

Oxbridge Admission Tests

1) Remember what is being looked at

Of course, some universities are prioritising aptitude: some test mental maths, physics, chemistry, etc. If your university or subject falls into that category, then focus on really revising and getting to know the subject so you can ace the test. People I know who were applying for these types of subjects did from half an hour extra a day at before they submitted their applications, to up to three extra hours a day in the weeks before the tests. I know, it's gruelling, but if you really want it, then you need to work hard.

If you are applying for a humanities-based subject, admissions tends to look more for the way that you think and analyse a problem that is given to you. My subject (Linguistics) was a mix of science and humanities, and assumed no prior knowledge, so I had a translation of made-up language section, raw data analysis, and an essay section (it's a lot, I know). I didn't finish my essay (I didn't even really start it- I wrote little more than a plan), but the Director of Studies told me that they weren't looking necessarily for perfect results: they wanted to see what we did under pressure (this is, in a sense, what happens when they push you in interviews).

Just a heads-up for everyone taking any kind of these tests: these exams are designed so that they are nigh impossible to complete, so just bear that in mind. That's not an excuse not to revise hard where you can, though.

2) Find alternative ways to revise

Don't rely just on practise papers to prepare for any admissions test: if you are lucky, there will be one or two practises, but little more. Try maths/science/linguistics Olympiad past papers, or comparing two random poems you find in a book, or analyse random paintings (History of Art). Reading widely for humanities papers also helps: even if they're unlikely to pick a common painting/extract/concept, you may have ideas and influences that can be used in essays (this is essentially what allowed me to do something with my essay section so don't knock it).

3) Do a proper mock exam

This is another reason you shouldn't just use the past papers as a revision tool, because (as you should well know by now), doing something under exam conditions is very, *very* different. Obviously you can't perfectly replicate the nervous conditions that you'll get when you do the actual thing, but this is as close as you can get. Time yourself. Make sure you really really stick by it. Do it in an environment where you'll be uncomfortable. It will be horrible, but it will be worth it. Check out the university's website to find a mock paper, and normally there is an answer paper to go with it. Even as I'm writing this the feeling of sitting the paper in a lecture room with five minutes to go and a 20-minute section that I hadn't started is creeping back, but it worked out for me so it'll be ok for you.

4) Work with others

Do you know anyone who is applying for the same subject as you? Did you meet anyone on the open day who is still considering applying? Reach out to them! They will be preparing for the test as well, and working together will be a very productive way for you to figure out what you know, as well as gaining new insights and influences to include in your own work.

5) Remember that the assessment is not the only part of your application

The Director of Studies I spoke to told me that some people who are in the bottom few for the admissions tests still get offers, because they're really good in the interview and their personal statement is good, and all manner of combinations of ability. The whole point of an Oxbridge application is to provide the most rounded view of your strengths and abilities, and the phrase "don't put all your eggs in one basket" couldn't be truer, as working too much on this test (which you won't be able to get 100% on unless you're Einstein) will sacrifice time spent creating an application that is the strongest you can give given your own strengths and abilities.