



## Top tips to follow before you choose your A levels

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### **Top Tip 1:**

*Don't set your heart  
on moving on until  
you have explored all  
the facts*

**You might just convince yourself that a change is as good as a grade.**

- Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you can get better grades just by moving from your current college – you are probably going to have to work harder than if you stay where you are;
- Your friends might be moving because they want different subjects – if you decide to stay they will still be your friends;
- Don't waste the last five years investment – make it work for you.

### **FACT:**

A local top recruiter Sixth Form College boasts an average of B- grade at A2. At **Claremont** with the same starting grades (A\*s/Bs at GCSE) the average A level Grade is a B which would put **Claremont in the top 10% of post 16 providers.**



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### **Top Tip 2:**

*Don't choose your place of study for A levels or BTEC based on ill-informed prejudices*

### **Without careful thought and consideration you might put value on:**

- A change of location
- A new start
- Going where my friends are going
- A common room
- An opinion given by someone who doesn't know your school
- Not having to wear a uniform
- The prospect of making lots of new friends.
- Taking a 'sexy' new subject.
- Being treated 'like an adult'

### **FACT:**

#### **At Claremont you can really put greater value on:**

- The success you have achieved so far
- The amazing relationships you have already established
- Your current school's successes.
- The high level of monitoring and assessment that your teachers will use to ensure that you make progress and secure brilliant grades
- High quality care, guidance and support.
- A learning ethos that has worked for you in which you have been treated like an adult.
- The old friends who will stay and the new friends you will make.



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### **Top Tip 3:**

*Don't over-think the value of extra A levels.*

*You may get lots of pleasure from studying*

*but your university*

*offers will almost always be the best three*

*grades*

**If 3 A levels are good then 4, 5 or even 6 must be better. Right?**

Simple answer - not really: The vast majority of students, wherever they study, take the basic pattern of **four AS levels** and **three A levels**.

If you are genuinely bilingual it might well be a good idea to take an extra AS or A level.

Or, if you are a Maths genius you might consider Further Maths as a good fourth A level.

### **FACT:**

At **Claremont** we know that the **Cambridge Admission documents** are absolutely clear that you only need **three A levels** to secure a place. And we are able to give you the best advice and support when it comes to applying.



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### Top Tip 4:

*There is no doubt that the facilitating subjects offer very good opportunities but they are not the only good A Levels to study.*

**You need to fully understand the difference between ‘facilitating’ subjects and ‘desirable’ ones.**

The Russell Group universities produced a list of ‘facilitating subjects’ which they felt were the most desirable when looking at university applications. It was not the case that they said that the named subjects were more rigorous or academic than those not listed.

It was simply implied that the named facilitating subjects could open many more doors and provide a greater range of study possibilities (at the Russell Group universities) than the non-facilitating subjects.

So, there are really three categories of A level subjects.

- **Facilitating subjects** – solid, hard subjects that have utility for further study.
- **Non-facilitating** – solid subjects which are hard but offer fewer options for further study such as Music, Art and Religious Studies.
- **Softer subjects** which are often negatively represented, such as IT, Accounting and Photography and unless this will be your career or vocation in life you should avoid taking more than one of these subjects.



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### **Top Tip 5:**

*Choosing a subject at A level just because you've never studied it before is very, very risky.*

### **It's a brand new subject. "I will love it!"**

It is apparent that 'undecided' students choose new subjects like psychology and often they have no other interest at all in studying sciences.

If you haven't taken a subject before there is no guarantee that you will love it. If you hate Science, loathe Biology and Maths and you hate anything to do with Statistics then you might just find two years of Psychology a real bind.

**What can you do to be more certain of your choices?** Take a look at the core texts and some past papers. This will really help you. Then attend a lesson and get a feel for what will be taught.

### **FACT:**

At **Claremont** we know you so well – or we'll get to know you well – that we will be in the best position to **guide you so that you make the right combination to keep your options open.**



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### **Top Tip 6:**

*There are some subjects you will really enjoy studying but taken alone you won't be able to study beyond A levels*

**After two years of study, I've had a great time but I can't find a suitable university course. How did I close my options down?**

If your A level Biology sits alongside a trio of Humanities subjects and you have great ambition to take it further into a university course then you are going to be disappointed. If you take Maths or Chemistry with it then you will have many university opportunities.

**The rule is keeping your options open:** the more facilitating subjects you do the better and sciences should always be taken in pairs.

### **FACT:**

At **Claremont** we know that if you take English, History, Biology and Chemistry, that you can take anyone of these as a degree but also a handful of others that you won't have considered. Take Creative Writing, Economics, Psychology and ICT you could make an admissions tutor wonder what on earth you were thinking of!



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### **Top Tip 7:**

*Celebrate your love of a subject but avoid taking it to extremes. It might cost you later!*

### **I'm totally fixed on studying this subject for A level and at University! Is this a problem?**

It isn't a problem in itself – let's say you are fixed on studying Economics and you have chosen Maths, Further Maths and Business Studies. You might even think about Accounting as a little extra. What if you discover a hatred of all things Economics half way through Year 12? Or, if you discover a love of economic history?

### **A little breadth is almost always a good thing.**

These subjects are seen to be complementary:

- English and Foreign Languages
- English and History
- Maths and Music
- Economics and History
- The Sciences & Maths
- Economics & Geography
- History & Classics
- English & Latin
- History & Music

### **FACT:**

At **Claremont** we know that you have been dreaming about taking a subject or combination of subjects since year 7! It's not a problem for us, but what we will continue to do is to check that this is your ambition and not someone else's and that you really know what will be involved in studying the subjects that you have chosen. We will even help you adjust when you change your mind!



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### **Top Tip 8:**

*Be led by what you want to do, not by what other people want for you*

### **They say “These are not the subjects that you should do” – should I listen?**

You could make your choices with a view to keeping your options open for two or more subjects. In some cases, this can be entirely legitimate, especially when the subjects are similar: choosing A-levels that suit either English or History is easily done, for instance.

But then you could try to choose options for two subjects that are not much alike at all. The classic combination is Law and Medicine. The first impression of such a student is inevitably of someone who wants a well-paid, well-respected, demanding professional career and who doesn't really have a clue what form they want that career to take.

This may be because of external pressures, such as a family that is made up almost entirely of doctors and lawyers

It ought to **go without saying that choosing your A-levels in order to take a degree subject that you aren't particularly sold on is a bad idea.** If you're in this situation, remember that there are plenty of well respected jobs that require a 2.1 or above without many requirements regarding the degree. Don't funnel yourself into a very particular (and very challenging) path if you are doing so to fulfil someone else's idea of what a successful career should look like.

### **FACT:**

At **Claremont** we know what you have been through to get the grades that you already have. You should definitely listen to what we can tell you about your chosen courses because **we know you and we know what we are talking about.**





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**Top Tip 9:**

*Don't pin all your plans on an unlikely ambition.*

**We all have dreams, but keep your day job in mind**

Optimistic dreams are great and yours should not be discouraged. Yet the inevitable reality is that very few actors end up in Hollywood; very few novelists earn enough from their writing to pay the rent.

**So what can you do about it?**

The answer is that you need to **choose A-levels that enable your dream** (of course!) but also ones that enable whatever it is you're going to do in order to afford groceries while your dream remains a work in progress.

So if you long to be a film producer, you might want to avoid Music Technology and Media Studies (which will not help you towards that goal anyway) and take subjects like Maths and English that will give you a solid CV, while you spend your free time looking for film-related work experience.

**FACT:**

At **Claremont** you have been sharing your dreams and hopes with us for the past five years – **who better to help you to reach for and achieve the next dreams?**



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### **Top Tip 10:**

*Don't be put off subjects because they're said to be hard, or let yourself be drawn to subjects because they're said to be easy.*

### **Difficulty is subjective**

It is a challenge to assess whether the majority of students find an A-level relatively hard or relatively easy, as A-levels with a reputation for being challenging (e.g. Physics) are taken primarily by more able candidates.

If you got an A\* in GCSE Chemistry, you should not be put off by A-level Chemistry because it has a reputation for being hard. Similarly, if you scraped a C at GCSE Geography, A-level Geography is probably not for you.

**Don't choose a subject you're not keen on just because it has a reputation for being easy; definitely don't avoid a subject you're enthusiastic about and do well in because you've heard it may be a little tricky.**

### **FACT:**

At **Claremont** we know what you have been through to get the grades that you already have. We also know how hard you have had to work to get these grades and what you are capable of when you are challenged. You are definitely going to find some aspects of your A Levels tough and we will **provide appropriate support** when that happens.



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***Top Tip 11:***

*The best reason to take a subject is because you think you'll really enjoy studying it.*

**Do it because you love it...**

Subjects can be very hard to enjoy when you're in the doldrums of GCSE revision. These are the times when you will wonder if, as an adult, you will ever compare and contrast two sonnets or solve a simultaneous equation.

Part of the point is to demonstrate that you can do as you're told, learn the things you're supposed to and regurgitate them in the required way – thereby showing that you can do the same in the world of work in the future.

Learning should be a pleasure for its own sake. If you've got two or three subjects that will lead helpfully towards your future goals, it is OK to choose the rest of your subjects based solely on the fact, say, that History at A-level is great fun. Ultimately, if you're stuck between two or three different subject choices, don't be a martyr to the belief that suffering through two years of Maths will make you a better person.

**If the range of options that you have is reasonably sensible, take the subjects you think you will enjoy most.**

**FACT:**

At **Claremont** we know what you can do when you are really engaged and committed to your work. We will use that knowledge to **guide, support and motivate** you and you can't put a price on that kind of knowledge and support.



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**Once I have got through the first few weeks it will be a doddle after that!  
Won't it?**

This isn't how it's going to be – you'll need regular reassurance and guidance to get through the GCSE to A level transition;

You are going to need a great team of experienced and successful teachers to help you navigate your way through subjects that will sometimes baffle you and at times you'll hate and love at the same time;

You'll need someone to go to just to talk about how your day has gone or about how you are feeling about life in general;

AND you will need a great team behind you to help you write your personal statement and to support you through the whole university application process.

**Top Tip 12:**

*You are going to need a lot of coaching and support to get to the stage where you are ready to submit a university or college application and you will need a brilliant team behind you; **a team that will write a reference based on knowing and supporting you over the last six years, as opposed to one year at another college.***

**FACT:**

**At Claremont we do all that for you and more besides** because you are an important member of our community and we want you to be successful in all things; and we will understand when you feel that it's just too hard or life is just too complicated. **You can trust us, because we care.**