

So what do successful applicants for top universities do?

Successful candidates for elite universities delve a little further into their subject areas through independent reading, not because they have to, but because they have a genuine love for their subject. By reading around their subject they not only demonstrate their commitment, they are also immersing themselves in the essence of the discipline. As a direct result they have more interesting things to say in their personal statement, as well as at interview. It gives them the opportunity to think about the harder questions and to tackle some of the more interesting issues that they will face on their course. It allows them to use real detail from their independent reading to structure arguments and to understand what the course might entail and why it might be a good fit for them. The admissions tutors will have dedicated their lives to their subject, and they will not be convinced by a student trying to 'wing it'. Unless you share their enthusiasm for the course disciplines they will soon see through your lack of commitment and desire.

Key books to help to explore your subject;

Architecture-

Towards a new architecture by Le Corbusier
The timeless way of building by Christopher Alexander

Anthropology-

The selfish gene by Richard Dawkins
The origin of species by Charles Darwin

Chemistry-

Foundations of organic chemistry by Michael Hornby and Josephine Peach
The periodic table by Eric R. Scerri

Classics-

The Iliad by Homer
Classics: a short introduction by Mary Beard and John Henderson

Computer Science

An introduction of algorithms by Thomas Cormen
The emperor's new mind by Roger Penrose

Economics-

The ascent of money by Niall Ferguson
Too big to fail by Andrew Ross Sorkin

Education-

Fifty modern thinkers on education edited by Joy Palmer
How children think and learn by David Wood

English-

The great tradition by FR Leavis
Literary theory by Terry Eagleton

Engineering Science-

Cat's paws and catapults by Steven Vogel
Invention by design by Henry Petroski

Geography-

Human geography edited by John Agnew
The geographical tradition by David Livingstone

History-

A little history of the world by EH Gombrich
What is history? by EH Carr

History of Art-

Studies in iconology by Erwin Panofsky
Ways of seeing by John Berger

Law-

Learning the law by Glanville Williams
Eve was framed by Helena Kennedy

Linguistics-

The language instinct by Steven Pinker
Through the language glass: why the world looks different in other languages by Guy Deutscher

Mathematics-

The mathematical tourist by Ivars Peterson
Alice in Numberland by J Baylis and R Haggerty

Medicine-

The man who mistook his wife for a hat by Oliver Sacks
The rise and fall of modern medicine by James Le Fanu

Music-

Nineteenth-century music by Karl Dahlhaus
The Norton anthology of western music by Peter Burkholder and Claude Palisca

Natural Sciences-Biology

The greatest show on earth: the evidence for evolution by Richard Dawkins
How animals work by Knut Schmidt Nielson

Natural Sciences-Physics

Warped passages: unravelling the universe's hidden dimensions by Lisa Randall
A brief history of time by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow

Philosophy-

What does it all mean? by Thomas Nagel
Science and wonders by Russell Stannard

PPE-

Anarchy, state and Utopia by Robert Nozick
Why humans have cultures by Michael Carrithers

Theology-

The puzzle of evil and the puzzle of god by Peter Vardy
The early church by Henry Chadwick