

# Building A Super-Curricular Profile For Oxford And Cambridge

What separates academic engagement from activity for its own sake, and how to prove you have actually thought about what you have read.

## The core distinction

### Super-curricular is not extracurricular

Sport, music, Duke of Edinburgh and volunteering are extracurricular. They show character and time management, and they belong elsewhere in your application. Super-curricular activity is academic engagement beyond the syllabus, connected directly to the subject you want to study. Tutors are checking whether you can already think that way, not whether your diary is full.

Lasting many ideas with no depth on any: engage properly with three or four significant sources instead.

Treating volunteering or sport as intellectual evidence: keep the two separate; each proves something different.

Choosing a paid summer school for its name: free resources such as JSTOR, MIT OpenCourseWare and Gresham College carry equal weight.

Starting in September of Year 13: build interest from Year 12, ideally earlier.

Citing a source you cannot discuss in depth: only mention what survives five minutes of questioning.

### Worked example: Reflection Quality

Weak: I read an article in The Economist about inflation.

Better: The Economist's coverage of inflation targeting showed me how central banks weigh competing risks when setting interest rates.

### Best

Reading Rogoff's original case for central bank independence alongside The Economist's coverage of inflation targeting showed me how central banks weigh competing risks when setting interest rates.

## Where to look, by subject

### A starting reference, not a checklist

Depth of engagement matters far more than the number of resources used. Treat this as a starting point: the goal is two or three sources you can return to and discuss properly, not a list to work through.

- Science (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Neuroscience): Scientific American, Mind, New Scientist, Oxford Open Science, arXiv preprints, Our World in Data, International Journal of High Energy Physics.
  - Mathematics (including UKMT, Senior Mathematical Challenge, Plus Magazine, published work by Oxford University and Cambridge, Art of Problem Solving).
  - Medicine (UKCAT, BMJ, The Lancet, research): general hospital admissions, medical ethics, debates on resources and allocation, and consent.
  - Humanities (History, English, Classics, Religion): primary sources, JSTOR collections, free public lectures and The Times Literary Supplement.
  - Social Sciences (Economics, Politics, Psychology): original papers, replicated work, World Values Survey, Institute for Fiscal Studies and Google Scholar.
  - Law: UK Supreme Court judgments, the legal rights, H.L.A. Hart's The Concept of Law and legal mooted events.
  - Languages: foreign-language specialist films and sustained correspondence with a native speaker; set texts read in the original.
  - Geography: environmental science, development, fieldwork, data analysis, the Royal Geographical Society, primary data, Google and the IPCC or ONS.
- Art and Music: gallery or concert reviews, critical response, a portfolio or composition log and outside influences. Syllabus and graded exams are evidence of skill, not thought.

## Supercurriculars don't need to be prestigious

You do not need Nature, an Oxbridge summer school or impressive work experience. Strong supercurriculars show that you explored your subject beyond class and reflected on it.

Oxford defines supercurricular learning as exploring beyond school through books, articles, lectures, podcasts, videos, challenges and competitions. Start small, then follow your curiosity.

Source: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/supercurricular-hub>

### A great supercurricular could simply be:

- Read a book, article or essay
- Watch a lecture or TED Talk
- Listen to a subject podcast
- Enter an academic competition
- Complete an EPQ, project or free course
- Visit somewhere relevant or research a question

UCAS includes reading, online learning, work experience, visits, podcasts, TED Talks and documentaries.

Source: <https://www.ucas.com/applying/applying-to-university/writing-your-personal-statement/how-to-write-your-personal-statement-for-2026-entry-onwards>

### The activity isn't impressive — your thinking is.

A prestigious source or programme is not enough. What matters is curiosity, learning and progression.

Source: <https://www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/adviser-news/news/ten-ways-students-can-demonstrate-experience-in-their-personal-statement>

### So focus less on:

Prestige, publisher or how impressive it sounds?

### And more on:

What did I learn? → What interested me? → What next?

Reflect thoughtfully on one thing you explored.

## Want personalised feedback?

Altheone supports ambitious UAE students applying to Oxford through one-to-one mentoring with current Oxford students.

[altheone.com](https://altheone.com) [admissions@altheone.com](mailto:admissions@altheone.com)

# Keep a reading journal, not a reading list

Reading beyond the classroom matters when it changes how you think.

## Documenting Your Thinking

Reading and attending lectures is half the work; reflecting on them is the other half. For each source, record the title, author and date, then write two or three sentences on the argument being made, where you agree or disagree, and what you want to explore next.

This habit deepens your understanding and gives you specific material to draw on in your UCAS answers and at interview.

## Why This Matters Now

One of the three new UCAS questions asks directly about learning beyond the classroom.

It rewards exactly this kind of record, specific, reflective and honest. Vague or generic answers are immediately obvious against it; a journal is not.

## Sample Journal Entry

### Economics: March

Rogoff, 'The Optimal Degree of Commitment to an Intermediate Target' (1999). Arguments that delegating policy to a conservative central banker solves the time inconsistency problem. Not convinced this survives contact with democratic accountability; worth checking how the Bank of England's inflation-targeting mandate resolves this in practice.

*Four lines, written in the moment. That is enough to build an answer or an interview point around, months later.*

## Five principles for a credible profile

- 01 Depth beats breadth. Three sources properly examined outweigh ten skimmed.
- 02 Free and paid resources carry equal weight. What matters is what you did with them, not what they cost.
- 03 Never cite what you cannot discuss. Anything mentioned in your application is fair game at interview.
- 04 Keep super-curricular and extracurricular separate. Each answers a different question about you.
- 05 Start early. Interest built over two years reads very differently from a profile assembled in September.

### Before You Rely on This

Can I explain the core argument of everything I have cited?

Have I said where I agree or disagree, not just summarised?

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### Before You Rely on This

Can I explain the core argument of everything I have cited?

Have I said where I agree or disagree, not just summarised?

Does my profile show real depth in a few places, rather than breadth everywhere?

Could I take an unexpected follow-up question on any of it?

Have I kept this separate from my extracurricular activities?

*A super-curricular profile is not a box you tick; it is a habit of mind they can recognise in five minutes of conversation.*

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