

Advice on Choosing A Level Subjects at Abingdon

Abingdon students begin the lower sixth studying four A Level subjects. Most Abingdon pupils drop to three subjects after Christmas or Easter in the Lower Sixth, or at the start of the Upper Sixth; there are set times when the dropping of a subject is allowed and sixth form tutors will advise if they think dropping is appropriate. Our aim is to create the sixth form curriculum which is most suitable for each individual. If, a few weeks into the Lower Sixth courses, you feel that you have chosen the wrong subject and have a different preference, we can often make this happen but there is no guarantee that a change will be possible and there is inevitably catch-up work to be done in the new subject when we can achieve a swap. Changes such as this become less and less feasible the later we get into the first term.

Your task now is to work out what the best sixth form study programme for you is likely to be, based on all the information available to you e.g. this document, your tutor, your subject teachers, Mrs Hoddinott (Assistant Upper Master, Universities), Mr Triff (Head of Career Guidance), your parents, taster lessons in the Lent term... and so on. If you have any queries about the suitability of a particular subject course, consult your teacher in that subject or the Head of Department concerned. In all other matters your tutor and your housemaster are your main source of advice. You should keep your tutor informed of your latest thinking.

In November you need to express your preference for *four subjects*, and a backup fifth preference in case your preferred combination isn't possible. You should assume that you will study all four subjects although you may decide to drop to only three subjects as early as the end of the first term. All of the Fifth Year students must submit preferences, even if you are thinking about being somewhere else for your sixth form years (there is a place to let us know this on the form).

November 2021:

Tentative Subject Preferences

Tentative Subject Preference
Tentative Subject Preference
Tentative Subject Preference
Tentative Subject Preference
Back-up Subject

January 2022:

Taster Lessons in subjects you are not sure about

Taster Lesson
Taster Lesson
Taster Lesson
Taster Lesson
Taster Lesson

February 2022:

Firm Subject Preferences

Firm Subject Preference
Firm Subject Preference
Firm Subject Preference
Firm Subject Preference
Back-up Subject

September 2022:

A Level courses begin

A Level Subject
A Level Subject
A Level Subject
A Level Subject

January 2023 onwards:

Option to drop to 3 subjects. Option to take EPQ

A Level Subject
A Level Subject
A Level Subject
<i>A Level Subject</i>
EPQ

Which Subjects to Choose?

Do not choose subjects on the basis of your empathy with particular teachers - it is your interest in, and enthusiasm for, a subject that matters provided that it satisfies your university/career aspirations. Do not be worried if at this stage you have little idea of which subjects you wish to study in the sixth form. You may wish to consider whether you fall into any of the following categories of student:

The artist:

Music A level is essential for Music degrees and Art A level is almost essential for Art foundation and degree courses, as it is your opportunity to develop your portfolio. Drama courses vary in their approach to Drama and Theatre A level, although in most cases it is an expectation. If the Drama course is more academic than performance-based then Drama and Theatre is likely to be required, and possibly English Literature. Design and Technology A level can be another useful subject to demonstrate creativity.

The essayist:

If you are thinking of choosing mostly essay subjects then you will have a wide range of degrees and careers available to you. However, it would not be recommended as preparation for a maths or science degree. For example, it would be difficult to apply for a Chemistry degree with A levels in Chemistry, English, History and French. That said, having one essay subject may be useful no matter what course you choose in the future.



The scientist:

If you are considering a degree in a science subject then it is worth considering whether Maths or Further Maths could be helpful, and whether not studying one of the other sciences might limit your options.

The linguist:

If you are considering continuing with a language to university, you may find it helpful to study two languages at A level to prove your linguistic abilities.

In general, entry to the professions, business and industry rarely require any particular A level subject combinations. There are, however, a few notable exceptions to this rule:

- Medicine – Chemistry is essential; Biology is a distinct advantage and essential for the more competitive courses
- Engineering – Maths and Physics are essential. Further Maths may be needed for some more competitive courses.
- Architecture – Art (almost) essential. Maths and/or Physics would be a significant advantage
- Finance – Maths A level is advantageous and, for many of the top economics degree courses at the more competitive universities, A Level maths is a requirement. Economics or Business would be interesting for the student, but not a requirement.

Competence in a modern foreign language is an advantage in almost every career area.

In evaluating how A-level choices affect career choices it is better to consider the skills or competencies acquired through each subject:

<p><u>Evaluative Skills</u> These skills involve the ability to communicate and compare different arguments, and to convincingly argue your own case. Evaluative skills are particularly useful for careers in Law, Politics, Marketing, Publishing, and Social Work. They are developed especially in essay subjects.</p>	<p><u>Creativity</u> Creativity is naturally especially valued in careers such as Art and Design, Architecture, Publishing, Performing Arts and Advertising but it is more and more being seen by a much more wide-ranging group of employers as one of their most looked-for qualities in candidates. Being able to think creatively is more openly developed in Art, Design & Technology, English, Drama & Theatre and Music.</p>
<p><u>Mechanical Skills</u> Being able to see what shapes fit where, and making and working with mechanical objects may be classified as mechanical skills. These are useful in Architecture, Art and Design, and Engineering, and are explicitly developed in Art, Physics, Design and Technology, and Maths.</p>	<p><u>Financial Awareness</u> The ability to understand business, finance, and money in large organisations/countries is highly valuable in many careers. Its use is more pronounced in Business, Engineering, Finance, Manufacturing, Marketing, Retail, etc. This awareness is more explicitly taught in Economics or Business.</p>

Consideration of these skills is of use in choosing A-level subject combinations. It should be emphasised that while many occupations do not directly use the subject knowledge obtained at A-level (or even degree level), the skills that are obtained in studying them are used all the time.

Above all, ensure you are choosing subjects that you enjoy and that you can see yourself being successful in.