



# Choosing your next steps advice sheet

## A levels

Picking just 3 subjects to strengthen your knowledge and help you decide on the future can seem a daunting task, but take into account some of the following questions and read the advice from websites careers pilot and target careers to take some of the uncertainty away when making these choices.

- What do you want to learn more about?
- When you're in your subject lessons now, what do you enjoy the most?
- What skills do you want to use the most in a day to day job?
- If I don't take this subject further, what opportunities am I closing off?

Choosing your A Levels needs careful research to think through your possibilities. Take advice from family, friends and teachers so you can make an informed decision, based on accurate up-to-date information - but remember, the final choice is yours as you are the one that will have to put the hard work in!

## Things to consider:

- A Levels are a big step up from GCSEs – they are harder! So choose your subjects wisely. Your career or degree ideas may change so make sure you choose subjects which you like and can do well in.
- If you are taking a science A Level, you should consider whether you need to look at taking another science or maths, particularly if you are interested in scientific careers or courses. i.e. Biology and Chemistry and Physics with maths are typical combinations.
- If you have a **specific career in mind**, check to see if you will need specific A Level subjects. Look at the job profiles within [job sectors](#) to find out more.
- If you have a **specific degree course in mind**, you need to check the entry requirements. Some university courses are very specific about the A Level subjects required – other degree subjects are very flexible. Check entry requirements on the [UCAS](#) website or on individual university

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websites. Check out the Target website's [Degree Subject Guides](#) which will show which A Levels are needed for different degree courses.

- If you have no idea about your choice of career or choice of degree subject at this stage (many students are in this position!), then make sure you choose a combination of subjects that will keep your preferred options open.
- Some schools and colleges offer both A Levels and BTEC qualifications. You may like to consider a combination of qualifications as this might suit your learning and assessment style.
- Some A Level subjects are regarded by virtually all universities as being acceptable. These are sometimes known as 'facilitating' subjects such as Maths, English, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, History, Geography or a foreign language. Some universities are stricter than others on this issue - the [Informed Choices](#) site is a good source of information to help you choose.
- Don't be afraid to email the universities during Y11 to ask for their advice about the subjects required for a course you are interested in – either email the Admissions Tutor or the Course Tutor (you'll find their email details on the university's website).
- If you are unsure of your career choice or degree choice, then think carefully about your combination of subjects. It is hard to pick up 3 or 4 new subjects that you have never studied before.

## **A few dos and don'ts when choosing A Levels**

- Do research each A Level thoroughly – talk to your teachers to find out what is involved in the course. Talk to students who are already taking that subject. Find out how the course will be assessed and whether this will suit you and your strengths. Ask for some honest feedback from your teachers as to how they think you would do at A Level.
- Don't assume you will like the subject at A Level just because you liked it at GCSE – it could be really different!
- Do be careful with your combination of choices – some universities might not like a combination of subjects that they feel are too similar, such as Business and Economics etc.
- Don't take all new subjects – it could be too much to cope with having 3 or even 2 new areas of study.
- Don't take English and Maths at A Level because you think this is what employers want or because they are good subjects to fall back on. Take them if you are good at them and really interested in studying them further – most employers are happy with them at GCSE level.
- Don't take subjects because you need them for your chosen career if you don't really like the subject or it is not one of your stronger subjects.

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- Watch this video to find the [six things you need to know before choosing A Levels](https://youtu.be/BHKFrXMCHII) or try out the [The Uni Guide A Level Explorer](https://thinkstudent.co.uk/good-a-level-combinations/)

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## A level choices and careers – keep your options open

Investigate careers you might enjoy before finalising your subject choices for A level,. It's not necessary to have a definite career plan, so if you're not sure what you want to do that's absolutely fine. However, it's good to leave doors open to careers you might want to pursue.

Look at the routes into careers that catch your interest. They may be more flexible than you think. For example, if you want to be an accountant you can do so with any degree or A level subjects (or equivalent) – there's no need to study maths, economics or business studies unless you feel like it. And you don't even have to go to university if you don't want to.

However, for other careers you need specific subjects. For example if you want to become an engineer then you need maths A level or equivalent, and usually other science subjects such as physics too, in order to get onto an engineering degree, degree apprenticeship or a higher apprenticeship.

- Take a look at our info on [different career areas](#), including what jobs are available, how much they pay and how to get into them.
- Read our advice on [how to choose your career](#).
- Use our [career choices](#) section if you're after inspiration for types of jobs that might suit you.
- If you're thinking of going to university, read up on [which careers require a specific degree](#) – a surprising number are open to graduates of any subject.

## A levels you need for different degree courses

Thinking of going to university? Do some initial research into degree subjects that might interest you and what qualifications you need to get onto them. Again, you don't have to make a definite decision yet. Depending on your thoughts about careers, you might have quite a

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limited range of degree subjects to consider or you could be in a position to pick anything you fancy.

- Browse our [degree subject guides](#), which tell you what different degree subjects involve, what's like to study them at university and what careers they could lead to. There's also advice on what the best degree choices are to get into different careers.
- Try the [Degree Explorer](#) quiz to generate ideas of degrees you might enjoy.
- Read about [how to choose your degree subject if you're not sure what you want to study](#).

You might have heard of facilitating subjects. These were A level subjects recommended as being particularly good for university entry by the Russell Group – a group of 24 of the UK's top universities. However, the Russell Group decided to ditch this list in spring 2019 and now focuses on highlighting which A levels tend to be needed for which degrees. You can find more detail on its [Informed Choices](#) website.

### What subjects should I take if I want to do a degree apprenticeship, higher apprenticeship or similar?

If you don't want to go to university, maths and sciences are good at keeping options open but by no means essential. Quite a lot of opportunities such as degree apprenticeships, higher apprenticeships and sponsored degrees are in technical areas such as IT and engineering, for which science and maths subjects are often required. However, there are also a good number of schemes in other areas, such as finance and business, that often don't require specific subjects.

### Good A level subject combinations

Taking time now to consider good A level combinations (or how to combine your Highers or IB subjects) will make life easier for you in the future.

If you're only interested in arts or social science subjects, you're usually OK to combine them how you like, as long as you keep the above advice in mind. However, it's worth thinking about what form your homework will take. For instance, English literature, history and sociology all involve a lot of reading. Is this a good thing, or would you like something a bit different to break this up?

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Some science subjects have others that support them. For example, if you want to do a biology-related subject at university you very often need chemistry A level (or equivalent) as well as biology. If you want to study physics or engineering you'll need to have taken maths. If you're thinking of joining an engineering employer programme such as a degree apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship it's sometimes more important to have studied maths than physics.

This means that taking biology without chemistry or physics without maths isn't nearly as good at keeping options open as taking both biology and chemistry, or both physics and maths. They can still be useful – for example some universities like you to have a science subject for courses such as nursing, sports science or psychology but are flexible as to which science it is. But there will be fewer options than if you took both.

For most students it's completely fine to mix arts, social science and science subjects. In some cases, this can even be an advantage: it can be good to have this mixture to get onto some architecture degrees, for example. However, if you're sure you want to go into science but don't know which area, you might want to take as many science subjects as possible to keep your options wide open. There are also some science degrees at some universities that will require at least three science subjects – keep a look out for this if you are considering medicine or chemical engineering, for instance.

### Choose A levels you can get good grades in

Think about how well you might do in different subjects. A levels are harder than GCSEs and universities and employers care about grades. Take a look at typical grade requirements for university courses or employers that might interest you.

Getting good grades depends on both ability and motivation. If you love a subject or you know you need it for your dream career, your passion should help you along even if it's not your strongest area. But beware picking subjects that really aren't your best unless there's a very good reason for it.

For example, perhaps you're working flat out to succeed in GCSE maths and just scraped a B in your mock exams, while you got As and A\*s in other subjects with less effort. In that case you'd want to think

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very carefully about whether there was a good reason to pick it for A level or equivalent, even though it's on the list of facilitating subjects and your parents might think it's a good idea.

If you're considering taking a subject at A level that you haven't studied before, think about how you are doing at GCSE/National 5 level in subjects that draw on similar skills. For example, if you're interested in politics A level, reflect on how well your history GCSE is going.

### Take subjects you'll enjoy

Motivation is a key factor in success. If you pick a subject that doesn't excite you, or that will at least help you into a career that excites you, are you really going to work hard at it consistently for two years? Facilitating subjects and sensible subject combinations will only take you so far. Yes, French, German and geography might look like a good choice on paper but if your heart is sinking at the thought of it, it's trying to tell you something very important.



## College courses

Whilst colleges will continue to take applications until results day, don't leave it until then. Get your applications in- remember you can apply to as many places and courses as you like and you won't make a final choice until results day.

Courses start to fill up from January so if you want to apply, do it. The online applications only take about 10-15 minutes and there is the Tuesday after school drop in to help.

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Remember to screen shot your confirmation email and pop it onto showbie. You will also usually need a reference so print or email to your year leader for them to complete.

## **Apprenticeships**

If you are wanting an apprenticeship this will need to be lined up to start in September. If you have applied to college for the course element, remember you will still need to find the employer.

If you are still making applications, keep a note of who you are applying to and from the spring step up the number of applications you make.

Consider applying to college for the full time course as a back-up plan, as you will need this all to be sorted before you leave school.

Any questions or if you need help come to see Mrs Stansbridge.

Information supported by

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