

Choosing your A Level Subjects

The two most important criteria for choosing subjects are:

- what you are likely to be good at
- what you are likely to enjoy

Most higher education courses require certain A level grades (or alternative equivalent qualifications), and many specify the A level subjects and GCSE subjects that you should have. Think ahead to what you will be doing after A levels to help you choose the best subjects now. If you are not sure what career you will enter, try to choose a selection of subjects that will keep your options as open as possible.

Therefore, when making your choices you should consider:

- the subjects in which you are interested
- your abilities, aptitudes and skills
- how open you want to keep your career choice
- which A level subjects are available at your school or in local sixth forms and colleges.

A level Subject Combinations

Some A levels cover common ground, for example, geography and environmental science, or economics and business studies. If the overlap is too great, some higher education institutions may not accept the combination. On the other hand, two complementary subjects may help a great deal in your studies. For example, doing physics without mathematics or another science would be difficult and is not generally recommended.

Some degree courses specify the A level subjects that you need. **The following list shows the most popular degrees that often require specific A levels:**

- **biology** – biology and another science or maths, especially chemistry
- **chemistry** – chemistry and usually another science and/or maths
- **dentistry** – chemistry and one or two other sciences
- **engineering** – maths and physics (or maths and chemistry for chemical engineering)
- **law** – no specific subjects are required although subjects involving essay writing can be helpful
- **maths** – maths
- **medicine** – chemistry, biology and either maths or physics will keep your options open for all medical schools. The majority of medical schools require A level chemistry, while

some specify biology at A level. (For those without science subjects at A level or equivalent, it is possible to undertake an additional pre-medical year at some universities. The pre-medical year is a preliminary course in chemistry, physics and biology.)

- **modern languages** – usually you will need the language at A level standard but requirements vary, especially for less common languages
- **music** – music
- **physics** – physics and maths
- **veterinary science** – chemistry and one or two other sciences

Facilitating Subjects

Some courses at universities require applicants to have studied certain subjects already, so you must be sure how your choices at school and college may close off certain subjects at university. A group of universities called the Russell Group has listed subjects that are usually considered by universities to be helpful and/or required at advanced level (e.g. A-level) for particular courses. For more information see www.russellgroup.ac.uk or <http://russellgroup.ac.uk/for-students/school-and-college-in-the-uk/subject-choices-at-school-and-college/>

These subjects are called ‘facilitating’ because choosing them at advanced level leaves open a wide range of options for university study.

Facilitating subjects include maths and further maths, physics, biology, chemistry, history, geography, modern and classical languages and English literature.

So you see there is a lot to think about. Do your research and choose wisely.

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