

Six things you need to know before making your final A-level choices

Whether you've already decided your A-levels for next year or you're struggling to decide, here are six pieces of advice to help you make the right A-level choices.

What A-levels should you take?

Choosing a handful of subjects to take at A-level isn't a decision you should take lightly. The A-levels you pick now can impact what you do later, namely the courses you can apply to at university (and which universities will consider you).

That said, if you don't know what you want to do in the future, you can still make smart choices now that will leave you in the best position in two years' time – see what we say about 'facilitating subjects' below.

Follow the six steps further down and you won't go wrong with your A-level choices...

1. A-levels are a lot tougher than GCSEs

The reason you take a particular subject at A-level will come down to one (or more) of these three scenarios (usually):

- you need it to pursue a particular career
- it's a subject you enjoy and are good at
- it's a subject you've not studied before but you think will suit you

Either way, be prepared for a big jump in the level of difficulty when you transition from GCSE to AS-level (or any other Advanced level qualification for that matter). You'll also see differences in the way you're taught and in what is expected of you.

2. Taking certain 'facilitating' subjects at A-level will open up more university course options

Want to go to University but don't know what you'll want to study? You're not alone!

Keep your future options wide open when choosing your A-levels by selecting a smart mix of the most commonly asked-for subjects in university entry requirements.

These are known as 'facilitating' subjects and are:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- English
- Geography
- History
- Maths
- Modern and Classical Languages
- Physics

The more of these you choose, the more courses at university will be open to you.

Additionally, if you have a talent for Art, Design or Music and think it could be an avenue you'll pursue, taking the relevant A-levels will help that to happen.

Be aware, some universities openly discourage students from taking certain combinations of A-level subjects, particularly when subjects are very similar like Business Studies and Economics – something to bear in mind when you're making A-level choices.

3. Certain Universities courses will look for specific A-levels

This is really important if you have a particular degree in mind. You won't be able to apply to some degree courses without having taken some specific A-levels (and scored the right grades in them too, of course).

Below are a few examples to give you an idea of what to expect (some are no-brainers)...

- Pharmacy must have: Chemistry, plus at least one from Biology, Maths and Physics
- English must have: usually English Literature, maybe English Literature and Language or English Language
- Geology/Earth Sciences must have: at least two from Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Biology
- Economics sometimes need: Maths, very rarely do you need Economics

Tip: Check out the full entry requirement details for a handful of courses across different Universities to make sure you're ticking all the boxes within your subject.

4. Some courses and Universities have lists of subjects they don't accept

Particular courses – take, for instance, an Architecture course at the University of Bath – will view certain A-levels as less effective preparation for university studies than others.

Similarly, some universities – such as the University of Sheffield – actually list which A-level subjects they prefer.

Others, like the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), have 'non-preferred' subject lists.

If your subject choices don't match up, you shouldn't necessarily discount the course, or be put off from taking a creative or vocational A-level subject you're really interested in.

5. Know myth from reality

Don't take everything you hear at face value or based on what a friend/older sibling/girlfriend's hairdresser says – the reality might be quite different. It's always worth investigating things yourself so you get the full picture.

While entry requirements are often a minimum set of criteria you have to meet, a University may view you differently from another candidate based on your **personal statement** or your **portfolio** if your predicted grades just miss the mark. Don't rely on preconceived assumptions or what you hear through someone else from their experience. Double-check your facts with the university or department themselves.

6. Many Universities and courses will consider you whatever you choose

Question: Accountancy, Anthropology, Archaeology, Banking, Business Studies, Classical Civilisations, Hospitality, Information Science, Law, Management, Marketing, Media Studies, Philosophy, Politics, Psychology, Public Relations, Religious Studies/Theology, Retail Management, Social Work, Sociology, Surveying, Television, Travel and Tourism...

What do these subjects have in common?

Answer: They will all consider a very wide range of A-level choices and do not normally have essential subject requirements! So don't get too bogged down in essential A-levels you have to take.