

Choosing your A Levels

information

Making the right decisions

What you decide to study post-16 can have a major impact on what you can study at degree level (if you intend to move on to University after sixth form). Whether or not you have an idea of the subject you want to study at university, having the right information now will give you more options when the time comes to make your mind up.

A good way of ensuring that you choose the correct subjects at A level (or any other post-16 qualification) is to follow the 5 point plan:

- 1 Know what you want to study? – Check out the entry requirements**
If you have a university course which you are keen on, check the relevant university website or UCAS course search to find out whether this course requires certain subjects at advanced level?
- 2 Not sure yet? – Keep your options open!**
If you are not sure about what course you want to study at university, try to choose at least two facilitating subjects (see below) - Maths, English Literature, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Geography, History, Languages
- 3 GCSEs matter...**
Make sure you understand the GCSE requirements for entry to a university. Are you on track to achieve the grades to progress onto the course/courses that you want to do at A level and the university course that you may choose to do?
- 4 Think balance**
Do you have a balance of subject choices that reflect your abilities, strengths and interests? Have you considered how certain subject combinations relate to university courses?
- 5 Make sure you know WHY**
If you want to take a subject that you have not studied before, can you talk for a minute on what this subject is about? Try and unpick why you wish to study this subject. It's not enough to say 'It's interesting', 'I think I'll like it' or 'It will be fun'.

Some degrees will be open to you whatever subjects you choose to study for your A levels. Just try to make sure that you stick to the five-point plan. The following popular degrees will normally be open to you without any specific subject background:

Accountancy, Anthropology, Archaeology, Business Studies, History of Art, Law, Management Studies, Media Studies, Philosophy, Politics, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, Surveying.

Although they may not be specified as required subjects, many successful applicants to the above courses do have advanced level qualifications in at least two of the facilitating subjects (see below).

What subjects can give me the most options?

Many courses at university level build on the knowledge which you will gain while at sixth form. Where this is the case, universities need to make sure that all the students they admit have prepared themselves in the best way to cope with their chosen course. For this reason, some university courses may require you to have studied a specific subject prior to entry, others may not. However, there are some subjects that are required more often than others. These subjects are sometimes referred to as facilitating subjects.

Subjects that can be viewed as 'facilitating' subjects are:

- **Mathematics and Further Mathematics**
- **English (Literature)**
- **Physics**
- **Biology**
- **Chemistry**
- **Geography**
- **History**
- **Languages (Classical and Modern)**

Although these subjects will keep your options open for many university courses, simply studying 3 or 4 facilitating subjects will not guarantee you a place on your course of choice. Many specialised degree subjects have strict entry requirements and will expect you to have studied 1 or more specific subjects in order to gain entry. Some of the more popular courses and their entry requirements are listed overleaf.

Accountancy (also Banking/Finance/Insurance)

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Usually none, although one or two universities require Mathematics.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Mathematics, Business Studies and Economics.

Architecture

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Some courses say they want an arts/science mix. Some may require Art.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Art, Mathematics, Design Technology and Physics. Note that a portfolio of drawings and ideas may be asked for.

Art and Design

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Art or Design Technology

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Design Technology, Art & Design. Note that most entrants onto Art and Design degrees will have done a one-year Art Foundation Course after completing year 13.

Dentistry

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Chemistry and Biology for most courses, but some require Mathematics or Physics as well.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Mathematics, Physics, Further Mathematics.

Electrical/Electronic Engineering

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Mathematics, Physics.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Further Mathematics, ICT, Design Technology.

Engineering (General)

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Mathematics and Physics.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Further Mathematics, Design Technology.

Law

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Usually none, although a few universities require English.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

History or other facilitating subjects. There really are no essential subjects for Law. Maybe one choice should involve essay / report writing. History gives you good relevant skills for Law but is not essential.

Medicine

Essential advanced level qualifications:

If you do Chemistry, Biology and one from Mathematics or Physics you will keep all the medical schools open to you. If you do Chemistry and Biology you will keep open the vast majority. If you do Chemistry and one from Mathematics and Physics you will limit your range of choices much more.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Further Mathematics or a contrasting (non-science) subject.

Nursing and Midwifery

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Usually Biology or another science.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Biology, CACHE, Sociology, Psychology, Chemistry.

Optometry (Ophthalmic Optics)

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Two from Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics or Physics (some courses prefer Biology as one of the choices).

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Further Mathematics.

Pharmacy

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Chemistry and one from Biology, Mathematics and Physics keeps the vast majority of courses open to you. Some courses like to see Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics. Doing Chemistry and Biology keeps most courses open.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Mathematics, Physics.

Physiotherapy

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Most courses will consider you with just Biology, however some also require a second science from Chemistry, Mathematics or Physics.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology.

Sports Science/Physical Education

Essential advanced level qualifications:

Many courses want to see one from

Biology/Chemistry/Mathematics/Physics (some courses will treat Physical Education as a science equivalent).

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Physical Education, Psychology.

Teacher Training (Primary and/or Secondary)

Essential advanced level qualifications:

(those best for Primary Teaching shown in italics) At least one from Art, Biology, CACHE, Chemistry, Design and Technology, Drama *English*, French, *Geography*, German, *History*, ICT, Italian, *Mathematics*, *Music*, *Physics*, *Physical Education*, *Religious Studies*, Spanish.

CACHE meets the entry requirements for early years Primary Teaching and a large number of Primary Education Teacher Training Degrees.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Another of the subjects listed above.

Veterinary Science

Essential advanced level qualifications:

You should do Chemistry and Biology and one from Mathematics/Physics so that you have all universities open to you.

Useful advanced level qualifications:

Further Mathematics

Important: The above information is not guaranteed to be accurate for every single university. It is recommended that you research your chosen university/courses thoroughly before making a decision. <http://www.ucas.com/students/coursesearch/>