

Hi! My name is Phoebe Jowett Smith and I am currently studying Spanish and Arabic at Jesus. I took the OLAT and MLAT in October 2017 and I am currently in my first year at Oxford. There are currently only four EMEL students at Jesus (two in 4th year and two in 1st year) and none of us do the same combinations so it is definitely a very small course but it is very centralised, so you will meet lots of arabists, persianists etc.

The OLAT: It is possibly one of the strangest Oxford admissions tests as it is based on analysing a completely made up language. The main thing to remember about the OLAT is that they are testing your aptitude for picking up a completely foreign language based on no grammar structures that you have previously come across; this puts everyone in the same boat and means that schools and backgrounds have nothing to do with your result.

Timing: The OLAT cannot be rushed. If you try to whiz through all the questions you are going to become muddled and end up making basic mistakes which will carry through to all of your answers as you go through the paper. It is only half an hour so it is important to get stuck in as soon as you start. Don't worry about trying to finish it, I only managed to answer a couple of questions from Section 4 and I know people who didn't even get to Section 4 and still made it to interview and beyond! The key is quality over quantity.

Preparing: There is only one practice paper on the Oriental Institute website (https://www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/orinst/documents/media/olat_sample.pdf) and this has no mark scheme which I didn't find particularly helpful. It can help to have a look at some of the LAT and the CAT (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/tests/cat> - particularly look at section B of the CLAT bit) or any other linguistic aptitude tests to get into the hang of analysing a question quickly. I didn't do too many practice papers (due to the limited resources and focusing on A Levels!) and essentially it didn't matter. The OLAT is an Oriental Languages *Aptitude* Test so you are not expected to know any of the answers and if you do find the test unreasonably hard then maybe picking up an oriental language may not be for you!

Things to practice: When I was revising the OLAT I found it useful to make sure I had a good understanding of the nominative and accusative cases. This was fine for me as I studied Latin to GCSE but if you haven't then a quick google search should sort you out. The reason this helped me is that I could quickly identify if there were any singular/plural nominative or accusative endings and write them down in a quick table which made the questions a lot quicker. Do not be caught out by false friends – sometimes the examiners will throw in a couple of words that look like they should mean something similar in English. Never assume this is the case but instead work through methodically to work out the correct meaning of the word.

The test itself: Keep calm and carry on. This is a total cliché but in my test I spent about ten minutes trying to figure out the first question and completely freaked out. When I calmed down and stopped trying to find things that I had identified in past tests and just focus on the test at hand, I managed to rely on my natural language ability and work through the test more quickly. Most of you will be doing the test after or before an MLAT and in the middle of the school day so it is a hectic environment; try not to let this get to you, drink plenty of water, and if you find yourself panicking: stop worrying about timing and just try to answer the questions accurately. It doesn't matter how many you complete.

After the test: Do not worry and stress about the interview acceptance just try to focus on school or gap year or whatever you are doing! The skills you pick up when preparing for the OLAT can be incredibly useful in interview though. During one of my four interviews, I was asked to analyse an ancient Iraqi language copied from a relic with some vague inscriptions on

it! This was very OLATish and meant that I could keep my cool and rely on my past experience of similar questions.

The application experience: the whole experience of applying to Oxford is very stressful; but if you can make it through that then you can make it through the course! There are so many tests, written work and interviews that by the end of the whole process you will feel exhausted. I found it really helpful to remember that Oxford is investing so much time in you that even if you end up not being offered a place, it still means that they have really considered your application thoroughly and it isn't just a glance at your personal statement and grades.

Good luck to all the orientologists out there! Doing an oriental language is a such a unique choice and no matter where you end up, you will always stand out!