

*WHTC University application subject guides*

# Geography

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
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## 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 St Andrews**
3. **University of Oxford**



4. Durham University
5. London School of Economics

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## 1. 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. University of Cambridge A\*AA
2. University of St Andrews AAA
3. University of Oxford A\*AA
4. Durham University A\*AA
5. London School of Economics AAA

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## 2. 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!

**Geography** is the only subject required, however if you study a BSc course Physical Geography or Environmental Science; Biology and/or Maths are preferred but rarely essential.



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### 3. 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.

**Oxford:** Geographical Admissions Test (GAT)

**Cambridge:** Interview upon offer

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### 4. 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

**Prisoners of Geography (Tim Marshall)** An insightful book which helps understand how physical geography impacts on political reality and really helps to understand how decisions of world leaders have been shaped by geography – a great introduction to geopolitics.

**Factfulness: (Hans Rosling)** a must-read book from a geography perspective – this takes a more realistic view of the world, presenting issues in fact-based context. It is a rational look at actually how far the world has measurably improved and what's left to be done.

**Divided (Tim Marshall)** Author Tim Marshall attempts to explain why we are living in an age of walls by delving into our past and present to reveal the fault lines that will shape our world for years to come. Another Sunday Times Best Seller from the author.

**Unruly Places (Alistair Bonnet)** At a time when Google Maps can take you on a virtual tour of most places on the planet, it's hard to imagine there's any uncharted ground left on the planet. Unruly Places goes to some of the most unexpected, offbeat places in the world to re-inspire our geographical imaginations.

**Brick Lane (Monica Ali)** A fictional novel which explores the rich cultural heritage of East London's Brick Lane. A less academic approach to key urban issues and cultural tensions in inner-city London.

**China's Asian Dream (Tom Miller)** Combining a concise overview of the situation with on-the-ground reportage from over seven countries, China's Asian Dream offers a fresh perspective on one of the most important questions of our time: what does China's rise mean for the future of Asia and of the world?

**On the Map (Simon Garfield)** Maps fascinate us. They chart our understanding of the world and they log our progress, but above all they tell our stories. From the early sketches of philosophers and explorers through to Google Maps and beyond, Simon Garfield examines how maps both relate and realign our history.

**The Power of Place (Harm De Blij)** The world is not as mobile or as interconnected as we like to think. As Harm de Blij argues in *The Power of Place*, in crucial ways--from the uneven distribution of natural resources to the unequal availability of opportunity--geography continues to hold billions of people in its grip. Incorporating a series of persuasive maps, De Blij describes the tremendously varied environments across the planet and shows how migrations between them are comparatively rare. De Blij also looks at the ways we are redefining place so as to make its power even more potent than it has been, with troubling implications.

**The Revenge of Geography (Robert D Kaplan)** NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • In this provocative, startling book, Robert D. Kaplan, the bestselling author of *Monsoon* and *Balkan Ghosts*, offers a revelatory new prism through which to view global upheavals and to understand what lies ahead for continents and countries around the world.

**Landmarks (Robert Macfarlane)** Words are grained into our landscapes, and landscapes are grained into our words. *Landmarks* is about the power of language to shape our sense of place. It is a field guide to the literature of nature and a glossary containing thousands of remarkable words used in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales to describe land, nature, and weather.

**Mountains of the Mind (Robert Macfarlane)** Combining accounts of legendary mountain ascents with vivid descriptions of his own forays into wild, high landscapes, Robert MacFarlane reveals how the mystery of the world's highest places has come to

grip the Western imagination—and perennially draws legions of adventurers up the most perilous slopes.

**Notes from a Small Island (Bill Bryson)** Featuring an all-new cover, New York Times bestseller Bill Bryson's hilarious journey through the beloved island nation he called home for two decades. From Downing Street to Loch Ness, this is a delightful look at the United Kingdom.

**A History of the World in 12 Maps (Jeremy Brotton)** Jerry Brotton examines the significance of 12 maps - from the almost mystical representations of ancient history to the satellite-derived imagery of today. He vividly recreates the environments and circumstances in which each of the maps was made, showing how each conveys a highly individual view of the world. Brotton shows how each of his maps both influenced and reflected contemporary events and how, by considering it in all its nuances and omissions, we can better understand the world that produced it.

**The Phantom Atlas (Edward Brooke-Hitching)** The Phantom Atlas is a guide to the world not as it is, but as it was imagined to be. It's a world of ghost islands, invisible mountain ranges, mythical civilizations, ship-wrecking beasts, and other fictitious features introduced on maps and atlases through mistakes, misunderstanding, fantasies, and outright lies.

**Longitude (Dava Sobel)** Longitude is the dramatic human story of an epic scientific quest and of Harrison's forty - year obsession with building his perfect timekeeper, known today as the chronometer. Full of heroism and chicanery, it is also a fascinating brief history of astronomy, navigation, and clockmaking, and opens a new window on our world.

**The Happy City (Charles Montgomery)** Charles Montgomery's Happy City is revolutionizing the way we think about urban life. After decades of unchecked sprawl, more people than ever are moving back to the city. Dense urban living has been prescribed as a panacea for the environmental and resource crises of our time. But is it better or worse for our happiness? Are subways, sidewalks, and condo towers an improvement on the car dependence of the suburbs?

**Map head: Charting the Weird World of Geography Wonks (Ken Jennings)** Ken Jennings takes readers on a world tour of geogeeks from the London Map Fair to the bowels of the Library of Congress, from the prepubescent geniuses at the National Geographic Bee to the computer programmers at Google Earth. Each chapter delves into a different aspect of map culture: highpointing, geocaching, road atlas rallying, even the “unreal estate” charted on the maps of fiction and fantasy. Jennings also considers the ways in which cartography has shaped our history, suggesting that the impulse to make and read maps is as relevant today as it has ever been.

Human Geography Reading List:

[https://www.geography.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Get%20involved/Reading\\_List\\_1\\_Human\\_Geography.pdf](https://www.geography.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Get%20involved/Reading_List_1_Human_Geography.pdf)

Physical Geography Reading List:

[https://www.geography.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Get%20involved/Reading\\_List\\_2\\_Physical\\_Geography,\\_Climate\\_Change\\_and\\_Maps.pdf](https://www.geography.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Get%20involved/Reading_List_2_Physical_Geography,_Climate_Change_and_Maps.pdf)

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## 5. 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!

**The Open University – <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue>**

The Open University is the leading university for flexible, distance teaching. As part of their OpenLearn programme, more than 1,000 free courses are available online for you to boost your brain. Courses accommodate a range of expertise and time required for study. Most also come with a free statement of participation on completion. Here are some of our suggestions for the geographically minded (click to be taken to the direct course online): Ecology and Ecosystems, Biofuels, Earthquakes, The Frozen Planet, Introduction to Geology, and Water and Human Health.

**Future Learn – <https://www.futurelearn.com/>**

Future Learn is a convenient online hub for free online courses. They collate loads of courses from top UK and European universities. You can filter your course search by subject, the amount of time you'd like to spend studying a week, and the duration of your course. Most courses have a set start date, but don't worry, you can join and work your way through it after it starts. Future Learn is powered by cutting edge research in education, favouring micro-learning principles and interactivity in education. Ecology and Wildlife Conservation – University of Leeds, Come Rain or Shine: Understanding the Weather – University of Reading, Exploring Our Ocean – University of Southampton.

### **Open Yale Courses – <https://oyc.yale.edu/>**

Yale provide free and open access to a selection of introductory courses taught by the university's highly esteemed scholars. Each course comes with high-quality, downloadable lecture videos, as well as suggested readings and problem sets. Here's some that will certainly appeal to A Level Geographers: The Atmosphere, the Ocean and Environmental Change – Professor Ronald Smith, Philosophy and the Science of Human Nature – Professor Tamar Gendler, Global Problems of Population Growth – Professor Robert Wyman.

### **UN CC: e-Learn – <https://unccelearn.org/>**

UN CC: eLearn is the official United Nations learning partnership for all things related to climate change. They offer self-paced and downloadable courses, meaning you can dip in and out of them as and when you please. There's an abundance of information on climate change – you can learn about climate policy, green economies, sustainable diets and personal finance, and lots more with these interactive courses. Take a look at some of the examples (Click to access these courses): Introduction to Green Economy, Climate Change and Cities.

### **Ivy League Online Courses**

<https://www.classcentral.com/collection/ivy-league-moocs>

An incredible opportunity to study at an Ivy League University! Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton, and Yale have made thousands of courses available for free. Search their catalogue for a course which links to one of your chosen A Levels or quite simply something which has always interested you! These courses are free, and you will receive a certificate of completion (at a small cost) upon completion. Another key feature for potential UCAS applications.

### **Geography of World Cultures – Stanford University**

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/itunes-u/geography-of-world-cultures/id384233929?mt=10>

The purpose of this map-intensive course is to explore the locational dynamics of the world's languages, religions, and ethnic groupings. We will examine every world region, seeking to understand how places vary from each other with regard to the cultural attributes of their inhabitants. The course will explore the historical forces that have generated cultural diversity and will carefully examine the processes of contemporary transformation. This course is presented in enhanced podcast format: the presentation images are synched with the audio track and will display in the album artwork section of your iTunes application.

**Exploring Human's Space- EdX (EPFL) <https://www.edx.org/course/exploring-humans-space-an-introduction-to-geography>**



As the title suggests, this course is a little more conceptual. The aim is to learn about the abstract terms through social science and cartography. Sounds complicated? ‘The aim of this course is to help you feel comfortable with your daily notion of space,’ says Jacques Levy Professor of Geography and Urbanism at EPFL. ‘Firstly, space is about distances, the simplest way to understand it is to connect your daily life, your perceptions and your practices to the concepts of contact and remoteness. You will easily realise that space is omnipotent in your life’. The course is divided into nine distinct sessions, each of which are filmed in a geographically relevant space. This will help some of the abstract notions a little more concrete. First, the course will explore the different types of contemporary space and deconstruct the idea of the city and urbanism. Second, it will assess the function of cartography in the making of these spaces. After 10 weeks, you will be able to read and draw your own maps.

**ChinaX - EdX (Harvard University) <https://www.edx.org/course/chinas-political-and-intellectual-foundations-fr-2>**

This course, the first in a comprehensive series on China, introduces you to the history, geography, and culture of the country. Time, space, and identity — enduring issues in Chinese history — are explored. You’ll study China’s early dynasties to understand how physical geography impacted its inhabitants and how the many ethnicities within the country affected Chinese identity. You’ll learn about China’s origins as told in ancient texts and through modern archaeology. You’ll explore the first dynasties during the Chinese bronze age, the many facets of Confucianism and his Analects, and the competing schools of thought that followed. New political and moral ideas appear in Chinese culture in this period — ideas that make up the country’s intellectual foundations and still resonate today. Join us to learn about China’s origins and how early concepts in Chinese culture still matter in the 21st century.

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## 6. 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:

**Lucy Cavendish Essay Prize on Contemporary Issues – University of Cambridge**



[https://www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/Lucy%20Cavendish%20Essay%20Prize%20in%20Contemporary%20Issues%202020\\_0.pdf](https://www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/Lucy%20Cavendish%20Essay%20Prize%20in%20Contemporary%20Issues%202020_0.pdf)

The Lucy Cavendish Essay gives you the choice of 4 contemporary titles to address in 1000-1500 words. With a cash prize pot of £200 and the lure of digging your teeth into a hot global topic, this isn't an essay to be missed!

#### **The Bank of England & Financial Times School Blog Competition**

<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/competitions/ftblog>

The Bank of England in partnership with the Financial Times invite school and college students, aged between 16 and 19, to send a blog of up to 500 words on this year's theme: the economy and climate change. Whilst this term's competition has closed, they are released on a termly basis. Keep your eyes peeled! Cash prizes along with your blog featuring on the Bank of England's website are surely good enough reasons to get involved!

#### **The Geographical Association's 'Geography from Home'**

<https://www.geography.org.uk/Preparing-for-A-level-geography>

This web section from the GA provides general guidance on why you should study A level geography. It also contains extensive reading lists arranged by physical and human geography themes to help students find the most relevant and authoritative reading material in preparation for advanced study.

#### **Royal Canadian Geographical Society's Online Classroom**

<https://onlineclassroom.cangeoeducation.ca/>

Every week, new activities and resources will be shared to make learning from home, or teaching at a distance, easy and fun. Come back regularly to see what's been added. We highly recommend the soon to begin 'The Anthropocene Education Programme'.

#### **The Royal Geographical Society's 'Geography at Home'**

<https://www.rgs.org/schools/teaching-resources/geography-at-home/>

This page provides an overview of the Society's support and resources, whilst highlighting other online geography-related learning opportunities that you might find useful.

#### **Dynamic Earth Online**

<https://www.dynamicearth.co.uk/learning/dynamicearthonline>

Dynamic Earth will be sharing a series of fun and thought-provoking content that will range from hands-on experiments that you can carry out at home, through to fascinating insights about the history of our planet and the science behind climate change.

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## 7. 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!

### **Popular combination courses include:**

Search for these on <https://digital.ucas.com/search>

- Geography and Economics
  - Environmental Science
  - Land Economy
  - Geography and Management
  - Geography and Biology
  - Physical Geography and Oceanography
  - Physical Geography and Marine Biology
  - Geography and International development
  - Geography and Politics
  - Geography and Anthropology
  - Geography and Demography
  - Population Geography
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## 8. 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.

#### Short Interview questions:

- What geography did you see on the way here?
- What are the greatest 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges facing humanity?
- Is regeneration a good or bad thing?
- What is the definition of geography?
- Why is geography important?
- What would the world be like without wind?
- What is special about London as opposed to other cities in England?
- What has been the geographical legacy of the Olympics in London?
- What are the environmental problems in the area in which you live?
- What are the main geographic and economic factors of climate change?
- Should the UK continue to provide aid to countries with increasingly developed economies?
- Why may a geographer be well placed to assess the effect of a global recession?
- What can the government suggest to increase happiness in local communities without using public spending?
- Why do Governments care about CO<sub>2</sub> emissions? Do they do enough in terms of adopting environmentally friendly methods of energy generation?
- Should the government build on green belt land?
- Is the 'Two Speed economy' something we should accept?

#### **If I were to visit the area where you live, what would I be interested in?**

The question gives candidates an opportunity to apply concepts from their A level geography course to their home area. They might discuss urban planning and regeneration, ethnic segregation and migration, or issues of environmental management. The question probes whether they are able to apply 'geographical thinking' to the everyday landscapes

around them. It reveals the extent to which they have a curiosity about the world around them. By asking specifically about their home area the question eliminates any advantage gained by those who are more widely travelled and have more experience of a variety of geographical contexts.