

Applying for Politics at University

A Guide

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Ruth Tarrant

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What is politics?

Firstly, there is no generally accepted definition of “politics”! It can be described as the art (or indeed science!) of governing, or more broadly any activities associated with the governance of an area, especially a state or country. Looking more closely than that, it’s often regarded as being about how people make, protect and amend the rules by which we live. This necessarily implies that when we study politics, we are studying “authority” and “power”. This in turn implies that much of politics is concerned with handling conflict – between individuals, groups, states. For many, the study of politics is also linked very closely with studying rights and liberties, and issues such as freedom and justice.

What will I study?

Given that there is so much debate in relation to what the term ‘politics’ actually means, it should come as no surprise that each institution / college / university that teaches politics will cover different topics and look at issues from different perspectives. That’s what makes the study of politics so interesting, but can also make it difficult for students to select the course that best suits them and their interests. What a degree in politics **won’t** teach you – contrary to what you might expect – is how to be a politician! Many universities offer “Joint Honours” courses, in which politics is combined with other subjects such as philosophy, economics, international relations, and even anthropology and psychology! A smaller number offer a pure politics degree, but even then, there are likely to be many options and alternative modules in the 2nd and 3rd year.

Typically, a first-year course in politics will cover:

- **UK Politics**
 - Types of participation (i.e. elections, referendums, pressure groups/lobbying, direct action)
 - Levels of governance (i.e. grassroots organisations, local government, devolved governments, Westminster, Europe, international institutions)
 - Electoral systems (i.e. types of system, campaigns)
- **Other political systems**
 - Types of system (i.e. the spectrum of autocracy through to democracy, rogue/failed states)
 - Political systems in other countries (e.g. US, China)
- **International relations**
 - Types of interaction in the global system and the range of theories that explain interactions (e.g. realism and liberalism)
 - Global issues (e.g. terrorism, climate change, international justice, refugees)
- **Political theory / ideologies**
 - History of political thought
 - Examining issues such as rights, freedoms, and equalities through different ‘lenses’ (e.g. feminism, socialism, conservatism, liberalism, nationalism etc)

If you want to read more about the nature of politics, and what the study of politics comprises, then [take a look at this online book](#).

Why study politics?

1. Being an informed citizen

Politics influences *everything* we do in life. It can affect where and how we work, whether we can afford to buy a home, our quality of life, our health, where to go on holiday – everything! Understanding how the government makes decisions, and the various influences on those decisions, should help us to make better choices ourselves. It may also mean that you finally understand the issues being raised on programmes such as Newsnight and Dispatches! Political issues are always ‘in the news’, and being able to sort good arguments from weak arguments is an important and valuable skill.

Dr William Sheward, a Professor at the University of Winchester has said “[*Studying politics*] encourages [people] to think critically and knowledgeably about contemporary issues and their historical contexts, which in turn allows them to be able to think for themselves as informed citizens.”

2. Gaining fantastic transferable skills

- a. **Developing verbal communication prowess:** whilst “contact hours” (i.e. lectures and seminars) are invariably pretty low on most politics courses, many seminars will require politics students to present ideas and engage in debate. There are very few jobs that *don’t* require these soft ‘transferable’ skills.
- b. **Synthesising information and learning to craft strong and coherent arguments:** politics students have to **read** – a lot! But you will be reading top-quality academic arguments from a range of perspectives, and then trying to synthesise them and assess their various strengths and weaknesses, before writing your own judgements and arguments. Again, these are critical workplace skills.
- c. **Improving written communication skills:** it’s likely that the bulk of your assessment will be in written form – exams, coursework essays, and longer dissertations. Written skills are vital in the workplace – no manager wants to see a badly written email or a report that needs an overhaul.
- d. **Time management and independent motivation:** science and engineering students often look at their peers studying arts and humanities subjects, such as politics, and think that they have nothing to do. True, the contact time can be minimal on a politics course, but you will need to be motivated to spend hours in the library, managing hefty reading schedules, co-ordinating study and debate groups, and writing long assignments. This is how many modern workplaces operate, with employees expected to manage their own time and work to deadlines. A politics degree is great training for that!

3. **Make a difference**

Whilst a good proportion of politics graduates go on to careers that are not directly related to the politics that they have studied, many do go on to work in the political sphere. This could include working for non-government organisations that do important work in a wide range of fields including mitigating climate change or negotiating peace, joining the civil service and working closely with the government on developing and implementing policy, working for pressure groups/interest groups, or working in a mediation role. The opportunities are endless!

Politics graduates frequently move on to careers in business, charities, education, law, journalism, and politics itself. A significant minority of politics graduates progress onto further study – Master's degrees and even PhDs.

4. **Just because it's interesting!**

You don't necessarily need a specific reason to study politics. It can be a great choice for students who have enjoyed a range of subjects at school or college, and want to study something that combines elements of many other academic subjects. In fact, if you're not genuinely interested in the degree course you enrol on, there's a good chance you won't enjoy it and that you won't do well. Remember – choose your degree course FOR YOU and not to keep other people happy.

What are the entry requirements?

You definitely do not need to have studied A level Politics – many undergraduates have not. Pretty much any range of A level subjects is acceptable. Given the strong emphasis on written communication, reading and the use of argument in a Politics degrees, having A levels in subjects such as history, religious studies, and English is likely to be a good start. A levels in demanding social sciences such as economics, psychology and geography are also useful, and can demonstrate to admissions officers that you are able to analyse data and statistics in addition to being able to write well. Taking the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) can also be a good boost, especially if you tackle something political.

The grades required depend very much on the precise title of the course and the institution to which you intend to apply. Don't forget that a growing number of universities and higher education institutions may offer lower grades if you attend a school or college in a particularly deprived area, so don't be automatically put off by a high grade requirement.

The table on the next page outlines some of the entry requirements for politics courses at a range of UK higher education institutions.

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
University of Aberdeen	A wide different joint honours degrees combining Politics or International Relations with other subjects. The flagship degree course is Politics and International Relations.	A Level: BBB IB: 32 points	Nicely varied degree courses with a strong international element; opportunities to study abroad; a highly vibrant student society. Studying politics in Scotland is likely to be highly interesting given the devolution developments. A 4 year degree. Ranked 40 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 85.6	http://www.abdn.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/subject-areas/402/politics-and-international-relations/
Aberystwyth University	Eleven single honours degrees in politics / politics-related subjects, some of which are taught in Welsh. Courses include Political Studies and International Politics. Around 30 joint honours combinations.	300 UCAS points, including at least one B at A level. All subjects – including Critical Thinking – accepted	A Top Ten politics department for “student satisfaction” (NSS 2016), a very strong research team, the home of <i>Interstate</i> (the oldest student-run international politics journal in the UK), and lots of opportunities for overseas study and placements in Parliament/Welsh Assembly. Ranked 46 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 83.7	https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/
Aston University	One single honours degree in Politics with International Relations, and a wide range of joint honours combining politics or international relations with subjects as diverse as sociology, business and English language.	A level: ABB IB: 33 points	Students are encouraged to also learn a language and can study abroad for a year. There is a strong European theme to the course. Assessment is via exams, coursework, group projects, presentations and an extended dissertation. Ranked 26 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 88.7, and a very high ranking for student satisfaction with the courses (top 20)	http://www.aston.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/languages-social-sciences/international-relations-and-politics/bsc-politics-with-international-relations/
University of Bath	Politics may only be studied as a joint honours, and can be combined with economics, international relations and a wide range of languages (some of which can be started ‘from scratch’)	A level: AAA, or AAB if an EPQ at grade A or Pre U grade M1 in Global Perspectives also offered IB: 36 points	Strong emphasis on analysing the role of states in a global world, and international security, and developing presentation and verbal communication skills. Admission criteria suggest that a personal statement including relevant work experience and extra-curricular activities is desirable. Ranked 12 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 91.6, and strong graduate prospects.	http://www.bath.ac.uk/study/ug/prospectus/subject/politics-international-relations
University of Birmingham	Both Political Science and International Relations may be studied as single honours, or combined, or combined with a wide range of subjects such as philosophy and geography	A level: ABB IB: 32 points	The staff here produce world-class research, and there are special interests in Germanic politics, and Russian/Eurasian studies. Around a quarter of students take a year abroad. The first year course includes some traditional political theory but is otherwise very global in nature. Ranked 20 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 90.0, and excellent graduate prospects	http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government-society/departments/political-science-international-studies/index.aspx
Bournemouth University	Just one single honours degree in Politics available	104 UCAS points from A levels IB: 28 points	A very strong media focus, in keeping with the strengths of Bournemouth University, and practical work in terms of advocacy, reporting/journalism, persuasion, and campaigning. Ranked 60 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 80.8	https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/study/courses/ba-hons-politics

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
University of Brighton	One single honours degree in Politics, a range of alternative single honours degrees in politically-related subjects such as Conflict, and several joint honours	A level: BBC IB: 28 points	The single honours politics course combines very traditional elements with analysis of outsider groups and the EU. In keeping with the culture of Brighton as a town, there is good coverage of unequal distribution of power and rights movements. There are opportunities to take modules from across the entire Social Science department. Ranked 70 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 77.8	https://www.brighton.ac.uk/courses/study/politics-ba-hons.aspx
University of Bristol	The single honours degree combines Politics with Quantitative Research Methods; the range of joint honours combines politics with its traditional partners of economics and philosophy, as well as languages and sociology	A level: AAA including an essay based subject (AAB for students from low-performing schools) IB: 36 points	Focus on quantitative research methods is fairly unique; research interests in the department include development politics, traditional political theory, and international relations. Ranked 14 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 90.8.	http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/2017/quantitative-research-methods/bsc-politics-quantitative-research/
Bristol, University of the West of England (UWE)	Politics and international relations	120 UCAS points from a minimum of 2 A levels, including General Studies	Both politics and IR are compulsory but students can choose which they would prefer to focus on, able to engage with other disciplines including psychology and criminology, a strongly applied course. Ranked 53 rd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 82.1 and extremely high student satisfaction.	http://courses.uwe.ac.uk/L290
Brunel University	International Politics, Politics, and both of those combined with Professional Development (sandwich year)	A level: BBB IB: 30 points	The course focuses on answering 'critical questions' in politics such as "who has power?", the first year focuses on political thought, the US, the EU, methods in political science and the modern world i.e. minimal UK politics. Ranked 45 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 84.0	http://www.brunel.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/international-politics-bsc
University of Buckingham	16 combined courses with politics or international relations, including journalism, law, languages, English, computing and economics	A level: ABB - BBB IB: 35 points	Degree courses at Buckingham are condensed and run over 2 years, with intakes in January, July and September. The university prides itself on small group teaching. Strong emphasis on international and global issues. Ranked 67 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 78.6, and extremely high student satisfaction ranking.	http://www.buckingham.ac.uk/economics-international/international-politics
University of Cambridge	History and Politics; Human, Social and Political Sciences (HSPS); HSPS – politics and international relations; HSPS – politics and sociology; HSPS – social anthropology	A level: A*AA IB: 40-42 points	A highly flexible course allowing significant personalisation in 2 nd and 3 rd years, be mindful that different colleges may be interested in you having slightly different A level subjects due to the research interests of Professors at that college. Ranked 3 rd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 97.2	http://www.hsps.cam.ac.uk/

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
Cardiff University	Politics, IR and Politics, IR and Politics with a language, Journalism and Politics	A level: AAB IB: 34 points	The department has excellent links with the Welsh Government, Westminster, the EU and NATO, providing lots of hands-on experience. The course includes both UK politics and international politics. Ranked 30 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 88.6, down from 17 th	http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/course/politics-bsc-econ
City, University of London	Politics, International Politics, International Political Economy, and International Politics with sociology	A level: ABB – BBB 128 UCAS points EPQ desirable	Addresses issues and concerns in 21 st century politics with a highly global perspective; the university hosts two highly acclaimed IR think tanks – the university is extremely highly ranked in terms of its IR teaching in particular. Ranked 35 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 87.3	http://www.city.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/politics
Coventry University	Politics, History and Politics, International Relations (with languages)	A level: BBB IB: 29 points	Recently revamped course designed to help students understand the global complex world in which they live looking at key critical issues, ranging from solving the problems of the Middle East through to ‘what is bad government?’, the courses are taught by staff from a range of departments. Ranked 47 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 83.7, up from 53 rd	http://www.coventry.ac.uk/course-structure/arts-and-humanities/undergraduate-degree/2017-18/politics-ba-hons/
Durham University	Politics, Politics and IR, Economics and Politics, Philosophy and Politics, PPE	A level: AAA (including an A in a social science or humanities subject) IB: 37 points	Specialises in comparative government, history of political thought, international relations, European studies and East Asian studies – undergraduates get a rigorous grounding in theory and ideologies. Ranked 5 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 95.5, up from 7 th and with excellent career prospects	https://www.dur.ac.uk/sgia/politics/
University of Edinburgh	Politics, International Relations, or Politics/IR combined with various languages, economics, philosophy or geography	A level: AAA (down to ABB if ‘contextual’ factors apply) IB: 34 points	Strong focus on political theory and comparative politics, but with a strong global perspective and emphasis on moral issues. A year abroad is possible, and you can take modules from across the College of Humanities and Social Science. Ranked 17 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 90.6 and with very good research in the department.	http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/
University of Exeter	Politics, Politics and IR, Economics and Politics, History and Politics, Philosophy and Politics	A level: AAA to AAB IB: 34 to 36 points	The Politics course focuses on political thought, international relations, comparative government, and public policy with lots of flexibility for optional modules in the 2 nd and 3 rd year. Ranked 6 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 95.4 and with very high student satisfaction levels	http://www.exeter.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/politics/
University of Glasgow	Politics, or politics combined with a huge range of other subjects including film, languages, music, history and maths	A level: AAB including English or a humanities subject IB: 38 points	Big focus on classroom discussion of ethical and empirical questions. First year focuses on liberal democracy and comparative government, and subsequently IR and political thought. Ranked 16 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 90.6	http://www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/politics/

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
University of Hertfordshire	Government and Politics, Politics and IR	112 UCAS points	Unusually this degree results in an LLB rather than BA/BSc, and has a load of extra-curricular activities on offer that can provide more credits towards your degree e.g. mootings, trials, debates. Teaching is via weekly lectures, tutorials, workshops and tutor surgeries.	http://www.herts.ac.uk/courses/llb-hons-government-and-politics
University of Hull	Politics, British Politics with Legislative Studies, War and Security Studies, plus joint honours of Politics combined with a range of other subjects including philosophy and history.	112 UCAS points IB: 28 points	Focus on the major topics, debates and issues from the last century, with a fairly 'activist' perspective. There are also many opportunities to study conflict and war. Ranked 44 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 84.2 and good student satisfaction	http://beta.www.hull.ac.uk/Study/UG/2017/politics.aspx
University of Kent	Politics, Politics and IR, social anthropology, Politics and Economics / Philosophy / English	A level: BBB IB: 34 points	Apparently Kent's most flexible degree programme with a huge range of options, focus on conflict, terrorism, ethnicity, and political theory. Full time or part time. Weekly extra-curricular Open Forums for staff and students to discuss/debate key issues. Ranked 22 nd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 89.9.	https://www.kent.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/29/politics
King's College, London	European Politics, Digital Culture, International Relations, Politics, Political Economy, War Studies, PPE	A level: AAB IB: 35 points	Opportunity to specialise in foreign policy, political thought, or economic policy. Strong departmental research on global issues such as energy, cyber security, radicalisation, biopolitics, and political violence. Ranked 15 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 90.8 (up from 30 th)	http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/politics/index.aspx
Lancaster University	Politics, Politics and IR, or a wide range of combined courses	A level: AAB – ABB IB: 32 – 35 points	Focus on concepts and events that have shaped the contemporary political environment, with lots of opportunity to take modules from other departments Ranked 9 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 94.3 (up from 11 th), with strong graduate prospects and student satisfaction	http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/by-subject-area/politics-and-international-relations
University of Leeds	Politics, IR, or combined with Religion, a range of languages, area studies	A level: AAB (with 2 A levels in 'traditional' subjects) IB: 35 points	Focus on the institutions and practice of modern political systems – the role of UK and global forces. A fairly liberal course, with emphasis on democracy, equality, and liberty. There's also a fantastic course on Parliamentary Studies that includes work experience. Ranked 21 st overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 90.0 (up from 31 st)	http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/
University of Liverpool	Politics, Politics with a year in China, Politics with English / History / languages / Film / Criminology / Business	A level: ABB (can include 1 from general studies, critical thinking, or citizenship) IB: 33 points	Many opportunities to study abroad or work in Parliament, emphasis on skills of data collection and argument construction, analysis of different approaches to political science in a range of settings/countries – a highly cosmopolitan course. Ranked 50 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 83.3	https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/politics/

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
LSE (University of London)	PPE, Politics and IT, Government and History, Government and Economics	A level: A*AA - AAA (including maths at A* for PPE) IB: 38 points	All politics/government courses start with political science and the history of political thought – a highly theoretical, rigorous, and academic course, with not too many options for cross-departmental study. Ranked 10 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 93.6.	http://www.lse.ac.uk/government/home.aspx
Loughborough University	Politics, IR, or both combined with history	A level: ABB IB: 34 points	Focuses on the challenges facing us in the 21 st century with debate on contemporary issues such as climate change and political violence; wide range of optional modules. The departmental tagline is “Global Problems, Radical Thinking”. Strong departmental interest in anarchism, and the work of NGOs. Ranked 19 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 90.2 (up from 31 st)	http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/phir/
University of Manchester	Politics and IR, Middle Eastern Studies, European Studies, plus a range of joint honours	A level: AAB IB: 35 points	One of the largest politics departments which allows real specialisation, the main “clusters” include Comparative Public Policy, Global Political Economy, Democracy and Elections, Critical Global Politics Ranked 28 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 88.7	http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/politics/
New College of the Humanities	PPE, and PPH	A level: AAA – AAB IB: 38 – 34 points BUT – other factors are considered	A unique, small, individual-focused private institution with many bursaries; in addition to the innovative course you must also take a 8 core courses for the NCH Diploma (including applied ethics, a science literacy programme, and a careers module). The courses are overseen by world-leading academics.	https://www.nchlondon.ac.uk/our-politics-international-relations-major/
Newcastle University	Politics, Government and European Studies, or combined honours	A level: AAA – AAB IB: 34 – 32 points	Covers IR, global politics, political systems and institutions, and political philosophy; one sixth of modules can be from other schools. Ranked 32 nd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 88.3	http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/politics/
University of Nottingham	Politics and IR, Modern European Studies, IR and Global Issues, Chinese Studies, PPE	A level: AAB IB: 34 points	The politics teaching focuses on comparative politics, political theory, and IR. Good opportunities to specialise in US politics. A solid course overall, with some innovative / unusual single honours programmes. Ranked 13 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 91.5	https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/politics/index.aspx
Nottingham Trent University	Politics, IR, International Law, plus a range of joint honours combined with Global Studies and European Studies	A level: BBC IB: 14 points	Theory and practice of politics from national and international perspectives, opportunities for practical learning Ranked 78 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 75.0	https://www.ntu.ac.uk/study-and-courses/courses/find-your-course?sort=title&level-of-study=Undergraduate&subject=Politics+and+international+studies

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
Oxford Brookes	International Relations and Politics	A level: BBC IB: 30 points	Significant emphasis on the changing nature of international relations, new war, impact of globalisation, and persistent world problems such as poverty, in addition to 'classic' modules in political thought and ideologies, and democracy. Ranked 55 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 81.8	http://www.brookes.ac.uk/Courses/Undergraduate/International-Relations-and-Politics/
University of Oxford	PPE, History and Politics	A level: AAA IB: 39-38 points (plus an AS in maths and the Thinking Skills Assessment for PPE, and the History Aptitude Test for H and P)	PPE – a highly flexible degree with the opportunity to specialise in any branch. The first year in politics (for both PPE and H and P) covers Theory of Politics, Practice of Politics, and Political Analysis. Highly competitive entry with around 15% of applicants offered places. Ranked 1 st overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 100.0	http://www.ppe.ox.ac.uk/ and https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/course-s-listing/history-and-politics?wssl=1
Queen's University, Belfast	Politics, or Politics/International Studies combined with a range of other subjects	A level: ABB IB: 34 – 33 points	Focus on conflict and cooperation, power and decision making, and the expression of differences through ideologies. One of the largest politics departments leading to plenty of choice for students. Ranked 38 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 86.2	http://www.qub.ac.uk/Study/Course-Finder/UG/Politics/L200/
University of Reading	Politics and IR, War Peace and IR, Politics and Economics, plus a range of joint honours	A level: ABB – BBB IB: 32 – 30 points	Focus on the realities of national and international governance, along with moral debates on the exercise of political power – an interesting balance of factual with ethical/practical considerations. Ranked 25 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 89.1	http://www.reading.ac.uk/spirs/
Royal Holloway, University of London	Politics, PPE, IR, plus a range of combined/joint honours	A level: AAB – ABB (preferred subjects Eng Lit, Philosophy, RE, History, Politics, Law, Econ, Sociology, Geography, Psychology IB: 32 points	Strong links with Europe, the US and Asia. Emphasis on Research Methods, Classic and Contemporary Politics Readings, along with more standard fare. Ranked 23 rd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 89.8	https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/politicsandir/home.aspx
University of Sheffield	Politics, Politics and IR, politics with languages / economics / history / sociology	A level: AAB IB: 35 points	A highly flexible course that contains all the essential/expected modules with some speciality modules including Security Studies and UK Coalition and Beastly Politics (!). Regularly changing curriculum to 'stay up to date'. Ranked a high 8 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 94.4	https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/politics

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
SOAS	Politics, International Relations, plus Politics/IR combined with “area studies”	A level: AAA IB: 37 points	A very ‘global outlook’ university, with world-leading research into Asia, Africa and the Middle East (the Global South); intense focus on understanding power shifts and changing dynamics in geopolitics. Key topic areas are political sociology, political economy, IR and political theory. Ranked 24 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 89.8	https://www.soas.ac.uk/politics/
University of Southampton	Politics, IR, Pol and Econ, Pol and Philosophy, Pol and Modern History, Politics and languages	A level: ABB (or BBB if it includes Politics) IB: 32 points	First year focuses on IR, Political Systems, Political Ideas, Political Inquiry and Quantitative Methods. The research methods theme continues throughout the second year. Ranked 31 st overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 88.5	http://www.southampton.ac.uk/politics/undergraduate/index.page
University of St Andrews	IR with a wide range of combined courses including languages, economics, history and philosophy	A level: AAA IB: 38 points	Huge expertise in area studies, foreign policy, peace and conflict studies, and terrorism – a modern, dynamic course. Annual competition for students to solve global problems in a creative way. Ranked 2 nd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 97.6	https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/intrel/
University of Stirling	Politics, International Politics, plus those combined with a range of standard partners such as economics	A level: ABB – BBB IB: 35 – 32 points	British politics, political thought and international politics provide the core, with a good range of optional modules from US Foreign Policy through to Green Politics. Ranked 37 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 86.7	http://www.stir.ac.uk/undergraduate-study/course-information/courses-a-to-z/school-of-arts-and-humanities/politics/
University of Surrey	Politics, International Politics, or combined with economics, languages, English, law	A level: AAB IB: 35 points	As well as a good grounding in the “usuals” of political theory/thinkers, the course covers key debates, research skills, contemporary history and European integration. The placement years are excellent. Ranked 33 rd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 87.9	http://www.surrey.ac.uk/departments-politics
University of Sussex	Politics or American Studies as single honours, or a range of joint honours linked with politics or IR	A level: AAB – ABB IB: 34 points	Good opportunities for trips, debates/talks and work experience. Theme-based learning – first year looks at “power” as well as how to conduct political science research, and plenty of opportunity to study multidisciplinary subjects. Ranked 18 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 89.3	http://www.sussex.ac.uk/politics/
Swansea University	Politics, or Politics/IR combined with a range of other subjects for joint honours	A level: ABB – BBB IB: 33 points	Great opportunities for work placements in the Welsh Assembly, Westminster, USA and Hong Kong. Focus on UK and US politics, along with political philosophy, ethics, war and peace. Ranked 43 rd overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 84.7	http://www.swansea.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/artsandhumanities/politics-and-international-relations/

Institution	Politics degrees on offer	Typical grades	Brief overview	Further information
UCL	PPE, European Social and Political Studies, Russian Studies, East European Studies, HPE	A level: A*AA IB: 39 points	Wide range of traditional and innovative courses from comparative politics, research and quantitative methods, through to gender politics, global environmental politics and terrorism strategies. A demanding course. Ranked 7 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 95.4	http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp
University of Warwick	Politics, Politics and International Studies, PPE, Politics and Sociology, Politics and Quantitative Methods, Politics/IS/languages	A level: AAA IB: 38 points	A global outlook and teaching programme with a global staff body, balance between theoretical and empirical politics. Compulsory first year modules are Introduction to Politics, World Politics, Political Research in the 21 st century. Ranked 4 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 96.8	http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/
University of York	Politics, Politics with IR, Politics with English / Economics / History / Philosophy	A level: AAB IB: 35 points	Core initial modules include introductory democratic politics, introductory international politics, introductory political theory, plus a range of interesting optional modules from the 2 nd year onwards including Human Rights and Wrongs, Politics of Development, Border Politics, and Politics of Criminal Law Ranked 11 th overall by the Complete University Guide with a score of 92.8	https://www.york.ac.uk/policies/

Suggested pre-university reading list

Politics students will end up reading a huge amount over the duration of their degree. Much of that reading, particularly in the first year, will include most of the texts listed in the “20 Classic Texts” section below. The books suggested in the “30 Modern Texts” section have all been written and published in the last few years so take a really contemporary view and are thought-provoking (whether you agree with them or not!).

Tackling some of these books/texts *before* heading off to university is a good way to

- a) work out whether you really are interested in pursuing a degree in politics;
- b) add some “oomph” to your personal statement;
- c) help you to formulate your own political views and opinions.

20 Classic Texts (in no particular order!)

- Clash of Civilizations – Samuel Huntingdon
- End of History – Francis Fukuyama
- On Liberty – John Stuart Mill
- The Communist Manifesto – Karl Marx
- A Vindication of the Rights of Women – Mary Wollstonecraft
- Federalist Papers – Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison
- The Social Contract – Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- The Prince – Niccolo Machiavelli
- Politics – Aristotle
- The Republic – Plato
- The Art of War – Sun Tzu
- Leviathan – Thomas Hobbes
- Manufacturing Consent – Noam Chomsky
- The Origins of Totalitarianism – Hannah Arendt
- Imagined Communities – Benedict Anderson
- Two Treatises of Government – John Locke
- Diplomacy – Henry Kissinger
- A Theory of Justice – John Rawls
- On Government – Marcus Tullius Cicero
- On War – Carl von Clausewitz

30 Modern Texts (again, no particular order!)

- The Speechwriter – Barton Swain
- Prisoners of Geography – Tim Marshall
- The Establishment: and how they get away with it – Owen Jones
- Corbyn: the strange rebirth of radical politics – Richard Seymour
- Parliament Ltd – Martin Williams
- Enough Said: what's gone wrong with the language of politics? – Mark Thompson
- The Silk Roads: a new history of the world – Peter Frankopan
- Politics: ideas in profile – David Runciman
- Postcapitalism: a guide to our future – Paul Mason
- The New Spymasters: inside espionage from the Cold War to Global Terror – Stephen Grey
- Grunt: the curious science of humans at war – Mary Roach
- Putin's Kleptocracy: who owns Russia? – Karen Dawisha
- The Churchill Factor: how one man made history – Boris Johnson
- The Euro and its Threat to the Future of Europe – Joseph Stiglitz
- Coalition – David Laws
- The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe – Andrew Geddes and Peter Scholten
- Global Inequality – Branko Milanovic
- From Silk to Silicon – Jeffrey Garten
- Politics: Between the Extremes – Nick Clegg
- How to Run a Government – Michael Barber
- How to be a Government Whip – Helen Jones
- Small is Beautiful – Adam Lent
- The Happiness Industry – William Davies
- The Democracy Project – David Graeber
- The War on Women – Sue Lloyd Roberts
- And the Weak Suffer what they must? – Yanis Varoufakis
- How the World Works – Noam Chomsky
- In Order to Live – Yeonmi Park
- I am Malala – Malala Yousafzai
- The State of the World Atlas – Dan Smith

How to write about books you've read

Obviously, you want to demonstrate in your personal statement that you are well read and engaged in politics. But, you must also avoid the temptation to simply write a long list of everything you've read. Instead, you need to demonstrate that you have actually *thought* about what you've read.

To help you with this, it's a great idea to keep a small **reading journal** so that you can jot down your thoughts and make it easier to remember key issues in particularly books that you either agree with, disagree with, want to find out more, find odd etc.

If you can **draw parallels** or write something **comparative** about just a small number of books then that is much better than trying to write large amounts about lots of books – quality and detail is better than quantity. There are some examples below:

<p><i>I am particularly interested in development issues in Africa, despite not taking the Global Politics option in my Politics A-level at school. I read widely, and 3 books stand out as being informative – Booth and Cammack's Governance for Development in Africa, Collier's Bottom Billion, and perhaps surprisingly, Slaughter's Unfinished Business. The common thread is feminism and the role/position of women in society. Improving maternal health and providing better female education in order to strengthen the franchise are key themes in the first 2 books; I would have entirely agreed, until I read Slaughter's book which examined the rise of women in the workplace and governance, and the fact that society has not changed enough to provide care for children and the elderly to compensate. We cannot have it all without fundamental reform.</i></p>	<p>This applicant has read some off-beat material and is clearly interested in key political questions on an international scale; choosing the book by Anne-Marie Slaughter as a comparator is a clever move because it wouldn't naturally be associated with African governance issues.</p>
<p><i>Following some work experience in my local HMRC office, I noticed that the employees have very rigid systems and that they only thought about tax issues rather than wider government issues; as such I became more interested in public policy. I have read Gillian Tett's Silo Effect, which highlights the issues associated with classifying and categorising information and people into departments. I also read David Halpern's Inside the Nudge Unit, which traces the story of the new Behavioural Insights Team and how to subtly change policies or how information is presented in order to change behaviour. After reading both books I have been developing my own ideas about how to help persuade people to participate more widely in politics and how to break down voting prejudices, for example, publishing a neutral "fact checked" newspaper.</i></p>	<p>This applicant's reading is quite thematic – public policy – and (s)he has tried to draw together ideas from both books, and then used them to come up with a new idea. This shows comparative/synthesis skills, and some original thinking.</p>

Useful (work) experience

The application process to universities is a pretty competitive process – in some cases there may be 20 or 30 applications for every available place. Every applicant is likely to have applied with the right predicted grades and will have done some wider reading. Undoubtedly, lots of applicants will also have achieved high grades on musical instruments and/or in Speech and Drama, taken part in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, captained or taken part in some sort of team or club, and so on.

So one of the **best** things you can do to indicate to admissions officers that you are serious about the degree course you are applying for is to offer some sort of wider experience **and** analyse your experience in terms of something political. It could be work experience, a part-time job, volunteering, a trip of a lifetime – it's possible to make anything sound great and eye-catching for the admissions officers who could be reading thousands of applications. Ideas for “experiences” that you could write about include:

- **Visiting key political sites** e.g. Houses of Parliament, Scottish Parliament, local council meeting, European Parliament, UN, legislatures in other countries when on holiday, important “blue plaque” sites, ancient sites of importance (e.g. Runnymede, various castles etc)
- **Interesting work experience** e.g. journalism, MP/MEP/MSP shadowing, pressure groups/think tanks/lobbying organisations
- **Leading and/or organising relevant groups at school or college** e.g. Amnesty International, Greenpeace, local environment, debating societies, Model United Nations
- **Engaging with interesting talks/lectures** e.g. local universities, LSE public lecture series (and associated podcasts), TED talks, Radio 4 podcasts, videos/podcasts from alternative news organisations such as Al Jazeera or NBC
- **Writing a journal** e.g. traditional print, having a blog, coordinating an interest group on social media

The table below provides some ideas and guidance on how to actually write about your experiences (all are based on previous successful applications) to show you in the best light.

Experience	How it was presented in the personal statement	Strengths
Weekly two-hour voluntary work at the local night-shelter for the homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing dedication and commitment to a project outside of school, demonstrating time management skills, and skills of collaboration – essential for group work / project work, and all university assignments • Homeless people struggle to participate in politics – they may not have a fixed address so can struggle to get onto the electoral register, which reduces participation by disadvantaged groups • A Marxist view could be that these people have been exploited by the capitalist system • Interesting to analyse the plight of the homeless, and how they are treated by the rest of society, in the light of the book “Chavs” 	This applicant demonstrates skills that are essential for success in Higher Education, shows that they might have something to offer to the local community, and demonstrates that the applicant is able to use comparative analysis

<p>Summer holiday work experience in the local MP's constituency office</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chose to do work experience for a Conservative MP despite personally having left-wing tendencies and considering becoming a member of the Labour Party – it's really useful in defining your own political view to engage with those of different views. Consensual / coalition politics could actually reduce political inertia, although the evidence from Coalition government suggests otherwise (e.g. failure to progress with Lords Reform) • Surprise at the sheer volume of work carried out by an MP – how do MPs with Cabinet responsibilities or Committee responsibilities fit it all in and still adequately represent their constituencies? • Is First Past the Post the right way to elect an MP? Before the work experience – I thought no – but afterwards I realised that they are still more than able to represent those who didn't vote for them 	<p>This applicant demonstrates sensitivity towards the nuances of understanding different political opinions, and is clearly very reflective and able to adjust their views in the light of evidence presented.</p>
<p>Caring for younger siblings before and after school, and weekdays during school holidays</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to 'fit in' specifically political work experience due to helping out a working parent with no other childcare • Read a variety of children's books to younger siblings at bedtime including the Paddington Bear stories (led to lots of discussion about immigration and open borders) and the Thomas the Tank Engine series (autocracy by the Fat Controller rather than democracy; anti-feminist sentiments with men in all the leadership positions and the Fat Controller's wife only being seen to make tea and toast) • The views of the left and right in the political spectrum on the provision of childcare e.g. government provided vs market led 	<p>This applicant looks like someone who is likely to succeed and is resilient. It's ok not to have "standard" work experience on the personal statement especially if there are legitimate reasons (like here).</p>
<p>Geocaching at politically important sites around the UK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geocaching is a personal hobby and easy to link with improving contextual political understanding – wherever I visit I try to find at least 10 geocaches and from there identify something 'political' • For example, geocaching in Winchester when visiting family I noticed that many of the caches were signed by German groups – made me think about the impact of open borders in Europe and how subsequent tourism is good for the economy • Geocaching on the Isle of Wight I noticed that one 'collection' of caches were along a disused railway track that had been regenerated as a footpath by a local issue group with support from the local council • Improves my observational skills, encourages me to interact with people from all walks of life in a range of communities 	<p>This applicant clearly has a slightly unusual hobby but is manipulating it into something meaningful – this applicant understands the nature of politics (with a small "p")</p>

<p>A love of classic English and American literature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not studying English for A level but really enjoy reading classic literature, especially Austen, Dickens, Twain, Steinbeck and F. Scott Fitzgerald • Reading Dickens makes me think especially about the importance of the welfare state and pushes my political views more to the left than others in my family – workhouses and debtor’s prisons, as described by Dickens, are highly undesirable and should be prevented by the government – whether this happens in a society depends on the extent of the voting franchise • F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “Great Gatsby” also shows the nature of greed in a capitalist society and also shows the impact of excessive government restrictions – there’s a balance to be struck between useful government intervention (to protect rights) and burdensome intervention • Reading Steinbeck – especially The Grapes of Wrath – made me think about how and why the strength of federal government increased in the US under FDR, and why that was actually important at the time. It effectively changed the US constitution but without official amendments. 	<p>This applicant’s comments really stand out – they clearly have a passion for reading outside of the classroom (something that they will need in abundance at university!) and are able to use different ‘lenses’ through which to assess / interpret the literature</p>
<p>Saturday job at the local hairdresser’s, washing hair and tidying up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers are always very keen / willing to talk about their problems – and they are more likely to come back if we listen and sound sympathetic and suggest that other customers have been saying the same sort of things. I think all MPs should have some of their constituency time in a local hairdresser’s or barber’s because people really get passionate and emotional about issues that really affect their lives. • Seen the effect (good and bad!) of government policies that affect the low paid – one hairdresser has returned to work because her daughter is eligible for 15 hours of free childcare now she is 2, another hairdresser’s partner is on a zero-hours contract at a local supermarket distribution centre and lacks stability but wants to work although would be better off on benefits. Westminster, and privileged MPs, are too ‘far away’ to understand. 	<p>This applicant is really well informed about recent government welfare policies and is able to see a number of different points of view. Combining a regular Saturday job with A level study requires good organisation skills.</p>

Overall Top Tips for successful Politics Personal Statement Writing

- Don't start your statement with a cliché (e.g. "I have always known that I have wanted to study politics" – it's unlikely to be true!)
- Don't just write a really long list of books or articles you've read without some sort of analysis, comparison or commentary – you need to indicate to the admissions officer *why* you've chosen those books, what you think about them and why, and how they have/haven't changed your point of view. Remember, they don't have to be pretentious-sounding academic books – you can transform *anything* into a political text with some imagination and thought. And you don't need to agree with or like the views in the book. Dare to be different!
- Do explain carefully *why* you want to read politics or a politics-related subject, and explain how your subject choices/extra-curricular activities will help you to succeed on a politics degree
- Do make sure that you have carefully read the descriptions of the 5 courses to which you are applying – all politics degrees are different, and you want to make absolutely sure that you understand what you are applying for. This means that you can 'tailor' your personal statement to specifically cover some of those areas.
- Do be willing to inject some humour or make some other element of your personality really clear.
- Don't just write about the same thing that you think everyone will be writing about – admissions officers read hundreds, if not thousands, of applications, and you don't want yours to be filed in the recycling bin. Write about something that will stand out.
- Do write, realistically, about what you expect to be able to offer the university and local community.
- And finally...don't lie!

Questions to Consider Before an Interview!

A small number of Higher Education institutions may call applicants for interview. Whilst it's impossible to predict exactly what you will be asked, the more that you have thought about likely or possible questions, the better prepared you will be, and the more confidence you will have even when faced with something unexpected!

So, here are **20 Key Questions** that you could prepare.

1. What is politics?
2. Why are you interested in studying politics?
3. Can you tell me about something you've read that challenges your political views?
4. Is it ever ok for an elected politician to lie?
5. Is democracy always a force for good?
6. Do you think we should abolish the House of Lords?
7. Which country's system of governance do you most/least admire and why?
8. Is it more important for elected politicians to be academic experts in a particular area, or to have a rounded 'real life' background?
9. Is there still a right/left divide in UK politics?
10. What is the single most likely political impact of Brexit for the UK/EU?
11. What is the most pressing current global cause for concern?
12. Is war inevitable?
13. Are international institutions, such as the UN and IMF, doomed to failure?
14. How would you assess the impact of social media on political participation?
15. Are opinion polls important?
16. Which political thinker has had the most profound impact on British politics? US politics? International relations?
17. Should prisoners be allowed to vote?
18. Is foreign intervention ever justified?
19. What is the difference between power and authority?
20. What has been the biggest political change in the last two decades in the UK? The US? Europe? Asia? Africa? South America? Globally?