



THE  
CAMBRIDGE INTERVIEW  
GUIDE

---

**THE GENERAL  
INTERVIEW**



## **Preface**

Students working with us in previous years have found this book extremely helpful in preparing for their interviews. This year, we decided to make this book publicly available for the first time. Although useful for all applicants, this book will be particularly helpful for those students who receive little support with their Cambridge application from their schools.

The questions provided in this book are in the style of Cambridge Interview Questions. They have been put together by a group of Oxford and Cambridge graduates based on their interview experiences and include suggested answers and approaches. This book allows applicants to have an idea of the type of questions they might encounter at their interview.

The interviewer does not expect you to know all of the answers. The reason for asking such tricky questions is that the interviewer wants to observe your approach and way of thinking through a problem. If you have no idea where to start, be sure to use what you know from your studies to date to think what may be relevant. And you are, of course, allowed to ask your interviewer questions

We would be delighted to hear your feedback regarding this book and can be reached through the Cambridge Interview Questions website.

## Introduction

Every year we hear from students terrified by the prospect of their Cambridge interview. They are worried that they will be so nervous that their mind will go blank under pressure, or perhaps that they won't have any idea how to begin when asked a seemingly impossible question.

The aim of this guide is to show you that by preparing appropriately, you can use the interview as an opportunity to showcase your talents and demonstrate why you should be offered a place to study at Cambridge.

***If you take only one thing away from this guide, it should be that you have more control during the interview than you might think. As long as you have an idea of what the interviewer is looking for, you can and should use this to your advantage.***

It is all too easy to neglect interview preparation. However with such a short period of time in the interview to leave a memorable impression, it is vital that you use your interview to make an impact and present the very best aspects of yourself. You should ensure that you are able to bring up the most important things that you want to mention - the interview should not be the first time that you are thinking about your achievements!

The more you can prepare in advance of your interview, the more confident and relaxed you will be going into and during the interview. For the majority of students, this is the first time that they will have been questioned in this way. You want to leave a unique and positive impression in the mind of the interviewer and should aim to be proactive, steering the questioning onto to areas where you can show why you are a strong candidate and deserve a place at Cambridge. The interviewer is unable to read your mind – their decision can only be based on your application and what you say at interview.

There are many things that you can do to improve your chances - and they may seem like common sense, but not all students receive the same level of assistance. It is difficult to work with vague advice such as "just be yourself" or "just be confident". The aim is to show your best self - and use the limited time you have to demonstrate your strengths and why you deserve a place. Preparing for the interview is not like revising for an exam, which is part of the reason so many students find it difficult. When talking about yourself there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Where should you start?

This Interview Guide helps you to deconstruct the interview process, and how you can use the weeks leading up to the interview to prepare and practice. This guide has been developed in response to students looking for specific and practical help on how to prepare for interview. We hope that you find the advice valuable and wish you the very best of luck at your Cambridge interview.

## **Part I: Preparing for your interview**

Unfortunately there is no way that you will be able to work out in advance what you will be asked at interview. The aim of preparation is to get you to think critically and become comfortable talking about yourself and your application.

As indicated earlier, broadly the interviewer is looking to determine your:

- **Academic ability**
- **Attitude and personality**
- **Capacity for critical and creative thinking**

All three are very closely related and there is significant overlap. However, we have found that dividing preparation into these areas to make it easier for students to prepare constructively.

With all of your preparation, it is important to note that we are **not** advising that you memorise answers to questions, but rather think about and identify the most important points you might want to mention about each area.

Try to keep your notes concise, aiming to give succinct and clear answers at interview.

We will discuss each point in turn, and how you can demonstrate your strengths.

**7. Tell me about a news article you have read recently that you found interesting.**

**Why has the interviewer asked this question?**

The interviewer is looking for a candidate to demonstrate their interest in the wider world outside the classroom. You can also demonstrate your ability to cultivate opinions and to think critically.

This is a nice broad question, which answered well would allow the student to take control and direct the later course of the interview. You could choose to discuss an article relating to your subject, for example an Economics applicant might want to talk about the recent downturn in Chinese GDP growth rate. This would allow you to demonstrate your enthusiasm and independent interest in your subject outside of school. A Sciences applicant might want to talk about a discovery or recent experiment, for example advances in genetic technology. Alternatively, you could choose an article of a topical news story. A current example might be the ongoing discussions regarding Britain's place in the EU or the refugee crisis in Europe – on which this example will focus.

**Example answer**

“I read an article last weekend in The Times about the European response to the ongoing refugee crisis. It focussed on a number of personal stories of the journeys people have made from Syria and Afghanistan – over thousands of miles, and for many the first time they have left their home country. It made me think of a number of different things. One is the immense power of the media to influence public opinion and government policy. The picture of a lifeless three year old on a beach in Turkey highlighted the personal and tragic nature of the crisis. However, if this picture had not been published, the response might potentially have been different – affecting thousands of lives. There are also questions arising from the increasing rise of right-wing sentiment and anti-immigrant feeling across Europe – highlighted in the comments of the Hungarian Prime Minister. In recent elections we have seen populist parties entering government across the continent – which seem to focus on exploiting people's fears. It is slightly terrifying – and I think there are many different causes. The article discussed the effect of the terminology we use – are they refugees, economic migrants or asylum seekers? Should this make any difference? I thought about is the obligation we have as an individual and as a society. My personal opinion is that we have a moral duty to assist those in need and less fortunate than ourselves – one of the reasons that I find it important to volunteer. After all, the refugees are experiencing horrific and terrifying violence at home and if I were in their situation, I would be doing exactly the same.”