

History and Politics

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Assalamu alaykum I am Hanifa, a third-year undergraduate studying History and Politics. In this guide, I hope to share a little more about this amazing degree and any tricks and tips I have picked up through my time here.

Example Timetable

- In the first year of this course, you take 4 papers, Pol 1 (Political thought) Pol 2 (International Relations), A history paper of your choosing, and Evidence & Argument (which is a theory paper)
- In the first year of this course, there are traditionally, for HisPol students, nine supervisions per term. Three for each of your core papers.
- Alongside the supervision, you have classes every fortnight for Evidence and argument. These classes help prepare you for a Long Essay which is due in Easter Term (the final term).
- Usually, there is one 1hr lecture a day

What are Supervisions Like?

- Supervisions are unique to the Cambridge experience; they are small or at times one-to-one meetings with an expert in the field you are studying in.

- The usual expectation is that you prepare an essay, prior to these supervisions. Which you will then discuss with the group/supervisor.
- From my experience, politics tend to have group supervision consisting of three students and one teacher. Whereas History supervisions are likely to be one-to-one.
- Do not be daunted by this more intimate style of teaching! It is valuable and allows you to share/shape your thoughts and ideas in a space where people want to listen.

What did you wish you knew when applying?

- I think for me I wish someone had told me the importance of my perspective. Although it can feel scary to speak in classes and supervision - the importance of providing a different viewpoint is extremely valuable and necessary in these institutions.
- Also, the spaces you create for yourself are so important. I think seeking out places in Cambridge where you feel comfortable isn't a bad thing. It does not limit your Cambridge experience instead it makes it a lot more comforting and easier.

Favourite and worst thing about your subject?

Favourite

- It is so flexible! Throughout the course, you are given multiple opportunities to pick what papers/topics you want to focus your studies on. This means that you are almost always doing something you are interested in, making your time here a lot more enjoyable.
- The people! Everyone who studies this paper is interested in similar things to you - so you are always learning new things and entering great conversations.

Worst

- I think the thing I found most difficult initially was that progress in your subject can feel slow. Improvement in your writing doesn't happen overnight it takes time. That process can feel very frustrating. However, it gets a lot easier, and you really do develop confidence in your writing skills.

Application Timeline

- The summer prior to the beginning of year 12, you should focus your attention on reading and collecting ideas on things you want to discuss in your personal statement.
- Towards the end of the summer, you should have a rough draft/outline ready to send to someone who is supporting you in your application.
- Throughout September you should focus your attention on polishing and ensuring your statement is in the best form it can be.
- A small tip would be that sending it to as many people as possible isn't always the best idea. This can lead to you feeling overwhelmed and not knowing what advice to follow.
- If you can edit throughout September, you will be in a good place to submit your statement for October.
- You will then receive a supplementary form to fill in.
- In November you will then be contacted for interview/and possible tests
- January Find out if you got an offer

Personal Statement Tips

- I know this can feel very scary, I remember I felt very scared. But it is manageable.
- You should note your first draft will never be your final draft. This should give you some motivation to get started.
- A personal statement is a display of your academic interests, so do not worry too much if you haven't done much extracurricular.
- The thing to prioritise in year 12 is reading interesting books beyond your subject set work. For example, if you come across something in history which stands out to you, but you didn't get to explore in class don't be afraid to find books/podcasts/online lectures which talk about it.
- Also, try to attend, if possible, in-person lectures on topics that interest you.

Entrance Test Tips

- If you are really worried about this, there are many colleges that don't require one so it might be worth looking into that.
- However, I did do one and it was completely fine. If you use the past papers available, you will quickly get the hang of it.
- I think the best thing you can do is remember no prior knowledge is required, you are only expected to use the information on the source.

- The structure I used was focused on finding one difference between the sources, and then two similarities. This worked for me, but it isn't the only method.

Interview Tips

- Know your personal statement well! One thing you could do is go through your personal statement line by line and think about any potential questions they could ask you. This allows you to prepare thoughts and answers.
- Also, make sure you are well-versed in the books you have mentioned.
- Most importantly have fun! This is a conversation with academics who are likely to be interested in similar things to you. There are no right answers to questions, they just want to get you thinking - you are expected to share only your thoughts!!

Recommended reading/activities

- A good resource is World of Books - they sell second-hand books for really good prices
- I am going to list a few books in subject areas that might interest you! This list only touches the surface - ask your teacher to recommend things that interest you

Political Thought/History

- Hobbes - Leviathan
- Machiavelli - The Prince
- Thomas More - Utopia
- Plato - The Republic
- Locke - The Two Treatises of Government
- Franz Fanon - Wretched of the Earth
- Gandhi - Hind-Swaraj
- Madison et al. - The Federalist Papers

Political activist thought -

- Václav Havel - The Power of the Powerless
- Lea Ypi - Free
- W.E.B Du Bois - The Souls of Black Folk
- Steve Biko - I write what I like
- Malcolm X Autobiography

- Trevor Noah - Autobiography
- Akala - Natives

Political Novels -

- James Baldwin - If Beale Street Could Talk
- George Orwell - Nineteen Eighty-Four
- Albert Camus - The Outsider
- George Orwell - Animal Farm

South Asian Novels -

- Rabindranath Tagore - The Home and The World
- Rabindranath Tagore - He (shey)
- R.K Narayan - Malgudi Days
- Mulk Raj Anand - Untouchable

Political Podcast -

- The Guardian - Politics Weekly
- The Guardian - Politics Weekly America (also helpful if you are doing politics A-levels and can't afford to pay for American newspapers)
- The FT - Political Fix
- The Rest is Politics - With ex-Labour Advisor to Tony Blair - and Ex-Conservative MP
- The Rest is Politics (discontinued but interesting to get to grips with the language of politics)
- RSA - Events Podcast
- History Extra
- In Our Time - History

Lecture series/documentaries

- Yale History Courses - Yale history lectures are recorded and uploaded for free on Youtube - My favourite is the one on ancient history
- Intelligence squared lectures - on a huge range of topics
- Harvard - Justice Lecture series
- BBC have really good history/politics documentaries - to name a few - A House Through Time, Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland ext.

