

Theology

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:

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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.

- [University of Cambridge](#) (Theology, Religion and Philosophy of Religion)
- [University of Oxford](#)
- [Durham University](#)
- [University of Exeter](#)
- [University of St Andrews](#) (Theological Studies)

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 worried 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. **Oxford:** AAA
3. **Durham:** AAB
4. **Exeter:** AAB
5. **St Andrews:** AAB-A*A*A

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!

Religious Studies, Ethics, Philosophy: It is helpful to have knowledge of these subjects when applying for a degree in Theology, but not essential.

History: Any subject which is essay-based will be good practice for this degree. This subject is also not essential, but the analytical nature of history will give you skills that will help with Theology.

English: Similarly, since English is an essay-based subject, this will help you prepare for assignments and exams on the course.

Generally, the courses do not specify particular A-Levels.

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.

Cambridge: when you apply, your application will go to a specific college (either one you've chosen or an open application). [The college will ask for one/two essays as examples of written work before the interview.](#) The interview section consists of a 60 minute assessment and two interviews.

Oxford: Submit a sample piece of work ([written and marked essay in a Humanities subject/English](#))

Durham: None

Exeter: None

St Andrews: None

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

Biblical Studies

***The Use and Abuse of the Bible* by Henry Wansbrough OSB:** an analysis of the different interpretations of the Bible throughout history.

***Bible Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* by J.H Hayes and C.R Holliday:** an explanation about how to interpret and analyse biblical verses. This is a key skill for theology degrees!

***The Original Story: God, Israel, and the World* by John Barton and Julia Bowden:** a great depiction of the historical background of the Old Testament. It is easy to read and gives lots of detail about the potential authors and characters of the Hebrew Bible.

Theology

***Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* by Daniel L.Migliore:** a lot of theology degrees focus on Christian theology so it is good to get a strong understanding of this when applying. This text explores all the major Christian doctrines and is titled after St Anselm's famous phrase: 'fides quarens intellectum.'

World Religions

***An Introduction to Judaism* by N.R.M de Lange:** a good summary of Jewish past and present. It includes descriptions of key texts and interpretations of them by the different Jewish groups.

***Muslims: Their Beliefs and Practices* by Andrew Rippin:** a really detailed text about the Muslim faith. It shows the history of Islam and the authority of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad. It also discusses the evolution of Islam into modern day, whilst referencing these authorities.

***Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* by J.J. Lipner:** this details the history, stories and themes of Hinduism. It discusses Hinduism as a family of religions rather than one single group.

Biblical Languages

***Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* by Thomas Lambdin:** a key text for learning about Biblical Hebrew.

***Elements of New Testament Greek* by J. Duff:** Similarly with Biblical Hebrew, New Testament Greek is different to modern Greek that is spoken today. This book introduces you to the typical language of the New Testament.

***Sanskrit: an introduction to the Classical Language* by M. Coulson:**

Sanskrit is an ancient Indo-Aryan language which is the predominant language of most Hindu philosophical and religious texts.

There are lots of books about religion and theology and you will certainly be able to find reading that satisfies your personal areas of interest. Use the internet to search reading that supports your interest, for example (feminist theology or money and religion) Additionally, if you attend an open day, ask a faculty member for recommendations for reading; it will show your enthusiasm and you will get great first hand suggestions!

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:

Visit a local place of worship (when safe to do so): show your interest by exploring different places of worship and talking to people from those religions. You can expand your knowledge and enthusiasm by actively delving into the religions.

[Keble College essay writing competition:](#) a 1500 word essay competition for Sixth Form students by Keble College, Oxford. It includes a £300 prize for the winner!

Watch documentaries: there are so many interesting documentaries about theology and religion. All of the major channels and streaming services have

documentaries related to it in some form or another. A couple of my favourites are: **Sacred Wonders (BBC)** and **Did Darwin Kill God? (BBC)**

[Listen to 'Moral Maze' on Radio 4:](#) A radio program and podcast which discusses and debates the big moral questions and issues behind the week's news stories.

[Watch 'The Big Questions' on BBC One:](#) A weekly show where representatives from different faiths and non-belief systems discuss a topic or question with the audience.

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!

You can combine Theology and Religious Studies mainly with Philosophy and Ethics. These can be single or joint honours degrees, where the timetable is equalled out between the different courses (see the other guides for more info).

As well as combining with different subjects, many universities also offer variations on theology which tend to have slightly different focuses or explore theology and religion through a different lens.

Biblical Studies (e.g. [St Andrews](#))

Religion, Culture and Ethics (e.g. [Nottingham](#))

Religion, Society and Culture (e.g. [Durham](#))

Religion and Oriental Studies (e.g. [Oxford](#))

Religion, Politics and Society (e.g. [Kings College London](#))



8. Oxbridge interview advice

For Theology and Religious Studies degrees, the interviewer will generally ask questions linked to the essays that were submitted during the application process. There are not necessarily specific questions and answers they will ask and expect you to say. Below is some advice from a Cambridge professor who is the Deputy Head of the School of Arts and Humanities and has participated in many Cambridge interviews.

Advice on interviews at Cambridge

For interviews at Cambridge, if you have been asked to submit a couple of essays from your sixth-form work, then you should expect to be asked some questions about at least one of those essays. We might start by asking you to sum up your answer to the question, and your supporting argument. From there, the questioning on an essay would be relatively open, inviting you to consider different approaches to the question, the impact that new or different information might have on your argument, what weaknesses you might yourself detect in the argument, etc. The point of such questioning is to check that the candidate understands what they have themselves written and also to see how flexible they are in adapting to new angles on things.

There is no script for precise questioning in interviews. If there was, candidates would simply bring scripted answers, and that would not be very informative. However, general questions that might arise - sometimes out of the questioning about the essays - might include things like:

- Is it an advantage or a disadvantage, in studying a religion, to be (or have been) a member of that religion? [This is a version of the 'insider/outside' debate.]
- What is 'religion' or 'a religion'? Is there a workable definition?
- Should religion be studied in modern, liberal, secular universities?

On another tack entirely, quite a common line of questioning is to enquire about what a candidate has read about the subject that is NOT part of their sixth-form work, what they have read out of private interest. It is a good sign if candidates have an interest in the subject beyond the curriculum.

As with most questions, it is not so much the answer ('right' or 'wrong') that matters, as the conversation, as the process by which the candidate thinks

through the question and the answer. One of the things it says on the website below is that candidates should 'think out loud' in interviews - should let the interviewers eavesdrop on their interior monologue or dialogue about the question.

There is some general advice about Cambridge interviews in a video here:

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying/interviews>

The best general advice I can offer any candidate for any subject (at least in the arts and humanities, but also in many of the sciences) is that they should read plenty - not just reading 'around the subject', but almost any reading (an activity I do not equate with browsing aimlessly on the internet). Even reading good fiction is helpful, because good fiction itself raises all sorts of social, political, and sometimes religious issues. Even reading bad fiction (James Bond) can provide food for thought, of course. But serious reading is important for developing vocabulary, syntax, fluency, and habits of attention and reflection.

Questions with discussion

Is someone who risks their own life (and those of others) in extreme sports or endurance activities a hero or a fool?

Theology and Religion doesn't require A-level Religious Studies, so we always want to find issues that enable us to see how a student is able to handle and unpick a question, relating the particular to more general concepts. This question appeared to work well because there really isn't a single answer – it's open not least because we could state the opposite case and observe how flexible, reasoned and committed each student was. The question is properly approached from many perspectives and opens up many topics – is there something distinctively human about going beyond boundaries? Is this impulse selfish, or does it contribute to the whole of humanity's attainment? Is the heroism of those who respond to the needs of the sportsperson more heroic still? What debts do individuals owe to society, and society owe to individuals? What is a hero, and is that category in opposition to folly? What we found with this question is that it did manage to open what is a stressful occasion into a real discussion, and we want to offer places to gifted candidates who are willing to think out loud with us in tutorials, and in a college community, whilst they are still explorers into truths.

Interviewer: Peter Groves, Worcester College

Is religion of value whether or not there is a God?

This is a question we would hope any candidate for Theology and Religion would enjoy answering. It raises a number of issues for them to explore. What is our definition of religion, and how fluid is that definition? What do we mean by



value, and how might it be measured? Are the effects of religion in the past as important as its consequences in the present?

A candidate might also want to ask what we mean when we say 'there is a God?' Is affirming this statement enough, or should religious or theological enquiry be more specific – is talk of God in the abstract as helpful as discussion of particular religious ideas or texts? How would we construct a case for the value of religion in the absence of belief in God?

A good answer could engage with one or more of these problems, and we would hope in conversation develop further questions. For example, can we adjudicate competing claims in conversations such as these? Is a worldwide religion such as Christianity or Islam intrinsically more or less valuable because of its number of adherents? Do ethics or aesthetics have a part to play: can I claim religious ideas have value if they inspire great art or music or poetry? Who gets to decide what is great? Does religion affect this decision?

All these possible questions represent directions in which the conversation might go – none is particularly wrong or right, but strong candidates will see a number of different routes available for them to explore, and could choose whichever interested them most.