

Philosophy

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Contact Hours (Lectures and Supervisions)

Contact hours vary from year to year and highly depends on paper choices. During my first year, I had one supervision a week, which I meant that I would spend the week focused on topic in philosophy. Moreover, there are fortnightly logic classes and discussion groups which require preparations beforehand. Lectures vary widely in number but they can be around five a week.

What are supervisions like?

Your written essay serves as the core of the supervision. Your view is challenged by the supervisor, and you defend it in return. Feedback is focused on both your writing style/essay structure and knowledge. I found supervisions to be very enjoyable since your arguments are always treated in a serious manner by professional academics who assist you in pushing that view further. Also I am a fan of debating so I always found the back and forth fun.

What is unique about the Cambridge course?

Something to keep in mind when applying for philosophy here is the philosophy school of thought (or style) taught here. Philosophy at Cambridge belongs to the “analytic” school of thought which is very mathematical in its approach to problems. I found this helpful as it taught me outstanding logical skills that served me well beyond just the course. However, it can be limiting as the course engages mostly with contemporary ideas and works.

What did you wish you knew when applying?

As mentioned above, I wish I knew about my subject’s focus on analytic philosophy. This meant that, at least in first year, most of the topics are contemporary and recent ones rather than old school philosophy you would learn about in Philosophy A-levels. So make sure that’s something you would like to explore.

Favourite and worst thing about your subject?

My favourite thing about the subject is its extraordinary logical and analytic nature. Studying philosophy at Cambridge transformed how I view arguments and claims in my daily life. Just by scanning a paragraph, I am able to fully detect the core argument and see its flow. This went on to help me with several job applications, law applications for example. This analytic approach made me well equipped to deal with complex problems generally.

On the other hand, I would say that the worst thing about the subject is that it can be quite detached from reality. Philosophy as a discipline is key, but its very theoretical nature makes it sometimes seem like a dinner conversation rather than an applicable science. So that’s something to keep in mind.

Application Timeline

Always check colleges' websites for up-to-date information. Generally, the application timeline would be submitting the application including personal statement. Then an interview with a logic test and a timed essay test after invitation. Some colleges might request two written essays as part of the application, but others don't so make sure to check the website.

Entrance Test Tips

Several past papers exist on the internet, so I would find those and get an idea of how the logic test would look like. Most questions are recycled one way or another so those past tests will help. The test can seem intimidating initially, but it's one factor among many so no need to stress it. Finally, if you have the time, read the first few chapters of "Forallx Cambridge" textbook which is available online. It makes you well equipped for the test.

With regards to the essay, you will be given at least two random essay titles to pick from. Structure your essay as a debate. Start with a clear introduction stating your stance, signposting the debate, and pretty much walking the reader through the whole thing. Then define anything that needs so.

Write your second paragraph as a clear argument in support for your view. The third paragraph can be a criticism to your argument. Write the fourth paragraph as a refutation to the criticism. Feel free to repeat this format as much as you want.

End the essay with a conclusion where you tell the reader what you achieved in the essay. I believe that structure would be the most effective.

Personal Statement Tips

When it comes to the personal statement, I would say the main key advice is to make it personal. Meaning that no one else can use it without lying. Link your personal life with the subject. If you would like to, pick a theme and explore it in your statement. Mention your readings, whether they are books, newsletters, or just websites. I wouldn't worry about reading too much. Rather make sure that you have your own opinions on the subject, which will make you sound original.

Interview Tips

It's almost impossible to predict the kind of questions you will get. So my tips would be to think out loud. If you recall your math tests back in school (if you did any), you will remember that working out meant more marks than the final

answer itself. This is pretty much the Cambridge interview. Go with the flow of the interview, so let the interviewers walk you around. Apply what you know already to the new problems. Remain calm and enjoy your discussion as it will show. Finally, make sure to be aware whether the interview is going to be online or in-person, so you are prepared accordingly!

Recommended reading/activities

Honestly just spend time reading and exploring what interests you the most. If you go into the faculty's website you will find a list of recommended readings, but they are merely suggestions.

Teach yourself to think about what you read. Finally, from personal experience, you will perform the best at philosophy with good Islamic knowledge. So make sure they go hand-in-hand in your routine!

