Dear Offer Holder,

I’d like to introduce myself – Prof. Hannah Smithson, Tutorial Fellow in Psychology – and the team of Pembroke Psychology tutors – Dr Laura Young, Career Development Lecturer in Psychology, Dr Rebekah White, Stipendiary Lecturer in Psychology and Dr Ben Crittenden, Stipendiary Lecturer in Psychology. You’ll have met Rebekah and me at the interviews, and you will be meeting Laura and Ben during the year. We’re all delighted to welcome you to Pembroke.

We asked the current students what they would have found helpful to know before coming to Oxford. You may have already been in touch with current students, and you can see some of their stories on the Pembroke webpage (http://www.pmb.ox.ac.uk/content/meet-experimental-psychology-students), but we thought we’d also send you some suggestions here.

In general, students find the hardest things are the things they haven’t had much chance to practice before coming to Oxford, and this can be very different depending on each individual’s academic training up to this point. People who hadn’t done essay-based subjects found that they needed to work on essay writing; people who hadn’t done much statistics found they needed to work on that; and people doing neurophysiology who hadn’t done biology felt that it would have been helpful to brush up on some basic terminology before going to the lectures. Experimental Psychology (EP) students take Psychology, Statistics and Neurophysiology in the first two terms. Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics (PPL) students take Psychology, Statistics and either Linguistics or Philosophy.

Essay-writing is a skill that can be learned and that benefits from practice. Writing Psychology essays, in which you need to present arguments that are backed up with empirical evidence, may be different from the writing you have done before. You might find it helpful to have a look at this blog, starting with the oldest posts first, which addresses some of the most common issues in undergraduate Psychology essays: http://essayheaven.blogspot.co.uk/.

Looking at A-level textbooks for biology and statistics can be helpful. For biology you’ll want to be a little selective, and focus on neurons and the brain. This is particularly important for the Neurophysiology course. For the Statistics course, much of the A-level material is useful. As an example, you might want to look at the Cambridge Advanced Mathematics Series to match the OCR specification – statistics books 1 to 3 (ISBN 978-0 521-54893-9; ISBN 978-0 521-54894-6; ISBN 978-0 521-54895-3).

For the Psychology course, we are attaching a broad reading list that includes books spanning the different topics that are taught at Oxford. Please do not feel that you need to read every book on this list – rather, we suggest that you dip into those that pique your interest, as well as those that cover material that you may be less familiar with.

The books on this reading list are diverse in approach. Some of the books are detailed (but introductory) textbooks (e.g. Hayes, Atkinson) while others are intended to be of general interest even to people who are not studying psychology (e.g. Pinker, Sacks, Carter, Dawkins). The edited books that ‘revisit’ the Classic Studies (i.e., Eysenck and Groome; Slater and Quinn; Smith and Haslam) are recommended reading for the associated Prelims courses, and will provide insight as to some of the pioneering studies that have shaped these fields of psychology.

Most of the books on this list are paperbacks, and many are available second-hand on Amazon. It is also possible that you will find many of them in your local library, and if not, your library may be able to order them for you.

When you get your Oxford email address and “single sign-on” you’ll also be able to log in to Weblearn (http://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/), where you will find EP and PPL listed under the Medical Sciences Division. This is the online repository for all your lecture materials, so you can get a sneak preview!

Happy reading!

We look forward to seeing you in October,
Hannah, Laura, Rebekah and Ben
General Introduction

Neuropsychology

Cognition

Developmental Psychology

Perception

Social Behaviour and Personality

Animal Behaviour

Statistics