

History of Art at University

Key issues that will be considered:

- Why take History of Art at Degree level?
- What to expect and consider in the course.
- Where to do it.
- How to prepare for application/course.
- Career paths after a History of Art Degree.

Why do Art History at Degree Level?

It's a fascinating subject, and if you have the drive and passion to pursue it for three years then I definitely recommend it.

It is different to at school; you are given more independence and choice. You are able to become focused on a particular period, style, genre, medium or country.

It is a uniquely interdisciplinary subject. It is not just the history of art, but the history of culture and of society. It encompasses the subjects of art, history, politics, sociology, religion, cultural studies, ethics.

What can I expect and consider in the course?

Courses will be taught differently at each university, depending on the offered modules, staff faculty and course structure. There may be different specifications such as Art History, Architecture and Design, or Art History and History, or with a Foreign Language. University courses consist of modules, such as British Landscape Painting or Michelangelo, and usually after your first year you can choose your modules. Look at prospectuses to see what kind of modules are on offer, see what the specialisms are within the faculty, consider what area you are most interested in and find a course that suits this.

Most universities offer the option of taking History of Art on its own as a BA Honours Degree or combining it with another course in the form of Joint Honours. You need to decide whether to do solely Art History, which would be different from at school where you are juggling with other subjects, but would allow greater breadth and depth of study, or mix it with another subject.

Teaching is through seminars (discussion based learning) and lectures. Contact hours vary, but is usually fairly minimal for this subject so lots of independent learning, not like at school. Lots of reading for weekly seminars. Assignments per term generally include 2 long essays, course reading, seminar preparation, group work, presentations and a final year dissertation. More work than at school, but you have better facilities, longer time to complete the work and greater flexibility in dealing with the assignment. More in-depth, lengthy and extensively researched work. Not weekly prep.

Strict deadlines, it's up to you to complete assignments on time, as is up to you to keep up with the course. You will have a tutor and lecturers who will all be happy to help you, but it's not like at school where you have teachers/housemasters on your back. You will also have work set for over the holidays, usually essays. Need to be self-motivated and self-disciplined. Actually use the resources and go to lectures out of your own free will. Not so spoon-fed as at school, not about syllabuses and ticking boxes. University is about independent study, personal development and individual, original work.

Entry Requirements:

Entry Requirements depend on the university. Oxbridge, London and Russell Group Universities are going to ask for good grades, eg. AAA-ABB, including A Level in Art History or related subject. Look to newer universities for slightly lower grade requirements. Doing History of Art at school gives you a huge advantage, you can show that you have already developed the knowledge, skills and intellectual curiosity for the subject. Having experience in scholarly essay writing, visual analysis and research will be invaluable in seminar discussions and assignments, meaning you'll find it all much less daunting and be able to take the transition from school to uni in your stride.

As well as good grades you'll need a personal statement that presents you as a unique candidate with a passion for the subject. You have to make sure that you demonstrate your interest and drive, rather than assuming it is understood. Make an impact, discuss how something is pertinent and particular to you and why. Be direct and concise whilst demonstrating your individual character and passion for Art History.

No practical Art skills are required, plus you do not even have to have studied Art History at AS or A2 Level – in fact only about 40% of those that study it at University will have taken the subject at A Level.

Where to go to do a History of Art degree?

History of Art is not a widely taught course at university, so your choice of university will be more limited in comparison to History or English. You need to consider the area/location, kind of university and course offered. I strongly suggest looking at the course structures and visiting universities. When considering a course look at what the emphasis/variety is in terms of modules, whether there are trip/art links/work experience potential, and the cultural features of the area (galleries/art centres). Obviously you'll need to think of geography, go north, south, Scotland? London is really the centre of art world so it's beneficial to have good access to the capital. You need to choose whether to be in a quieter area or an urban city, on a campus or spread through a town, at a small or major university. Course links with a local art gallery are invaluable as study tools/subjects offering constant interaction with real art in situ, whilst providing possible opportunities for gallery work experience and public talks and exhibitions.

Universities to consider applying to include:

Cambridge and Oxford

Courtauld, UCL, Goldsmiths College

Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham, Leeds, York, Warwick, Glasgow, St Andrew's, University of East Anglia

Sussex, Reading, Edinburgh, Oxford Brookes, Manchester, Aberdeen

How to prepare for taking the course at Uni:

Writing a strong personal statement and working to the best of your abilities for your exams.

Visit galleries and exhibitions.

Read important art history texts and any current art reviews in newspapers.

Take an art history course.

Take a languages course/ learn a language.

Subscribe to a magazine / journal

Travel abroad and visit key collections, eg. Venice, Rome, Paris, New York, Barcelona, Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam ...

Do some relevant work experience – art gallery, cultural centre, museum, national trust property, auction house, commercial gallery.

Where an Art History Degree could take you Career-wise:

Museum and Art Gallery Work (Curating)

Heritage

Conservationism

Auctioneers, valuations and sales

Interior Design

Antiquities

Marketing and Publicity

Publishing

PA and PR

Human Resources

Teaching and Research

School's liaison / Outreach Programme

Analysis, management

Media & Communications

Charities and Public funding

Journalism / Writing