

Biomedical Sciences Applicant Advice

Below is some advice from Lena who is currently studying Biomed at St Hugh's, we hope you find it helpful!

BMAT Test Advice

To apply for Biomedical Sciences at Oxford you need to sit the BMAT, which is divided into three parts.

The first one is reading comprehension and logic puzzles, you can't really teach yourself this one but it's good to familiarise yourself with the format. Once you register for the exam you will get access to some past papers, so it is good to do couple of them as practice.

The second part is comprised of GCSE Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Maths – so it is good to revise any of these sciences that you're not doing at A-level. On the site they have a pdf with all the material that you need to know for this part, so it's worth checking out, especially if you are an international student. Again, it's good to do a couple of practice papers, however bear in mind that the main obstacle on this part is time. While the questions are relatively easy, you will probably be pressed for time. Don't worry if you're not able to complete the test when you're practicing, most of the people I know didn't finish it when they took the official one.

The third part is an A4 page essay. You get to choose the topic out of four, they usually give some science/medicine related ones and a general one as well. Don't worry, you don't need to actually know much about the topics, the essay asks about opinions on things rather than about facts. For that part, both your grammar and reasoning are marked – so if you are able to write a comprehensive argument you will be okay. Again, it's good to practice couple of essays in timed conditions and have a read through the mark scheme which is available online.

(Also look at the advice for Medicine, as they also sit the BMAT)

Personal Statement Advice

In your personal statement, focus on the things that make you love the subject. Biomedical Sciences is a very broad course, so it is likely that you won't be equally excited about everything. Focus on the area that you are most excited about and tell the tutors how your interest started. Maybe a topic piqued your interest during a lesson and then you decided to read more about it? Maybe you watched a TED Talk about it and wanted to know more? What tutors are looking for are people with curiosity who learn beyond the topics covered in school. That's why you also need to 'prove' your interest in a way.

Talk about books you read on the topic, or online classes you took in order to learn more. Don't worry though you don't need to read university level textbooks, there are many popular science books from which you can learn a lot.

Another thing that tutors really like is lab experience, the best way to do it is to try shadowing some scientists in an actual research lab, but of course not everyone has the means to do this (though it's definitely easier than you think, if you can spare two weeks in summer it's worth emailing some heads of labs in your area and ask if you could come observe or even help out in the lab, they are usually very nice and like to share their excitement about science with students!). However, even experiments

you did in school can be useful if presented well. Even from growing beans in different conditions you are learning about experimental design.

Below are some books that might be worth reading (but obviously don't stress and think that you have to read them all!):

- If you are interested in genetics: 'The Epigenetics Revolution' by N. Carey, 'Genome' by M. Ridley, Richard Dawkins books are very well written and interesting but 'Selfish Gene' is a bit overused in personal statements so while it is definitely worth a read, it might be worth considering mentioning something else in your personal statement.
- If you are interested in neurology and psychology: 'The Idiot Brain' by D. Burnett, 'It's All In Your Head' by S. O'Sullivan, 'Phantoms In The Brain' by V. Ramachandran, 'The Language Instinct' by S. Pinker
- If you are interested in physiology: 'Life At The Extremes' or 'The Spark Of Life' both by F. Ashcroft
- If you are interested in cell biology and microbiology: 'Power, Sex and Suicide: Mitochondria and the Meaning of Life' by N. Lane, 'I Contain Multitudes: The Microbes Within Us' by E. Yong
- Some more general medical books: 'Emperor Of All Maladies' by S. Mukherjee which is a great book about history of oncology, 'Do No Harm' by H. Marsh, 'Ten drugs: How plants, powders and pills shaped the history of medicine' by T. Hager, 'Good germs, Bad germs' by J. Snyder Sachs

Interview Process Advice

Interviews are really not as bad as you think they will be. Tutors are generally nice people who understand that you are very stressed. They will give you time to think and you can always change your mind mid-sentence and correct yourself. The interviews are not about giving correct answers they are about showing them your thinking process. Some of the questions they ask don't have specific answers or there are many correct ones. So don't be too scared if they ask you something and you don't know the answer. Instead start thinking out loud. Instead of saying simply: 'I don't know' and being silent say: 'I'm not sure but..' and start making hypothesis based on what you're given. Maybe along the way you'll figure out the answer and even if not, you'll get halfway there which is also good.

In general, the questions will not require you to list facts from memory, instead it will require an understanding of concepts from the field. You might be shown some experimental results and be asked what conclusions may be drawn from it and how the experiment could be changed. You might be shown a genetic tree and be asked to talk about the patterns of inheritance. So when preparing for the interviews make sure you know the basics and underlying principles from biology and chemistry, but don't worry about trying to learn all the vitamin names and functions.

Sometimes tutors will ask about some biomed related things that have been in the news recently so it's good practice to check the headlines from a couple of weeks prior to your interview. Also, revise your personal statement as they sometimes will ask about things you have mentioned in it.

Good luck!