

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

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## 1. Certain higher education courses will be looking for specific A-levels

You won't be able to apply to some university courses without having taken some specific A-levels (and scored the right grades in them too, of course).

Listed below are a few examples of these to help you avoid getting tripped up. Yes, some of them are no-brainers, but you never know...

- **Pharmacy** must have: chemistry, plus at least one from biology, maths and physics
- **English** must have: English literature 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.

For more info, see our full list of uni subjects and their typical A-level requirements. If you already know what you want to study, check out the full entry requirement details for a handful of courses at different universities to make sure you're ticking all the boxes with your subject choices.

## 2. Taking certain A-levels will open up more university course options

Think you probably want to go to university but don't know what you want to study yet? You won't be the only one! You can keep your options wide open when choosing your A-levels by selecting a smart mix of the most commonly asked-for subjects in university entry requirements, known as 'facilitating' subjects. Take your pick from:

- 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.

Some universities openly discourage students from taking certain combinations of A-level subjects, particularly when subjects are very similar like business studies and economics, so bear this in mind when you're making your choices.

### **3. A-levels are a lot tougher than GCSEs**

The reason you take a particular subject is usually one (or more) of these three scenarios: you need it to pursue a particular career, it's a subject you enjoy and are good at or 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 shift from GCSE to AS, A-level and any other Advanced level qualification for that matter.

### **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 - 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.

Taking a subject such as history of art, classical civilisation, economics, geology, government and politics, law, media studies, philosophy, psychology, religious studies and sociology in conjunction with at least one (ideally two) of the 'facilitating' subjects listed above shouldn't be an issue if you get the grades.

### **5. Know myth from reality**

Don't take everything you hear at face value – the reality might be quite different.

Say you've been told you've no chance of getting on to an ultra-competitive law course at the University of Durham because it doesn't accept psychology A-level. Is that really the case? It's best not to rely on pre-conceived assumptions - there are ways to double check your facts.

First, take a look at what the university itself has to say. In this case, Durham Law School proactively states on its website that 'we do not make offers in respect of critical thinking or general studies, but we are otherwise unconcerned by the subjects you take'. Couple that with a closer look at what A-levels current students on the course took – actually, 14% of students studying law at Durham arrived with A-level psychology.

Find out what universities really think about A-levels in media studies, law and general studies.

### **6. Many universities and courses will consider you whatever you choose**

Q: 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?

A: They will all consider a very wide range of A-level choices and do not normally have essential subject requirements.

### **Where should you look for further advice and guidance on A Level subject choices?**

- The UCAS website has a valuable section titled 'Explore your Options' which explains how higher education courses are organised and what are the different entry requirements.

[www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/explore-your-options](http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/explore-your-options)

- The Russell Group of research – led universities has published an influential guide titled 'Informed Choices' to the A Level subject combinations that keep most options open.

[www.russellgroup.ac.uk/informed-choices](http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/informed-choices)

- The careers and sixth form teams at Wilmslow High School will be reviewing students choices throughout the sixth form admissions process and will be offering appropriate advice and guidance.