

A LEVELS

What are A Levels?

A Levels are Level 3 qualifications that you can choose to take after your GCSEs. You can take A Levels in schools, sixth form centres or at some Further Education Colleges. They are considered to be excellent general academic qualifications that are valued by employers and universities alike. A Levels offer a great route to degree level study.

A Levels will give you a chance to find out about your GCSE subjects in greater depth or you can choose to study one of the subjects that many schools and colleges only offer at A Level such as Law, Economics or Psychology. They are good preparation if you are thinking of going onto higher education or if you are not sure of your career plans, as they can keep your options open.

How many GCSEs will I need to study A Levels?

To study A Levels you will need to do well in your GCSEs. Most schools and colleges will expect you to have gained grades 9-4 (A*-C in old grades) in your GCSEs with a minimum of grade 4 in English Language and Maths. Specific requirements can vary from four passes to six passes, so you should check with each institution. Often you will need a GCSE at grade 6 or above in a subject if you want to go on to study it at A Level.

How long does an A Level course last and how many should I take?

A full A Level qualification is achieved after 2 years of study. How many you take depends on how well you have done in your GCSEs and what the school or college suggests would be best for you. Some students with very high GCSE grades take 4 A levels, but most students take 3 subjects, some sixth forms offer 4 to start then you can drop one later.

Different schools and colleges will offer a different range of subjects and a different combination of options so it's best to research what's on offer and what will suit you.

Can I study vocational qualifications alongside A Levels?

It is possible to combine vocational qualifications such as BTEC Level 3 qualifications or OCR qualifications with A Levels. These qualifications attract UCAS points in the same way as A Levels do.

WHY A LEVELS



Recognised worldwide



Keeps your options open



Provides in-depth knowledge



Wide range of resources

Choosing your A Levels - what you need to consider

If you are thinking about taking A Levels you need to choose subjects:

- you will enjoy;
- you believe you will do well in;
- that will help you get to where you want to go in the future.

After A Levels, many students go on to higher education (either full time or part time), whilst others look for an apprenticeship or a job, or a combination of these. You need to make sure that your choice of A Level subjects allows you to keep your options open if you haven't got a specific career in mind, or will help you get the career or job you would like to do.

Tips on choosing your subjects:

Choosing your A Levels needs careful research to think through your possibilities. Take advice from family, friends and teachers so you can make an informed decision, based on accurate up-to-date information - but remember, the final choice is yours as you are the one that will have to put the hard work in!

Things to consider:

- A Levels are a big step up from GCSEs – they are harder! So choose your subjects wisely. Your career or degree ideas may change so make sure you choose subjects which you like and can do well in.
- If you are taking a science A Level, you should consider whether you need to look at taking another science or maths, particularly if you are interested in scientific careers or courses.
- If you have a **specific career in mind**, check to see if you will need specific A Level subjects. Look at the job profiles within [job sectors](#) to find out more.
- If you have a **specific degree course in mind**, you need to check the entry requirements. Some university courses are very specific about the A Level subjects required – other degree subjects are very flexible. Check entry requirements on the [UCAS](#) website or on individual university websites.
- If you have no idea about your choice of career or choice of degree subject at this stage (many students are in this position!), then make sure you choose a combination of subjects that will keep your preferred options open.
- Some schools and colleges offer both A Levels and BTEC qualifications. You may like to consider a combination of qualifications as this might suit your learning and assessment style.



A few dos and don'ts when choosing A Levels

Do research each A Level thoroughly – talk to your teachers to find out what is involved in the course. Talk to students who are already taking that subject.

Don't assume you will like the subject at A Level just because you liked it at GCSE – it could be really different!

Don't take all new subjects – it could be too much to cope with having 3 or even 2 new areas of study.

Do be careful with your combination of choices – some universities might not like a combination of subjects that they feel are too similar.

Don't take English and Maths at A Level because you think this is what employers want. Take them if you are good at them and really interested in studying them further.

Grades and points

A Levels are graded A*-E and these are all regarded as pass grades and gain UCAS points towards entrance to higher education. The points awarded for A Levels, AS Levels and other qualifications are sometimes called '[tariff points](#)' or [UCAS points](#) (read more by clicking through the links).

Some employers now specify a required number of UCAS points for some of their jobs or apprenticeships.

Progression after A Levels

Both universities and employers really value A Levels.

After A Level qualifications, many students continue their study or training through an apprenticeship, vocational qualification or a higher education course at a university or college.