

WHTC University application subject guides

Architecture

This guide has been written to help support you in your application to university. It contains the following information relevant to your subject to help you decide where to apply and put together the best application that you possibly can:

1. Course links
2. Entrance requirements
3. Recommended A-levels
4. Admissions tests
5. Recommended reading
6. Interesting MOOCs
7. Useful additional resources
8. Related courses
9. Oxbridge example interview questions

1. Course links

Below are links to the top courses for this subject in the UK (according to [The Complete University Guide](#)). Click on the links to find information about what the course is like, what you'll learn, and loads of information about things such as fees and accommodation. However, remember that there are loads of other great universities out there, so check out The Complete University Guide or just google studying your subject at university.

1. [University of Cambridge](#)
2. [University of Bath](#)
4. [University of Sheffield](#)
11. [University of Edinburgh](#)

15. [University of Nottingham](#)
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2. Entrance requirements

Here are the grades that the university suggests you need to get in to that course, and the likely offer that they will give you. If you're concerned that your predicted grades aren't this high, don't worry – these are the universities with the highest requirements. There are plenty of other great universities out there with lower entrance requirements!

1. **Cambridge:** A*AA
 2. **University of Bath:** A*AA
 3. **University of Sheffield:** AAA
 4. **University of Edinburgh:** AAA-ABB
 5. **University of Nottingham:** AAA
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3. Recommended A-levels

Different universities may differ as to what A-levels they ask you for. Some might list one subject as 'essential', while another might list the same subject as just 'helpful', so make sure to check out the course page (under Section 1 of this document, or on the university website) to be sure what your chosen university expects!

There are no A-levels that are absolutely required to study Architecture at university. However, most universities will expect you to have a good academic background in Maths, Science and Art. Universities will want to see evidence that you're an enthusiastic, practical person who is able to combine their knowledge across the arts and sciences. The ability to draw and an interest in the history of architecture is essential for most courses.

Art: Art is a useful A-level to study if you aspire towards architecture because it enables you to develop and refine your artistic knowledge and abilities. As most universities are looking for some evidence of artistic capability, studying it at A-level is a really easy way to showcase this. You will also have to produce a portfolio of creative work and sketches to show universities, so doing Art A-level will make this significantly easier.

Maths: Until fairly recently, Maths was a required subject for studying Architecture at a leading university. Although some universities (such as the University of Leeds) still require it, the vast majority of universities now view it as a desirable but not essential A-level choice. Strong mathematical skills are required when it comes to planning and creating a building so a Maths A-level will provide useful evidence of these skills. We would highly recommend you take Maths A-level if you want to do Architecture.

Physics: Like Maths, Physics is considered a desirable but not essential A-level choice for studying Architecture. Studying Physics will enable you to prepare for the engineering components of the course.

4. Admissions tests

What admissions tests are you typically required to sit in addition to submitting your application? This also differs from uni to uni, so if your chosen university isn't on this list, make sure you check out the course page so you know exactly what you need to apply.

As a part of your application, universities will expect you to submit a portfolio of your work. This can take the form of drawings, paintings, graphic design, 3D models, pages from sketchbooks, photography, etc. The exact number of pages that your portfolio needs to be will differ from university to university so it's important to have as many pieces of work available as possible.

The purpose of the portfolio is to enable you to demonstrate your creative abilities across a wide range of materials and media. They will be looking for a wide range of styles and being able to show that you are capable of thinking in terms of 2D and 3D is a particularly important skill.

Most universities are looking for evidence of a process which led to the final product so consider how you can showcase this in your portfolio. You will be expected to be able to talk in-depth about the pieces you've chosen to include, such as your inspiration behind the piece or why you chose to use the materials you did.

Don't underestimate how long completing a portfolio will take you. It's important to begin early to ensure that you submit the best possible pieces of your work.

If you are applying to Cambridge and are invited to an interview you will also be expected to complete the [Architecture Admissions Assessment](#). This is an hour long paper designed to test your writing skills and graphic and spatial ability. You will not need to register for this beforehand, as it will be sat on the same day as your interview at your chosen college.



5. Recommended reading

Reading some relevant books or articles is a really great way to demonstrate your passion for your chosen subject in your personal statement, and show how you've gone beyond the curriculum. Plus, if you really want to spend three years or more studying this subject at university, it should be enjoyable! Try taking notes and jotting down your thoughts as you're reading so that you can share some of this in your personal statement

Introductory Reading

***Stones Against Diamonds* by Lina Bo Bardi:** Lina Bo Bardi was a prolific architect, designer and thinker, whose work, absorbing her native Italy and then after 1946 her adopted homeland, Brazil, spans across architecture, furniture, stage and costume design, urban planning, curatorial work, teaching and writing. This collection of essays is the first-ever English anthology of her writings, in which she proposes a series of new parameters for design thinking and practice

***Why We Build* by Rowan Moore:** In *Why We Build* Rowan Moore explores the making of buildings from conception to inhabitation and reveals the paradoxical power of architecture: it looks fixed and solid, but is always changing in response to the lives around it. Moore gives a provocative and iconoclastic view of what makes architecture, why it matters, and why we find it fascinating.

***The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* by Juhani Pallasmaa:** Why, when there are five senses, has one single sense – sight – become so predominant in architectural culture and design? Juhani Pallasmaa argues that the suppression of the other four sensory realms has led to the overall impoverishment of our built environment, often diminishing the emphasis on the spatial experience of a building and architecture's ability to inspire, engage and be wholly life enhancing.

***Experiencing Architecture* by Steen Eiler Rasmussen:** Profusely illustrated with fine instances of architectural experimentation through the centuries, *Experiencing Architecture* manages to convey the intellectual excitement of superb design.

***Architecture Depends* by Jeremy Till:** Architecture, Jeremy Till argues with conviction, cannot help itself; it is dependent for its very existence on things outside itself. Despite the claims of autonomy, purity and control that architects like to make about their practice, architecture is buffeted by uncertainty and contingency. With *Architecture Depends*, Till offers a proposal for rescuing architects from themselves: a way to bridge the gap between what architecture actually is and what architects want it to be.

***50 Architects You Should Know* by Isabel Kuhl:** Starting with the Renaissance, this introduction to fifty visionary architects traces the major

aesthetic movements over the past six centuries and offers concise portraits of the geniuses behind them.

The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard: Beloved and contemplated by philosophers, architects, writers, and literary theorists alike, Bachelard's lyrical, landmark work examines the places in which we place our conscious and unconscious thoughts and guides us through a stream of cerebral meditations on poetry, art, and the blooming of consciousness itself.

The Future of Architecture in 100 Buildings by Marc Kushner: A pavilion made from paper. An inflatable concert hall. A building that eats smog. A bridge that grows grapes. The Future of Architecture in 100 Buildings captures the soaring confidence, the thoughtful intelligence, the futuristic wonder, and at times the sheer whimsy of the world's most inspired and future-looking buildings.

Ecology and Architecture

How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built by Stewart Brand: Buildings have often been studied whole in space, but never before have they been studied whole in time. *How Buildings Learn* is a masterful new synthesis that proposes that buildings adapt best when constantly refined and reshaped by their occupants, and that architects can mature from being artists of space to becoming artists of time.

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive by Jared Diamond: What happened to the people who made the forlorn long-abandoned statues of Easter Island? What happened to the architects of the crumbling Maya pyramids? Will we go the same way, our skyscrapers one day standing derelict and overgrown like the temples at Angkor Wat? Bringing together new evidence from a startling range of sources and piecing together the myriad influences, from climate to culture, that make societies self-destruct, Diamond's *Collapse* also shows how – unlike our ancestors – we can benefit from our knowledge of the past and learn to be survivors

Ecological Urbanism: The Nature of the City by Susannah Hagan: This book asks the questions that are important inside and outside the built environment professions: what are climate change, urbanisation and ecology doing to the theory and practice of urban design? How does Ecological Urbanism figure in this change? What is Ecological Urbanism?

Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till: At a time when many commentators are noting that alternative and richer approaches to architectural practice are required if the profession is to flourish, this book provides multiple examples from across the globe of how this has been achieved and how it might be achieved in future.

Planning, Drawing and Making Architecture

Narrative Architecture by Nigel Coates: Since the early eighties, many architects have used the term 'narrative' to describe their work. To architects

the enduring attraction of narrative is that it offers a way of engaging with the way a city feels and works. *Narrative Architecture* explores the potential for narrative as a way of interpreting buildings from ancient history through to the present, deals with architectural background, analysis and practice as well as its future development.

Drawing: *The Motive Force of Architecture* by Peter Cook: Focusing on the creative and inventive significance of drawing for architecture, this book by one of its greatest proponents, Peter Cook, is an established classic. The book features some of the greatest and most intriguing drawings by architects, ranging from Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier to Zaha Hadid and Lebbeus Woods.

***The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs:** Jane Jacobs, an editor and writer on architecture in New York City in the early sixties, argues that urban diversity and vitality are being destroyed by powerful architects and city planners. Rigorous, sane, and delightfully epigrammatic, Jane Jacobs's tour de force is a blueprint for the humanistic management of cities.

Context: *Architecture and the Genius of Place* by Eric Parry: This book turns the urban statistician's telescopic focus on global trends inside out for a better understanding of the cultural and physical conditions that make archetypes like the Parisian Café, the London High Street, the Baltic City Square, and the Mumbai Market part of the architect's lexicon. From pavement to landscape, readers will examine how context must be taken into account at every stage of the design process.

Ground Control: *Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First-Century City* by Anna Minton: Britain's streets have been transformed by the construction of new property – but it's owned by private corporations, designed for profit and watched over by CCTV. Have these gleaming business districts, mega malls and gated developments led to 'regeneration', or have they intensified social divisions and made us more fearful of each other?

Radical Cities: *Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture* by Justin McGuirk: What makes the city of the future? How do you heal a divided city? In *Radical Cities*, Justin McGuirk travels across Latin America in search of the activist architects, maverick politicians and alternative communities already answering these questions. From Brazil to Venezuela, and from Mexico to Argentina, McGuirk discovers the people and ideas shaping the way cities are evolving.

Fiction

***Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino:** In *Invisible Cities* Marco Polo conjures up cities of magical times for his host, the Chinese ruler Kublai Khan, but gradually it becomes clear that he is actually describing one city: Venice.

***Brick Lane* by Monica Ali:** Still in her teenage years, Nazneen finds herself in an arranged marriage with a disappointed older man. Away from her

Bangladeshi village, home is now a cramped flat in a high-rise block in London's East End. Confined in her tiny flat, Nazneen sews furiously for a living until the radical Karim steps unexpectedly into her life. On a background of racial conflict and tension, they embark on a love affair that forces Nazneen finally to take control of her fate

Austerlitz by W.G. Sebald: In 1939, five-year-old Jacques Austerlitz is sent to England on a Kindertransport and placed with foster parents. This childless couple promptly erases from the boy all knowledge of his identity and he grows up ignorant of his past. Later in life, after a career as an architectural historian, Austerlitz – having avoided all clues that might point to his origin – finds the past returning to haunt him and he is forced to explore what happened fifty years before.

6. Interesting MOOCs

Another great way of learning more about your chosen subject and demonstrating your interest is to take a MOOC, or Massive Open Online Course. These are free courses delivered by universities that you can take online. If the ones below don't take your fancy, try looking at [Class Central](#) - they have a huge list of different courses for every subject imaginable, and they're all free!

[Enhancing the Quality of Urban Life](#) (Centre for the Study of the Built Environment) – find out how we can improve life for people in cities by looking at award-winning architecture projects from across the globe.

[Modern Building Design](#) (University of Bath) – climate change, technology and regulation are changing modern building design, and the professional practices of the architecture, engineering and construction industry. This online course explores these trends and how the industry can react to them.

[The Architectural Imagination](#) (University of Harvard) – architecture engages a culture's deepest social values and expresses them in material, aesthetic form. This course will teach you how to understand architecture as both cultural expression and technical achievement. Vivid analyses of exemplary buildings, and hands-on exercises in drawing and modelling, will bring you closer to the work of architects and historians.

[A Global History of Architecture](#) (MIT) – how do we understand architecture? One way of answering this question is by looking through the lens of history,

beginning with First Societies and extending to the 16th century. This course in architectural history is not intended as a linear narrative, but rather aims to provide a more global view, by focusing on different architectural 'moments'

[Making Architecture](#) (IE School of Architecture and Design) – Making Architecture offers a unique insight into the mind and work of an architect, starting with the basics of the profession and culminating with the production of a scaled site model.

7. Useful additional resources

There are loads of other great things out there that you might want to look at to develop your interest and strengthen your application, from videos to podcasts, to websites. Here are a few suggestions:

[Urbanista](#) – webzine of critical perspectives on the contemporary urbanist scene. It investigates the ways in which multidisciplinary design and management teams are responding to social, cultural, political and economic forces globally, along with the underlying issues impacting quality of life globally.

[Dezeen](#) – the world's most popular and influential architecture and design magazine

[Ash Amin - Lively Infrastructures](#) – this lecture examines the social life and sociality of urban infrastructure. Ash Amin argues that infrastructures – visible and invisible – are deeply implicated not only in the making and unmaking of individual lives but also in the experience of urban community, solidarity and struggle

[People Fixing The World Podcast](#) – podcast from the BBC offering brilliant solutions to the world's problems

[Theo Jansen TedTalk](#) – artist Theo Jansen demonstrates the amazingly lifelike kinetic sculptures he builds from plastic tubes and lemonade bottles. His creatures are designed to move – and even survive – on their own

[Anupama Kundoo's Handmade Architecture](#) – article from The Financial Times on architect Anupama Kundoo

[Justice As Everyday Life: Urban Conflict and Civic Space](#) – online lecture from Wendy Pullan analysing the difficulty in applying the abstract nature of legal systems to everyday life in cities

[My Green Agenda For Architecture TedTalk](#) – architect Norman Foster discusses his own work to show how computers can help architects design buildings that are green, beautiful and ‘basically pollution-free’

8. Related courses

At university, there are loads of different combinations of subjects that you can do. Maybe you might find one of these alternatives more interesting? A few ideas are listed below with a sample link, but in most cases there are lots of universities that offer these different combinations so make sure to have a good look around!

Due to the intense and interdisciplinary nature of the course, Architecture is not offered as a joint honours subject. This means that you cannot study architecture at university alongside another subject, for example, a language.

However, there are a range of degree options that are very closely linked to architecture, depending on what route you want to go down. For example:

Engineering and Architectural Design e.g. [UCL](#)

Civil Engineering and Architecture e.g. [University of Southampton](#)

Architecture and Environmental Design e.g. [University of Nottingham](#)

Interior Architecture and Design e.g. [Coventry University](#)

9. Oxbridge example interview questions

As you will know, applicants to Oxford and Cambridge have to take an interview in order to get a place. It is normal to get open-ended questions, as well as being given charts or pieces of writing to analyse. Here is a sample of the kind of questions you might get asked. Remember, you're supposed to not know the answer! They often deliberately choose topics that they think no one will have studied in order to make the questions fair. What they're looking for is to see how you think under pressure, and how you can present your ideas and your logic.

Below are some questions that have previously been asked in interviews. Have a think about how you would answer them and what a perfect answer to them might look like:

- How would you reduce crime through architecture?
- How do you make a place peaceful?
- What is the importance of light in architecture?
- What is your favourite building?
- Who is your favourite architect?
- Compare music to architecture
- How do you think science and art link together?
- How would you explain architecture to an alien visiting earth?
- How would you reduce crime through architecture?
- How does studying art link with architecture?
- What is the role of architects and museums?

It is also likely that you will be asked questions based on your personal statement and your portfolio so make sure to come prepared!