



Choosing Your A Levels

The Russell Group represents 20 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research and outstanding teaching and learning experience. *'Informed choices'* is a pre-16 guide to choosing the right A Levels to maximise your opportunity to enter university. To find out more click on <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/for-students/school-and-college-in-the-uk/subject-choices-at-school-and-college/>

GCSEs:

When applying to a competitive university and especially for a very competitive course, it is important that you consider all the aspects of the entrance requirements, including the GCSE level requirements. GCSE Language is a standard entry requirement and often Mathematics too. For Medicine, the entry requirements are often five A* grades.

Which A Levels?

Four reasons you may want to continue to study a subject at a higher level are:

- You have enjoyed studying this subject before.
- You have good results and feedback from teachers in this subject.
- You need this subject to enter a particular career or course.
- You have not studied the subject before but you have looked into it and think it will suit your strengths.

Three further considerations should be taken into account:

- Some subjects are distinctly more difficult at an advanced level than at standard level.
- Make sure you get your facts straight. There are many misconceptions about subjects required for courses and careers.
- Don't take an uninformed risk. What is the new subject actually about?

Thinking ahead to university courses

If you are planning to go on to university, it is important you research the A Levels required for your chosen university course.

Some popular degrees will normally be open to you without any specific subject background.

These include:

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

What subjects can give me the most options?

Many courses at university level build on knowledge which you will gain while still at school. If you are not sure of your degree choice at the A Level stage, then keep your options open and choose an A Level that provides good general learning in a specific subject area:

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

How do certain subject combinations relate to university courses?

In considering your A Level subject choices, it is a good idea to think about how they relate to broad groups of university courses. Here are some common patterns of A Level choices:

The Scientist, Mathematician and Engineer:

A student who is good at science often chooses Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and Physics. This will keep open all the science/mathematics options at university. It can be a good idea to replace one of the sciences with an arts/humanities subject or a social science to demonstrate a broader outlook.

Mathematics: Students who are very good at Mathematics may well do Further Mathematics and again, an art/humanities/social science A Level is often worth considering.

It is worth noting that, in the science field at university, many degrees fall into one of two camps: Biological/Life Sciences and Physical Sciences

Biological/Life Sciences are degrees based on Chemistry and Biology. As long as you choose these two subjects at advanced level, a huge range of degrees will be open to you (for example, Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, Pharmacy, Dietetics) and degrees based on research (Biochemistry, Biomedical Materials Science, Pharmacology).

Physical Sciences involve the practical application of Mathematics and Physics. As long as you take these two subjects at advanced level a huge range of degrees will be open to you, such as: Engineering (mechanical, electronic/electrical and civil), Physics and Materials Science.

Essay Based A Levels:

If you are interested in History, English Literature, Politics and Sociology for example, at A Level, your degree at university might well follow on from one of these subjects – you could do a degree in History, Politics, English Literature or Sociology. You could also do a degree in another arts/humanities subject (for example, Philosophy). Or you could do a degree in another social science (for example, Psychology). Or you could do a degree in something more vocational (for example, Law or Management Sciences). As you can see, you will have many options open to you.

The Linguist

Some students will emphasise their linguistic abilities by doing not one but two foreign languages. Students that study languages are highly sought after by universities for language degrees or courses with a language component.

The Artist

If you have talent in music you may well want to study it at university. If so, it is important that you take Music to advanced level (along with performance grades). If you have a talent in art you may well be thinking about an art foundation course as a precursor to a degree programme. You might want to consider an advanced level qualification in either Art or Art and Design. Either of these will provide you with the basis for your portfolio, which you will need to gain entry to an art foundation course.

The Actor/Dancer

For drama and dance courses, entry does not depend on you possessing the relevant subject. For a few courses (particularly those with a strongly theoretical base) Theatre Studies may put you at an advantage but most universities advise that you take subjects such as Theatre Studies purely out of interest, with entry to higher education in these fields often largely dependent on performance at an audition. Preparation for such auditions can be gained from many different out-of-school activities, from drama and dance groups within school and, of course, from your school leaving qualifications themselves.

Other universities outside the Russell Group may say things slightly different so it's always best if you check out individual universities degrees on their own website.