

Welcome to Pembroke!

Firstly, congratulations on your exam results and getting into Cambridge! Pembroke is easily the nicest and most friendly college around and — without a hint of bias — English is by far the best subject to study, so you have made a good choice.

We're Joanna and Phil, your Pembroke College English reps. You can ask us anything about English or Cambridge life by e-mail, in person when you arrive or at any point throughout the year — so don't feel you have to remember all the information you'll currently be getting. Although it might be tempting to pile up as much information as possible, you'll settle in very quickly regardless of whether or not you know if you should bring your own kettle (yes) or what colour your bedroom's curtains will be (blue).

How it works...

Cambridge terms are compact and slightly hectic eight-week periods. In first year you will study Medieval (Michaelmas), Renaissance (Lent) and Shakespeare (Easter), as well as Practical Criticism throughout. You will write an essay each week based on one text or author, on top of which you will have one group class (for translation in Michaelmas), a Practical Criticism class where you'll look at unseen poetry and prose and your supervision. These are two- or three- on one classes where you discuss your essay and weekly topic after you have finished them.

As well as this, there will be lecture courses running throughout the year which are recommended but not compulsory, allowing you to work out which ones are most useful. The work load might seem tough at first, but everyone works out their own rhythm and settles in — and you're not expected to work the whole time!

As well as your lecturers and supervisors (who will change each term) you have a Director of Studies and a Personal Tutor. These are the people to go to if you have any academic worries or personal worries, respectively. There is a lot of support in college both academically and for welfare, which you will be told more about in Freshers' Week, so don't worry about being thrown in at the deep end on your own. You can also talk to either of us and ask any questions you might have.

Medieval

Studying medieval can be difficult, particularly as it's your first term and many of you will never have read a medieval text before, but a little preparation will help it to go smoothly. The main object of your summer holidays should be to enjoy yourself, but also take the time to read some primary texts: a few *Canterbury Tales*, *Piers Plowman*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and/or *Morte d'Arthur* are good places to start.

Compare book prices on Amazon, WHSmiths and Waterstones Marketplace for the cheapest second-hand editions and keep the receipts — that way you can claim back £60 from college in book fees. Don't overdo secondary or background reading: it's not as important as primary material, although Burrows' *Medieval Writers and their Work* is a fantastic introduction to the period.

When you arrive at Cambridge and are faced with weekly essays, don't feel compelled to try to read the whole text for each week's topic: find a summary then use it to cherry-pick the most relevant passages to your essay. The same technique should also be applied to secondary criticism using the introduction or index. Holidays are a good time to get to grips with primary texts and also completing the translations you will begin in Michaelmas, but pace yourself and don't attempt to read everything.

Contact

A few nerves at this point are perfectly natural, but you really don't need to feel daunted by coming to Cambridge (Joanna has written an article that addresses some of the worries you may have: <http://www.tcs.cam.ac.uk/features/0035638-dear-future-freshers.html>).

We'll be organising a meal for all of you and the current Pembroke English students during freshers' week — we're thinking of Pizza Express because the one in Cambridge is surprisingly ~fancy~ — so we'll see you then, and in the meantime don't hesitate to e-mail us at jt613@cam.ac.uk (Joanna) or pvtg2@cam.ac.uk (Phil).

Looking forward to seeing you in October!

Joanna Taylor and Phil Gull