

Advice on Picking a College

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This advice is based on how I picked my college, St John's, along with some visits. Visiting is important if you can, as you might like the atmosphere of a college more than you realize. This advice aims to help you create a shortlist since it's difficult to visit all colleges. If you can't visit, look at online resources, try to talk to current students (such as through [Reddit 6th form](#) or Discord servers), and explore images online. I only visited my chosen college briefly and would have applied there regardless of visiting. Most Cambridge students end up happy, even if they were pooled to a different college than their initial choice.

Picking a College

I recommend creating a shortlist based on criteria that are important to you, combining objective and subjective factors. Here are some examples:

Objective Factors

Physical Size of the College: You might prefer a bigger or smaller college. I liked a larger one because of the spaces for socializing, the facilities (gyms, rooms for studying or events), and having most accommodation on-site, like at St John's. A large college can save time on commutes and offer more resources.

Distance from the Centre: Proximity to places like Kings or Caius can reduce commute times, but being farther might provide a quieter atmosphere. Proximity to your department and shops (like Sainsbury's) also matters, especially if your accommodation is far from the college.

Number of Students and Subject Cohort: A larger college may offer more diverse interactions, while smaller colleges might have tighter communities.

Financial Resources: Colleges vary in their scholarships, bursaries, and prizes. Wealthier colleges can offer more, such as [scholarships at St John's](#). Look into [income-based bursaries](#) and additional grants, like the [Free Places scheme at St John's](#).

Accommodation Facilities: Look for information about ensuite rooms, kitchens, and other amenities. Visiting or speaking to current students can provide insights not available online. For example, at St John's, a student portal contains accommodation information, and asking a current student can help you access this.

Other Facilities: Check if colleges have music rooms, gyms, or free laundry. St John's, for example, offers [a £900 Learning and Research Fund](#) for course-related materials.

College-Specific Societies and Benefits: Some colleges offer unique perks like free laundry (at Emmanuel and St John's) or societies like Beekeeping at St John's.

Subjective Factors

Aesthetics of the College: Visiting is the best way to get a sense of how you feel about the look and atmosphere of a college. If you can't visit, explore virtual tours, open days, or ask current students for their impressions.

College Atmosphere: This is highly subjective and best experienced in person. However, speaking to current students might give you some insight into what the community feels like.

My Experience

I initially wanted a large, central college with many Maths students, which led me to consider Kings, Trinity, and St John's. After reflection, I chose St John's because of its [Studentship scheme](#), central location, and the ability to store belongings over term breaks.

From talking to friends, it seems that most students are happy wherever they end up. There's no need to overanalyze statistics regarding college admissions, as every college provides a great experience.