

Hello!

Congratulations on your results, and on your place at St Peter's College. This is the start of a very exciting time!

My name is Bridget Penman and I am to be your College tutor.

If there is anything that you would like to discuss with me before term begins, we can arrange a video call, or you can ask me via email. Feel free to contact me on

bridget.penman@biology.ox.ac.uk.

I have put together a short list of reading and listening material (see below), to help you prepare to study Biology at university.

I am really looking forward to meeting you all soon, and congratulations again!

Best wishes

Bridget

Preparatory material

A biological essay

Oxford is famous for its tutorials. These are opportunities to discuss a specific topic with an academic in a small group (typically 2-4 students in size). You will often be asked to write an essay on the tutorial topic. But how does one write an essay on a biological topic? You will have plenty of time during the coming years to explore this and find your own voice, but to start with some inspiration, I wanted to share an essay by a famous biologist: *On Being the Right Size* by JBS Haldane.

You will find a copy in [this online folder](#). Please also see my additional document in the folder for pointers about how to get the most out of reading this essay.

Listening to researchers

The BBC has a wonderful radio programme/podcast [The Life Scientific](#), in which Professor Jim Al-Khalili interviews scientists about their lives and their research. I recommend [Anne Ferguson-Smith](#), [Bambos Kriacou](#), [Dale Sanders](#) and [Martha Clokie](#) (though by all means listen to whichever episodes you want!)

You can use these podcasts to practise notetaking and active learning. After, or whilst listening to an episode, write down the key scientific results that have been discussed. Try to think of a scientific question that you would ask the expert if you were in the room with them. Notice that there are things that the expert themselves does not know about their topic of study, and consider how exciting this is. The Biological Sciences degree at Oxford is research led, and we will be honest about our uncertainties!

Recommended Books

When you arrive, you will receive a longer list of recommended books from the Biology Department, that also includes some of the titles I list below. I wanted to focus, here, on introductory books that are likely to be available via your local library. Please do not feel obliged

to spend any money on books, either before your arrival or after you arrive – you will soon have access to the university and college libraries.

The Selfish Gene by Richard Dawkins

Plants: a very short introduction, by Timothy Walker

Molecular Biology: a very short introduction, by Aysha Divan & Janice Royds

The Animal Kingdom: a very short introduction, by Peter Holland

Ecology: a very short introduction, by Jaboury Ghazoul