

# Securing Your University Offer for Philosophy

Essay Competition Award Ceremony  
13 April 2023



# Agenda

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- Welcome
- Studying Philosophy at University: an Overview
- Submitting a Competitive Application
- NU London Insights
- Q&A

# Studying Philosophy at University: an Overview





# What is the study of Philosophy?

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- Philosophical study develops writing, reading, reasoning, re-thinking, adapting, learning, organising and dialogue skills
- Philosophy assists us in understanding what our own ideas are based on, and how they stand in relation to those of others when exploring complex issues
- Philosophy provides concepts that apply to family, social and work situations - helping us recognise and respond to ethical issues in the real world
- You learn up-to-date techniques and possible answers to philosophical questions, and develop critical, interpretive, and evaluative skills
- The study of Philosophy fosters awareness of major figures and developments in the history of philosophy



## Where and how can you study Philosophy?

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- Single Honours BA Philosophy, BA Political Philosophy, etc.
- Many joint and combined honours options, e.g.: Philosophy and Computer Science (would most likely be a BSc), Philosophy and Art History, Philosophy with Creative Writing (\*note that the study balance is likely to be other than 50/50 if it's Philosophy *with* rather than Philosophy *and*)
- Could study PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) or PPH (Philosophy, Politics and History)
- Different degree spans (standard English 3 years, standard Scottish 4 years, fast-track 2 years etc)
- Degree apprenticeships take a more practical approach (potentially useful to fast track toward particular careers)
- Full-time/part-time; online/in-person; study abroad

# How is Philosophy taught?

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- **Reading:** Reading is critical in understanding the basic history of Philosophy and will inform your own critical thinking about various subjects
- **Lectures:** Lectures will give an introduction to different Philosophers/Philosophical schools of thought, allowing you to see in which areas your interests lie (e.g.: Ancient Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, 20<sup>th</sup>C Philosophy)
- **Seminars:** seminars are very important to Philosophy, as it is all about discussion and debate; usually there is no right or wrong answer
- **Essays:** Formative and summative, Philosophy essays are where you can show off your thinking skills and analysis to form your own arguments concerning the question/topic given
- **Presentations:** Not as common in Philosophy, but can still be useful to show independent research and analytical development - these may be individual or group presentations



## What skills do you develop?

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- Intellectual skills (*e.g. critical, analytical, synthesising and problem-solving skills*)
- Communication Skills (*e.g. written and oral*)
- Organisational skills
- Interpersonal Skills (*e.g. working with others*)
- Research Skills
- Time management
- Referencing skills

The skills you will acquire as a Philosophy graduate will allow you to pivot flexibly into a variety of industries, when you enter the working world.

# What can you do after your degree?

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As a Philosophy graduate your transferable skills can take you into ANY industry. Some of the top graduate destinations are:

- Education
- Public Sector
- Journalism and Publishing
- Law
- Psychotherapy and Counselling



# Submitting a Competitive Application for Philosophy



# What are the entry requirements?

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*Information provided by [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)*

- **A levels:** Usually minimum two A levels, with three A levels and A-B grades are required for the most popular courses
- Entry requirements range from BCC to AAB
- Other useful subjects to hold for Philosophy degrees include any other humanities subject
- **International Baccalaureate Diploma:** From 30-39 points overall in the IB Diploma
- **Scottish Highers:** From BBBB to AAABB (most frequently AABBB)
- **UCAS Tariff:** 130-96
- **Access to HE Diploma:** 60-45 overall credits
- **Cambridge Pre-U:** M2-D2



## What are admissions tutors looking for?

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- Enthusiasm and motivation to study Philosophy
- Appetite to read widely, and to read across all genres
- Credible evidence that supports your subject passion
- Proactive subject exploration and engagement - e.g.: wider reading beyond the set texts
- Relevant extra-curricular/super-curricular activities
- Interests outside of school, relating to Philosophy
- Relevant and transferable work experience
- Aims and goals; career plans if known
- Understanding of the demands of studying at university, and how this is different from school

# What super-curricular activities would support my application?

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Super-curricular activities take the subjects you study further, beyond what you have learnt at school or college. Some examples for Philosophy may include:

- Wider reading beyond the set texts
- Reading specialist magazines and journals
- Attending university taster lectures or taster days
- Listening to podcasts, TED talks or online lectures
- Attending a Philosophy Summer School
- Taking an online (MOOC) Philosophy course
- Taking part in university essay competitions!



# Why is the personal statement so important?

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- Often your only chance to 'sell yourself' to the university and impress the admissions tutor
- Helps to differentiate between equally excellent candidates with similar or identical grade profiles, especially for competitive courses
- Helps if you are a borderline candidate
- Demonstrates your reasons for applying for a course
- May form basis of an interview - tutors may ask questions arising from the statement
- May help if on results day you don't quite make your grades

# How can I write a compelling personal statement?

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- Invest plenty of time in the brainstorming/thinking stage, before starting to write your statement
- Structure your personal statement
- Use positive and enthusiastic language
- Make every sentence count - word count is tight!
- Ensure it reflects your 'voice', and your 'journey'
- Use evidence to support claims/statements
- Be prepared to draft and redraft
- Be honest - don't exaggerate and don't plagiarise
- Double check grammar and spelling for errors
- Ask for support, especially with proofreading and checking - it's easy for mistakes to slip through!





## What might an admissions interview look like?

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- Unique opportunity to discuss a subject you are passionate about with an academic tutor
- Opportunity for tutor to get to know you and your motivation for applying - you can also ask questions!
- May take the form of a 'taster' tutorial
- Unlikely to be a test of knowledge - tutor will be more interested in how you think, rather than what you know
- Discussion-based; questions will probe your subject interest, enthusiasm and aptitude
- Questions may build on your personal statement
- Questions will be challenging - don't panic if you don't immediately have an answer; take your time to think
- Some interviews may include a task, or pre-reading



## How can I prepare for my admissions interview?

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- Carefully reread your personal statement, and be prepared to expand upon any of the points you have included
- Re-read or re-familiarise yourself with any texts you referenced, so these are fresh in your mind
- Undertake any reading or pre-interview tasks in good time
- Practice talking about the points in your statement
- Research who will be interviewing you
- Make sure you are clear regarding interview logistics
- If you will be undertaking a virtual interview, make sure you have somewhere suitable for this task, with good wifi
- Prepare questions you would like to ask in the interview



# NU London Insights



# Faculty insights

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- Philosophy is recommended to those who are open-minded and enjoy thinking about and discussing abstract and/or profound questions
- Philosophy especially trains you in thinking and speaking on complex subjects in a clear and orderly way. The more a job calls for that - and very many do! - the more useful degree-level experience in Philosophy will prove to be
- When preparing for an admissions interview in Philosophy, take one or two philosophical issues or problems from a book like Simon Blackburn's *Think*, and start to work out what you think about it/them, and why. Be prepared to talk through your ideas and responses
- We recommend Plato's *Protagoras*, or Hume's *Dialogues on Natural Religion*. Peter Adamson's *History of Philosophy without Any Gaps* is also worth a read
- In your personal statement, be authentic and true to yourself. Talk about your subject engagement positively, and enthusiastically

# Student tips and hints

- Some important traits to have are intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, critical reasoning and analytical skills, and the ability to think deeply
- In your personal statement, be genuine and honest. Frame everything in a positive way, and don't be afraid to talk highly of yourself
- Have a look at Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Plato's *The Republic*, and Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics*
- Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Crash Course Philosophy, the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and PhilosophyTube are useful
- In interview, don't overthink it; take a minute to think about your responses and stay relevant and on-topic



## Suggestions for wider reading

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- Blackburn, S (1999), ***Think***. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Buxton, R, Whiting, L (2020), ***The Philosopher Queens***. London: Unbound
- Dennett, D (2013), ***Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking***. London: Penguin
- Descartes, R (1641), ***Meditations on First Philosophy***, ed. J. Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Plato, ***The Last Days of Socrates***, ed. Tredennick. London: Penguin
- Srinivasan, A (2021), ***The Right to Sex***. London: Bloomsbury

# Q&A

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