Congratulations on achieving success in your exams and your place here at St Peter’s College. That’s really fantastic - I am really looking forward to working with you over the next four years.

Your first year at Oxford can be very different from the way the subject is taught in school but the way you approach requires (re)learning some critical study skills. The four-year biology (MBiol) course is challenging, extremely demanding of time and will require high levels of intellectual investment.

All this will culminate at the end of your first year with a set of public examinations – Prelims.

You will be better prepared for these challenges if you use your time wisely over the next few weeks. So, to help you prepare for these challenges, we have (i) a series of short tutorials planned and (ii) provide a suggested reading list for the summer.

**Online Tutorials**

One of the most important aspects of teaching in Oxford is through tutorials. These are small group, intensive sessions focused on a particular aspect of subject. They involve you undertaking some preparatory work, writing a science (evidence-based) essay and attending a group discussion to talk through the topic.

This style of teaching is likely to be different from that you have experienced. So, to introduce this study skill we have planned three **online tutorial sessions** through September.

For each tutorial, you will be expected to prepare a short essay on a topic and come along prepared to contribute to discussions. We will set topics, expectations on essay style/length and times for handing in this work, in advance and we will sort out times for these **online tutorials**.

***IMPORTANT: please send me your current email address where we can send this tutorial material***

**Suggested Reading**

Whilst the course lectures, practicals and tutorials are all planned, one of the critical aspects of studying at undergraduate level is **self-directed learning**. This involves focusing on material, reading and taking notes. It is a very different style and approach to learning that is essential to get to grips with early on in your degree studies. This suggested reading will
allow you to develop these sorts of skills – and should give you a neat introduction to
interesting aspects of biology (and science).

**General Introduction:** While these books may not be on your recommended reading for the
first-year course, they will, I feel, give you a very good foundation and get you into a
biological-thinking frame of mind.

You are not expected to get them all, but when looking through them all but it is important
to start to develop key study skills: note taking; critical thinking; rapid reading....


**Quantitative Studies:** Biology is rich in the application of mathematics (see
[http://merg.zoo.ox.ac.uk](http://merg.zoo.ox.ac.uk) for an example 😊). As such, and in contrast to popular belief,
biology is a highly quantitative subject. It involves the use of statistics, the development of
mathematical models and understanding their application. Many (if not most) first students
are poorly prepared for and often very intimidated by these quantitative aspects of the
course. *This need not be the case.*

If you spend some time this summer preparing yourself for this aspect of the course, it will
be highly rewarding and pay dividends later! Toward that end, I highly recommend the
following two books:


This book is highly recommended if you did not take A-level mathematics (and even if you
did it is probably worth the time reading it!)


This is an excellent, highly readable introduction to the concepts you will have to master
during the quantitative methods course. It is a recommended textbook and make sure you
attempt to do some of the problems at the end of each chapter.

*It cannot be emphasised enough how important it is for biologists to understand and use quantitative methods. The more time you spend now, the greater the benefits in the long-term...*
**Philosophy of Science:** Lastly (or perhaps this should be first) to prepare yourself to start thinking about science, I recommend you look through either or both of the following books:


As I mentioned, it will be fantastic to have you here at St. Peter’s and, I am looking forward to meeting you again and getting started on our intellectual pursuits.

I hope that you are really excited about coming to Oxford. I will meet you during the online tutorial sessions and in person at the start of term but if you have questions before then, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

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