



Six Things You Need To Know Before Making Your A Level Choices

Whether you have already decided your A levels for next year or you are struggling to decide, here are six steps to making the right A level choices

1. Certain university courses will look for specific A levels

This is 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.

For more guidance on what to study at A level to go on to particular degree subjects, see our full list of university subjects and their typical A level requirements.

Tip: Check out the full entry requirement details for a handful of courses across different universities to make sure you are ticking all the boxes with your subject choice.

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

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, known as 'facilitating' subjects.

These 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 will 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 are making A level choices.

3. 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 is a subject you enjoy and are good at; or it is a subject you have 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 A level (or any other Advanced level qualification for that matter). You will also see differences in the way you are taught and in what is expected of you.

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 are 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 should not 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 have heard that you have no chance of getting on to an ultra-competitive law course at the University of Durham because it doesn't accept psychology A level. Well, 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 – in this case you will find that 14% of students studying law at Durham arrived with A level psychology! It is always worth investigating things yourself so you get the full picture.

A university may view you differently from another candidate based on other factors such as extra-curricular interests or your portfolio. Don't rely on preconceived assumptions or what you hear through someone else from their experience. Double check your facts!

We have found that media studies, law and general studies usually throw up some confusion and cases of ‘he said-she-said’. Read our guides on how universities view these at A level.

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.