Ribston Hall High School

Oxbridge Aspirations at Ribston

A Year 10 Guide to Preparing for Oxford and Cambridge

If you are considering applying to Oxford or Cambridge in the future, Year 10 is the perfect time to start laying the foundations. Successful Oxbridge applications are built gradually over several years through strong academic achievement, intellectual curiosity, wider exploration of subjects, and consistent engagement with opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

At Ribston Hall, students can begin this journey through excellent GCSE study habits, participation in **Going Further opportunities**, engagement with **Ribston RAP**, and later achievement of the **Ribston Baccalaureate** and involvement in the **AEP Pathway** in Sixth Form.

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Oxbridge Timeline

BE Ribston Exceptional

Your Oxbridge Timeline

ASPIRE | EXPLORE | PREPARE | ACHIEVE

1 Year 10

BUILD STRONG FOUNDATIONS

- Prioritise strong GCSE performance.
- Develop excellent study habits.
- Explore different academic interests.
- Engage with Going Further opportunities.
- Read beyond the curriculum.
- Start recording enrichment activities.



2 Year 11

EXPLORE AND PLAN

- Continue striving for the strongest GCSE outcomes possible.
- Develop deeper super-curricular interests.
- Research A Level choices carefully.
- Begin identifying potential university subjects.



3 Year 12

DEEPEN AND PREPARE

- Join the AEP Pathway.
- Undertake significant super-curricular exploration.
- Attend university outreach events.
- Gain relevant work experience where appropriate.
- Begin preparing for any admissions tests.



4 Year 13

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

- Finalise university choices.
- Submit Oxbridge applications by the October UCAS deadline.
- Prepare for interviews and admissions assessments.
- Continue demonstrating academic excellence.



EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE | EXTRAORDINARY FUTURES

What Do Oxford and Cambridge Look For?

Both universities are primarily looking for:

- Exceptional academic potential
- Strong GCSE and A Level performance
- Intellectual curiosity
- Independent learning
- Critical thinking skills
- Genuine enthusiasm for a chosen subject
- Evidence of super-curricular engagement beyond the classroom

Both universities actively encourage students to explore subjects beyond the curriculum through reading, lectures, podcasts, projects, competitions, museums, wider research and relevant work experience. What matters most is not the number of activities completed, but the depth of engagement and reflection demonstrated.

The next sections of the booklet will discuss what Oxford and Cambridge look for and how you can prepare for this throughout Year10 and 11 and then into Ribston Sixth Form.

1. **Focus on GCSE excellence**
2. **Understand super-curricular activities**
3. **Make the most of Ribston's Going Further Opportunities**
4. **Read beyond the curriculum**
5. **Develop critical thinking skills**
6. **Improve your communication skills**
7. **Gain meaningful work experience**
8. **Begin thinking about future A Level choices**
9. **Build your academic profile through the RAP**
10. **Looking ahead to Ribston Sixth Form and the AEP**
11. **Understand admissions tests**
12. **Preparing to be successful at Oxbridge interviews**

1. Focus on GCSE Excellence

Your GCSEs are the first major building block towards a competitive Oxbridge application.

While admissions tutors consider applications in context, successful applicants often have a strong profile of Grades 8 and 9, particularly in subjects related to their intended university course. GCSE performance remains an important indicator of academic potential.

What should you focus on now?

Build strong study habits

- Complete work to the best of your ability.
- Stay organised.
- Avoid last-minute revision.
- Develop consistency rather than relying on occasional intense effort.

Develop deep understanding

Year 10 and Year 11 should be about mastering concepts rather than simply memorising information for assessments.
The knowledge and skills you develop now become the foundations of:

- Future A Levels
- Admissions tests
- University study

Build resilience

Successful Oxbridge applicants are rarely students who find everything easy. More often, they are students who embrace challenge, learn from mistakes and continue improving.

2. Understand Super-Curricular Activities

One of the biggest differences between Oxbridge applications and some international university applications is the emphasis on **academic exploration** rather than collecting a wide range of unrelated activities.

Oxford describes super-curricular activities as activities that allow students to explore academic subjects beyond school and develop curiosity, critical thinking and subject understanding.

Super-curricular activities include:

- Reading books beyond your GCSE syllabus
- Academic podcasts
- University lectures
- MOOCs (online courses)
- Subject competitions
- Museum visits
- Research projects
- Relevant work experience
- Academic journals and articles
- Debating and discussion groups

Cambridge specifically recommends reading, subject-related websites, museums, lectures, volunteering, relevant work experience, competitions and academic projects.

3. Make the Most of Ribston's Going Further Opportunities

The **Going Further** section on the Student P Drive is one of the most valuable resources available to aspiring Oxbridge students.

These opportunities are designed to help you:

- Explore subjects beyond the curriculum
- Develop specialist interests
- Access competitions and enrichment
- Gain leadership experience
- Investigate future career pathways
- Prepare for university-level study

Examples of opportunities may include:

- Subject-specific reading recommendations
- Essay competitions
- Maths Challenges
- Science Olympiads
- Language activities
- STEM competitions
- University outreach events
- Guest speakers
- Academic webinars
- Research opportunities

Remember: **Depth matters more than quantity.** Oxford and Cambridge consistently emphasise that genuine engagement and thoughtful reflection are far more valuable than trying to complete dozens of activities simply to build a list of achievements.

4. Read Beyond the Curriculum

One of the most effective ways to prepare for Oxbridge is to read widely. Successful students actively pursue questions that interest them and learn beyond what is required in lessons.

Examples:

Medicine and Healthcare

- Medical ethics
- Public health
- Genetics
- Neuroscience

Law

- Human rights
- Criminal justice
- Constitutional issues

Business, Economics and PPE

- Economic policy
- Markets
- Globalisation
- Political decision-making

History

- Historical debates
- Different interpretations of events

Languages

- Literature
- Foreign news sources
- Cultural studies

STEM

- Popular science books
- Research developments
- Coding projects
- Problem-solving challenges

Oxford's Super curricular Hub provides reading lists, podcasts, lectures, challenges and enrichment resources designed specifically to support academic exploration.

5. Develop Critical Thinking Skills

Oxbridge is interested in how students think.

Admissions tests, personal statements and interviews all seek evidence that students can analyse information, evaluate arguments and consider different viewpoints.

Ways to develop these skills

Ask questions

- Why does this happen?
- What evidence supports this claim?
- Is there another perspective?

Discuss ideas: Talk to teachers, friends and family about issues that interest you.

Debate respectfully: Learn how to support arguments using evidence.

Analyse information: Challenge assumptions and consider alternative explanations.

Cambridge highlights critical thinking, independent opinions and openness to new ideas as key qualities in successful applicants.

6. Improve Communication Skills

Oxbridge interviews are often described as academic conversations rather than traditional interviews.

Strong applicants can:

- Explain ideas clearly
- Discuss evidence
- Adapt their thinking
- Respond thoughtfully to unfamiliar questions

You can start developing these skills now by:

- Presenting ideas in class
- Joining discussion activities
- Participating in debating
- Explaining new concepts to others
- Writing analytical responses

For essay-based subjects, developing strong written communication and structured argument is especially important.

7. Gain Meaningful Work Experience

Work experience can help students understand a profession or academic discipline more deeply.

Examples might include:

- Healthcare settings
- Law insight programmes
- Engineering placements
- Research placements
- Community volunteering

- Business placements

However, Oxbridge places much greater emphasis on reflection and learning than simply completing placements. What matters is what you learned and how it developed your thinking.

8. Begin Thinking About Future A-Level Choices

You do not need to know exactly what degree you want to study in Year 10.

However, it is sensible to begin exploring possibilities.

Many Oxbridge courses require specific A Levels.

Examples include:

- Medicine: usually Chemistry plus another science or Maths
- Engineering: Maths and Physics
- Economics: Maths is highly recommended and often expected
- Natural Sciences: strong science and Maths combinations
- Languages: relevant language A Levels

As your interests develop, begin to research degree requirements so that future subject choices keep as many opportunities open as possible.

9. Build Your Academic Profile Through the RAP and then the Ribston Baccalaureate

Your experiences outside the classroom are valuable when they help develop your intellectual curiosity and personal growth.

Use your **Ribston RAP** to record:

- Books read
- Competitions entered
- Lectures attended
- Volunteering experiences
- Leadership opportunities
- Reflections and learning

Similarly, the **Ribston Baccalaureate** in Sixth Form helps students develop:

- Leadership
- Service
- Personal development
- Academic enrichment
- Wider engagement

Many of the activities that strengthen Oxbridge applications naturally contribute towards these programmes.

10. Looking Ahead to the AEP Pathway in Ribston Sixth Form

Students with aspirations towards Oxford, Cambridge and other highly competitive universities can access additional support through the **AEP Pathway** in Sixth Form.

The programme supports students with:

- University research
- Degree choice
- Super-curricular development
- Admissions tests
- Personal statement preparation
- Interview preparation
- Competitive university applications

Students who have already begun exploring their interests through Going Further opportunities are often best placed to maximise these opportunities in Sixth Form.

11. Understand Admissions Tests Early

Many Oxford and Cambridge courses require applicants to sit an admissions test as part of the application process. These tests are designed to assess academic potential, problem-solving ability, critical thinking and how well students can apply knowledge to unfamiliar situations, rather than simply testing recall.

While you do not need to start preparing for admissions tests in Year 10, understanding that they exist can help you develop the right skills over time.

Examples of Admissions Tests

Many competitive courses at Oxford, Cambridge and other top universities require applicants to sit an admissions test. These tests assess aptitude, problem-solving, critical thinking and subject knowledge beyond GCSEs and A Levels. Requirements can change over time, so students should always check the university website when applying.

Mathematics Admissions Tests

For students interested in Mathematics, Statistics, Computer Science or Economics.

- **TMUA (Test of Mathematics for University Admission)** - used for courses such as Mathematics, Economics and Computer Science at universities including Oxford and Cambridge. Assesses mathematical reasoning and problem-solving.
- **STEP (Sixth Term Examination Paper)** - used primarily by Cambridge Mathematics as part of some offers. Tests advanced mathematical problem-solving.

Engineering Admissions Tests

For Engineering and related STEM courses.

- **ESAT (Engineering and Science Admissions Test)** - used for Engineering and some science courses at Oxford and Cambridge. Includes mathematics and science-based problem solving.

Law Admissions Tests

For students applying to Law.

- **LNAT (National Admissions Test for Law)** - assesses critical reading, logical reasoning and essay writing. Used by Oxford and several other leading universities.

Medicine Admissions Tests

For Medicine and Dentistry applicants.

- **UCAT (University Clinical Aptitude Test)** - assesses verbal reasoning, decision-making, quantitative reasoning and situational judgement. Required by Cambridge and many UK medical schools.

Thinking Skills and Critical Thinking Assessments

For students applying to a range of humanities and social science courses.

- **TARA (Test of Academic Reasoning for Admissions)** - assesses critical thinking, analysis and reasoning skills. Used by Oxford for some humanities and social science courses.
- Many courses also test critical thinking through written work, interviews and college assessments.

Subject-Specific Assessments in Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences

Depending on the course, students may encounter:

Sciences

- **ESAT** for Natural Sciences, Physical Sciences and Engineering courses. [lumiexams.com]

Humanities

- Additional written work and subject-specific interview tasks in subjects such as History, English and Classics.

Social Sciences

- **TMUA** for Economics-related courses. [lumiexams.com]
- **TARA** for selected social science and humanities programmes. [ox.ac.uk], [lumiexams.com]

The Skills Admissions Tests Often Assess

Many Oxbridge admissions tests reward students who can:

- Solve unfamiliar problems
- Apply knowledge in new situations
- Analyse information quickly
- Think logically
- Construct reasoned arguments
- Work accurately under time pressure

These are skills that are developed gradually through strong classroom learning and academic enrichment.

How Year 10 Students Can Prepare Indirectly

Rather than focusing on test practice now, focus on developing the habits and skills that admissions tests reward:

For all subjects

- Read challenging material regularly.
- Develop strong comprehension skills.
- Learn to evaluate evidence and arguments.
- Practice thinking beyond the obvious answer.
- Challenge yourself with difficult questions.

For Maths, Economics, Engineering and Sciences

- Participate in Maths Challenges.
- Try problem-solving activities.
- Enter STEM competitions.
- Attempt extension questions rather than stopping when work becomes difficult.

For Humanities, Law and Social Sciences

- Read opinion pieces and analyse arguments.
- Take part in debates and discussions.
- Develop strong essay-writing skills.
- Practice evaluating different viewpoints.

For Medicine

- Develop scientific understanding beyond the GCSE specification.
- Explore medical ethics and current healthcare issues.
- Read articles critically and consider multiple perspectives.

How Ribston Supports Admissions Test Preparation

Many of the opportunities available through:

- Going Further
- Ribston RAP
- The Ribston Baccalaureate
- The AEP Pathway in Sixth Form

help students develop precisely the academic thinking skills that admissions tests assess.

For example:

- Maths Challenges build problem-solving skills.
- Essay competitions develop analytical writing.
- Wider reading improves comprehension and evaluation.
- Academic lectures expose students to complex ideas.
- Subject competitions encourage application of knowledge in unfamiliar contexts.

Students who consistently engage with these opportunities from Year 10 onwards often find themselves much better prepared for admissions tests in Sixth Form.

A Final Thought on Admissions Tests

One of the biggest misconceptions about Oxbridge admissions tests is that they can be successfully crammed for a few weeks before the exam.

In reality, students perform best when they have spent years developing:

- Strong subject knowledge
- Intellectual curiosity
- Problem-solving ability
- Analytical thinking
- Academic resilience

That is why Year 10 matters. The habits you develop now through your GCSE studies, Going Further opportunities, RAP reflections and wider academic exploration will help create the foundation for success in admissions tests, interviews and university applications later on.

12. Preparing to Be Successful at Oxbridge Interviews

One of the most common misconceptions about Oxbridge interviews is that they are designed to test what you know. In reality, interviews are primarily designed to explore **how you think**. Tutors are looking for students who can analyse information, solve problems, respond to new ideas and engage in academic discussion.

What Are Interviewers Looking For?

Successful candidates often demonstrate:

- Intellectual curiosity
- Logical reasoning
- Willingness to engage with difficult questions
- Ability to adapt their thinking
- Enthusiasm for their subject
- Strong communication skills
- Academic potential

Interviewers do not expect perfection. They are often more interested in how a student approaches a difficult problem than whether they arrive at the perfect answer immediately.

How Can You Start Preparing in Year 10?

Be Curious

Get into the habit of asking questions.

- Why?
- How?
- What evidence supports that?
- Is there another explanation?

Discuss What You Read

If you read a book, listen to a podcast or watch a documentary:
Ask yourself:

- What was the main argument?
- Did I agree with it?
- What evidence was used?
- What questions remain unanswered?

Challenge Yourself

- Do not avoid difficult questions.

The willingness to struggle with a problem and think your way through it is exactly what Oxbridge tutors value.

Explain Ideas Clearly

Practice discussing complex ideas with:

- Friends
- Family members
- Teachers

Try explaining advanced ideas in simple language.

Interview Skills You Can Practise at School

The following opportunities help build interview confidence long before Sixth Form:

In Lessons

- Explain your reasoning.
- Engage in class discussion.
- Ask thoughtful questions.

Through Going Further Opportunities

- Attend lectures.
- Enter competitions.
- Participate in enrichment events.
- Complete independent projects.

Through RAP and the Ribston Baccalaureate

- Reflect on experiences.
- Develop leadership skills.
- Build confidence communicating with others.
- Learn to discuss your achievements thoughtfully.

Common Qualities of Strong Interview Candidates

✅ Curious
✅ Thoughtful
✅ Open-minded
✅ Reflective
✅ Willing to change their mind when presented with evidence
✅ Enthusiastic about learning
✅ Comfortable discussing ideas

These qualities develop gradually through years of engagement with learning, not through last-minute preparation.

Final Advice and Interview Preparation

One of the biggest misconceptions about Oxbridge applications is that preparation starts with interview practice. In reality, the strongest preparation begins much earlier through developing the habits, knowledge and intellectual curiosity that Oxford and Cambridge value most.

In Year 10 and beyond, focus on:

- Working hard to achieve the strongest GCSE outcomes possible.
- Reading widely beyond the classroom.
- Exploring ideas that genuinely interest you.
- Taking full advantage of Ribston's Going Further opportunities.
- Recording and reflecting on your experiences through your Ribston RAP.
- Developing a small number of interests in depth rather than collecting lots of unrelated activities.
- Taking advantage of the support available through the AEP Pathway when you join Sixth Form.

By doing these things consistently, you will naturally develop many of the qualities Oxford and Cambridge are looking for: academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, resilience, independence and a genuine love of learning. If you focus on becoming an engaged, curious and independent learner throughout Year 10, Year 11 and Sixth Form, you will already be developing the skills needed for success at interview and beyond.

How Ribston Sixth Form and the AEP Pathway Support Oxbridge Success

Students considering Oxford, Cambridge and other highly competitive universities benefit from a structured programme of support throughout Sixth Form. The combination of excellent academic teaching, enrichment opportunities and the **AEP (Academic Excellence Programme) Pathway** helps students build the knowledge, experiences and confidence required for competitive applications.

Academic Excellence

Successful Oxbridge applicants need outstanding academic outcomes. Ribston Sixth Form supports this through:

- Expert subject teaching
- High academic expectations
- Regular assessment and feedback
- Independent learning and Going Further opportunities
- Subject extension activities
- Academic mentoring and support

Students are encouraged to move beyond specification content and engage with subjects at a depth more similar to undergraduate study.

Super-Curricular Development

Oxford and Cambridge place significant value on evidence of academic engagement beyond the classroom. The AEP Pathway supports students in:

- Developing wider reading programmes
- Accessing university outreach events
- Attending lectures and webinars
- Entering essay competitions
- Securing relevant work experience
- Participating in subject-related projects and research
- Building a portfolio of super-curricular experiences

Students are encouraged not simply to participate, but to reflect on what they have learned and how their thinking has evolved.

Application Support

Students receive assistance with:

- UCAS applications
- Personal statement development
- Recording super-curricular engagement
- Identifying evidence of academic potential
- Preparing competitive applications

Final Thoughts

Year 10 is about becoming the type of learner who would thrive at Oxford or Cambridge.

Focus on your GCSEs. Be curious. Read widely. Take advantage of Ribston's Going Further opportunities. Build your RAP. Work towards the Ribston Baccalaureate. Explore subjects because they genuinely interest you.

The strongest Oxbridge applicants are not necessarily those who do the most activities. They are the students who consistently demonstrate academic excellence, independent thinking, intellectual curiosity and a genuine passion for learning over several years. By starting now, you can develop these qualities naturally and put yourself in the strongest possible position for future success.