

Dear English Fresher,

My name is Alice, I am a second-year student at Sidney Sussex and am the English subject rep! Congratulations on making your offer and welcome to the Sidney community. We are one of the most friendly, cohesive and welcoming colleges and whether you were pooled or applied directly, you will most certainly have a fantastic time here!!

Studying English at Sidney is unique as we have an incredible department that places your enjoyment and love of the subject at the fore. You will build strong and personal relationships with your supervisors and can rest assured that you are in safe hands academically – Sidney English students consistently achieve some of the top marks in the university. Typically, there are around five or six English students per year which will ensure that you can enjoy a sense of community both within your own cohort and with the English students in other year groups. This is also assisted by the fact that, just before you arrive, you will be put into a 'college family', in which you are linked to two college 'parents' in the year above, one of which will study English, as well as at least one 'sibling' in your year of a different subject. I know it sounds strange, but it does help you settle in, meet people and have your questions answered!

Please don't worry about the reading lists you will be sent over the summer before you arrive! Reading lists are not meant to be finished and are meant to be a starting point to give you ideas, but nobody really explains this to you when you arrive so freshers tend to feel a bit anxious if they haven't completed everything they've been sent. The most important thing to consider, firstly, is to make sure you've read any compulsory primary texts you might have been set. This tends to be very minimal, but if you don't read them in advance it will be difficult to catch up in term time, so I'd start with those. Secondly, use the reading list as an opportunity to find out what elements of the period you're really interested in, so that when you start the term you have a few potential leads that might eventually turn into essays. It is likely that you will be set reading for the Medieval paper over the summer as we were and again, please don't feel intimidated by this! It can seem very daunting particularly as lots of it is in Middle English, but if you turn up and don't really have any idea what's going on then don't worry it will all become clear. No one is going to examine your knowledge of anything when you arrive – the best way you can come prepared is to turn up with enthusiasm and ideas!

In your first year you will be set, on average, a 2000 word essay every week on the period paper that you are studying that term, as well as some additional reading or perhaps small writing tasks for Practical Criticism. Lectures are run every morning Monday-Friday and are all optional. This is fantastic for many reasons. Firstly, it means that you can pick and choose topics that you like the sound of, so you don't have to spend hours on something you know you'll never write about. It also makes time management much easier. If you miss a lecture for an essay crisis, or an extracurricular commitment, or recovery from the previous day/night you will not miss out on learning essential content that is required for the course, as is the case for most other subjects. English lectures are intended, instead, to offer the opportunity for you to be introduced to ideas, writers or movements you may not have come across. Having said that, Medieval ones are really good so try and go to at least one of those in your first term even if you're feeling a bit dead lol.

Supervisions will occur twice a week at first and are an hour long. Sidney runs Practical Criticism supervisions with the whole cohort while the period paper supervisions will usually involve you and one or two of your Sidney English pals. This means that your week will have a shockingly low number

of contact hours which on the one hand is great as it gives you freedom and independence, but also means it can be tricky to organise your time. It will probably take a couple of terms for you to properly get a routine down and my advice would be to discipline yourself – when you have three empty days ahead of you it can be easy to spend one of them reading a single chapter at a leisurely pace but this is not an efficient use of time as you might discover. Use all the different libraries that Cambridge has to offer – the English Faculty and Sidney Library will be your go-to's, but you're welcome in any faculty library so it's always good to mix it up. I will show you the University Library when I take you on your tour in fresher's week, but most people only make it there in year two because it's quite scary.

The most important thing for you to remember, though, is that your life here will not only revolve around your work. You will of course have the opportunity to get involved in all the extracurricular opportunities offered by the university as a whole, but it is also worth noting that Sidney itself has an incredibly sociable atmosphere with one of the university's best college bars (one of only a few that are student-run) where you are welcome to get involved in one of the weekly pub quizzes, the termly themed 'Bops' or just sink a few pints with your mates on a Saturday night. Whatever your preferences, there is something here for you!

Feel free to reach out to me or any other Sidney English student if you have any questions or want any help! My email is ab2546@cam.ac.uk, or feel free to message me on Facebook too (Alice Bergin).

I look forward to meeting you soon!

Alice xxx

