. This will certainly help with revision later. In order to develop an active, questioning approach to your reading, you will need to use the vacations to get ahead with the primary texts. Term time can then be given over to rereading, to rethinking, and to consulting secondary literature. Remember that while you cannot cover everything in your essays, you are

looking to combine depth of understanding with clear, persuasive and stylish analysis. Above all, learn the difference between spoken and written English and develop your own economical and focused style, perhaps experimenting with parodies of critical texts you have come across in your reading.

Finally, a word about collaborating with others: languages are about communication, and working together on proses and literary essays can be very productive, provided there is input on each side. But please make sure that what is submitted or read out has 'been through your head' and not simply been copied - or transferred as a file!

Dr Andrew Kahn  
Dr Wes Williams  
Dr James Naughton

# **Music**

The Faculty of Music publishes detailed handbooks to accompany the Mods and Final Honour School syllabuses; you should read these very carefully, and should also attend the Induction sessions at the beginning of Michaelmas Term.

## **Goodbye school, Hello Oxford**

In moving beyond your A-level study to begin reading Music at Oxford, you will need to accept that ‘doing’ music need not always mean actually playing music on an instrument: it can (and often will) mean an approach that regards music primarily as an object of scholarly intellectual enquiry. Ideally, however, you will learn to understand how all the various approaches taken to the subject at Oxford can be mutually supportive and reinforcing; your own studies will be greatly enriched and facilitated if you can keep this possibility in mind.

## **Too many notes ....**

The central focus of your studies will always be music itself, in its many manifestations. None of us knows enough music, and there will never be time in lectures and tutorials to do more than skim the surface of the vast repertorial background to the course. You should make it a priority – a very enjoyable one – to extend your knowledge of western and non-western music as widely as possible. In addition to the Faculty CD holdings and Oxford’s very rich concert life, one of your most useful study aids will be a radio capable of receiving good-quality BBC Radio 3 FM, and a copy of the weekly broadcasts that are relevant to your current lecture courses and tutorial work. Try also to listen each week to at least one piece of music that has nothing to do with your course, and of which you are currently ignorant.

## **Knowing the score**

Books on music can be prohibitively expensive, and it is not assumed that you will be in a position to purchase a great many items. Your purchasing power will be best directed towards the acquisition of musical scores, and you should aim to build up a personal library of study-scores. Above all, get into the habit of accompanying your listening with score reading: this will help to improve your ability to ‘realise’ a score mentally, without the need to hear the music actually played. The development of your ‘inner ear’ in this way represents another key task for your development as a musician; much of your learning at Oxford will tend to assume this ability, though the course will also provide opportunities for improvement.

## **Read on**

The reading lists issued in connection with lecture courses and tutorial assignments are not intended to be exhaustive, nor are you expected to read everything that is listed. You should regard these lists as indicative of the best and most relevant material in the field. In many cases you may be expected to use the books listed as a source of further bibliographical references. When reading towards a tutorial essay or assessment, it is a good idea to read as widely around the subject as possible. You will quickly learn that black-and-white 'right' and 'wrong' answers are rarely what is required: a considered assessment of the competing arguments for and against a particular position will often be a more intellectually rewarding exercise for tutee and tutor alike. Make a note of all the sources you consult when preparing a piece of written work (this applied particularly to articles in periodicals, of the contents of which you should aim to keep abreast): your revision will be greatly assisted if you can return swiftly to the materials on which you based prior arguments.

## **Staying the course**

While Faculty lectures and classes are optional, you should find it possible and worthwhile to attend almost all of them; indeed, the essentially Faculty-based teaching in History of Music for Mods makes attendance at these lectures effectively mandatory. Tutorials and tutorial work are not optional; what you gain from them, as from the experience of reading Music at Oxford in general, will depend entirely on what you are prepared to give.

Dr Roger Allen



# ***Philosophy***

For every Honour School that includes philosophy there is a university handbook, which offers a wide range of information and advice: it is important to read these. Here are just some supplementary comments, which are *not* to be read *instead* of your handbook.

## **Reading, thinking, writing**

- \* Philosophy tutors differ in how detailed their guidance is on reading for a topic. But no philosophy tutor will spoon-feed. It is important to get used to browsing in libraries or bookshops to find relevant things.
- \* It's a good idea to read what you both understand and *disagree* with. This should get you thinking, and thus actually *doing* philosophy, not just reporting on other people's doing of it.
- \* Philosophy books and articles are often very dense, and you should be prepared to budget more time per page than you might for other academic prose. But you shouldn't read too much. Tutors are continually saying 'Read less; think more'.
- \* Be critical of what you read, but don't dismiss ideas without trying to understand why they're put forward: they're probably not as daft as you might at first think.
- \* Be adventurous in developing your *own* ideas, but be especially critical of these: ask yourself what objections might be raised against them and how you would respond.
- \* Some philosophy options are hung around a classic text or texts. Don't then let your work degenerate into mere history of ideas or literary criticism: the ideas and arguments themselves are of first importance, their provenance is of secondary interest, and all else is an idle curiosity.
- \* Try to be clear and precise when you write, but don't worry if you think this is difficult to achieve. (Do worry if you don't think so!)

\* Take care over the meanings of the words you use: if necessary, give an explicit gloss on your use of a word. (A caveat here to the recommended use of a thesaurus to search for synonyms:- When you are developing a systematic argument, then if you want to mean the same thing in two different places, it's usually best to use the same word: it can get very confusing otherwise.)

\* Coherent syntax is essential. Good spelling is helpful.

\* As well as writing essays, you will - at least in the first year - have to do logic exercises. A lot of this work is symbolic logic, but you still need to use decent English prose when explanation or discussion is called for: don't skimp on this.

## **First-year anxiety**

Most people will not have done any philosophy - at least, not in any systematic way - before starting undergraduate work on it. It will be new and strange, and you must expect to feel rather at sea to begin with. In fact, there's probably something wrong if you don't. Just try to recapture the intellectually innocent and insistently inquiring cast of mind that you had when you were five years old, and just get going. Then take to heart the specific feedback your tutor gives you on your work, which should be a great deal more valuable than any amount of study-skills documentation.

Dr Stephen Blamey

# Physics

The Department of Physics provides a variety of resources for Physics students; the most important of these is the '*Undergraduate Handbook*', distributed at the beginning of Michaelmas Term. In addition, the Department maintains an extensive library of Physics resources online ([www.physics.ox.ac.uk](http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk)); this includes a list and timetable of all lectures, online versions of the Undergraduate Handbook, previous examination papers and much more. The following is based on the "*Notes for Incoming Freshers*" ([www.physics.ox.ac.uk/admissions/degrees/freshernotes.htm](http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/admissions/degrees/freshernotes.htm))

## Lectures

The basic form of instruction is the Lecture; i.e. one person, using blackboard/OHP/slides/demonstrations etc., explaining his or her advertised subject to all students in the University wishing to attend. The lectures are frequently supported by printed notes, problem sheets, or other handouts. Lectures go fast and do not repeat material! You will need to learn to take good lecture notes, and supplement them with your own private study, using textbooks recommended by lecturers and tutors.

## Tutorials

Lectures are backed-up by tutorials, which are compulsory. They usually consist of a meeting between two students and one tutor for one hour. On average, physics students will have 2 tutorials a week, a bit more in the first year and somewhat less in later years.

For each tutorial, a topic or topics will be identified, usually references to relevant books or sections of books will be given, and you will be asked to solve a number of illustrative problems, often based on assignments handed out in the lectures. The work assigned will usually be handed in to the tutor the day before the tutorial and will form the basis for what will be discussed during the tutorial. The tutorial work will be organised to be as nearly as possible in step with the lectures, so as to reinforce them. To get the most out of tutorials, it is essential that you prepare for them by identifying as precisely as you can the areas which you need help with, either in the lectures or tutorial work. You will soon find that they are an essentially friendly encounter (provided you are working properly!) during which you are encouraged to ask questions and contribute to the discussion.

## **Practicals**

The whole of physics depends on experimental observations, and learning how to make these reliably and quantitatively is an essential part of your training. Practical work is therefore compulsory. It is a University requirement that you do the proper amount of practical work, which averages about one whole day per week for most of the first year. You keep a record of your practical work in '*Daybooks*'; some of your practicals have to be written up in detail and are marked. You have the choice of replacing some practicals by choosing a voluntary vacation project or by taking the Theory Option, which involves an additional paper in the final examination, or by teaching physics at a local school.

## **Vacation work**

At Oxford the teaching terms are very short – they add up to only about 25 weeks in one year. It is therefore absolutely essential that you set aside significant amounts of time during each vacation for academic work. The course assumes that you will do this. You must go over your lecture notes, revising the material and supplementing it by information gained from tutorials and from your own reading. In addition to consolidating the previous term's work, you should try to prepare for the next term's courses. Your tutors will often set you vacation reading and specific vacation work. Collections, an examination based on the previous term's work, at the beginning of each term are intended to give both you and your tutors an indication of your progress.

Professor Philipp Podsiadlowski  
Dr Jeff Tseng

# **Politics**

## **Research**

Politics covers a huge range of approaches and subjects, and you will need to read widely for papers in this subject. The first year's reading list can be found on the Department of Politics and International Relations website, along with the reading lists for the core and option papers: [www.politics.ox.ac.uk/teaching/ug/reading\\_lists/](http://www.politics.ox.ac.uk/teaching/ug/reading_lists/)

Reading lists contain certain basic texts as well as a number of additional books and articles on each topic. Your tutor will give you specific guidance before each tutorial as to what exactly you should read: the point will be to cover as much ground as possible on the reading list while leaving enough time to prepare and write an essay. Some key texts will be found in the College library, but the most important library is the Department's library for PPE at Manor Road, and you will be using this one regularly. Make sure to order books early.

## **Tutorials, Lectures and Classes**

Tutorials and classes will cover the syllabus quite closely, and are generally organized from within the College. Lectures are organized by the Department, and provide essential coverage of the syllabus. At the beginning of each term, your Politics tutor will go through the Lecture list with you, and identify the key lectures which you should attend; this is a very important part of the learning process and you should get into the habit of attending as many as you reasonably can. There are also Special Lectures at Oxford where many distinguished international guests speak on a range of contemporary political issues, so do look out for the Special Lecture list each term.

## **Essays**

This is something which will be discussed extensively during your time in Oxford, but here are some preliminary guidelines. Essay-writing is one of the most important aspects of the learning experience at Oxford: you will write many of them over your three years here, and your skills will continue to develop as you proceed through the course.

You should make organised notes that can be used both for writing essays and for revising for exams. After reading a text, summarise what the author is arguing and then think about whether the argument is correct. Essays should always begin by identifying the problem they are addressing. A brief summary of what you propose to argue and/or of the sequence in which you address your topics should follow. There should always be a conclusion at the end, in which you summarize the main features of your argument, and what your answer to the question is.

To provide supporting evidence, be selective: essays should not be too long (and conciseness is an important skill to acquire for when you will be writing under examination conditions), but do illustrate your argument with examples. Make an argument – do not simply describe what others have written. Where a variety of views have been offered of a given topic, explain the chief arguments for and against each, and why you prefer yours. Provide a theoretical framework where appropriate, and think about different approaches to a given topic such as a rational choice approach or a comparative approach. (See also the advice on ‘Essays’ under the Modern History section.) Make absolutely certain you answer the question. Even if you are *not* writing an essay in any given week, you should still read and set out a plan of the question and the arguments.

Dr Karma Nabulsi

# **Psychology**

Psychology is a multi-disciplinary subject and so requires a range of study skills. The single most important skill is being able to think so do set aside time to think about the contents of the lectures, tutorials, and practical classes.

## **Lectures**

It is essential to attend lectures since this will give you an overview and direct your attention to those parts of the syllabus which are considered most important. Also you will be able to hear about the latest studies which are not yet in review papers or books.

## **Tutorials**

You can expect to write at least twelve essays per term for the first two terms. Each essay should develop an argument, not just be a list of experimental results. Use your tutorials wisely and ask questions. During your preparation for tutorials make a list of issues you don't understand, so that you remember to ask about them. Don't be embarrassed if you don't understand - it is always better to ask than remain quiet.

## **Practical classes**

It is compulsory to attend practical classes. The key to success is to write up the practical as soon as possible after the class since it is easy to forget exactly what happened if you leave it a few weeks, when the writing process will be that much harder and more time-consuming. Hand in your practical work by the deadline - failure to do so will result (unless there are extenuating circumstances) in your degree class being lowered.

## **Projects and dissertations**

Many students find the project work one of the most interesting parts of the degree. Success comes with starting projects and dissertations in your second year, which will then leave more time in your third year free for Finals revision.

## **Informal discussion with other students**

Discussing the contents of lectures or tutorials with other students is very beneficial. It will help you discover other points of view and test your own understanding, as well as giving you practice in formulating arguments.

## **Department of Experimental Psychology booklet**

This excellent booklet explains the course structure as well as course requirements. It also describes the requirements for British Psychological Society recognition which is often required for postgraduate training, for example, in clinical psychology.

Professor Maryanne Martin



## ***Summary of website references***

Computing Services: [www.ict.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ict.ox.ac.uk)

Counselling Service – revision and exams: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/shw/revision.shtml](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/shw/revision.shtml)

Disability Office: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/disab](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/disab)

*Introduction to Traditional Grammar*, by Bella Millett:

[www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/notes/grammar.htm](http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/notes/grammar.htm)

*Physics Notes for Incoming Freshers* -

[www.physics.ox.ac.uk/admissions/degrees/freshernotes.htm](http://www.physics.ox.ac.uk/admissions/degrees/freshernotes.htm)

*Politics and the English Language*, by George Orwell:

[www.george-orwell.org/Politics\\_and\\_the\\_English\\_Language/0.html](http://www.george-orwell.org/Politics_and_the_English_Language/0.html)

Politics reading lists: [www.politics.ox.ac.uk/teaching/ug/reading\\_lists/](http://www.politics.ox.ac.uk/teaching/ug/reading_lists/)

Rules for Computer Use: [www.ict.ox.ac.uk/oxford/rules](http://www.ict.ox.ac.uk/oxford/rules)

St Edmund Hall IT information: [www.seh.ox.ac.uk/it](http://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/it)

University Guidance on Plagiarism: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism)

University's *Essential Information for Students*: [www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/pam/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/pam/)