

Hello new Asnac!

First off, congratulations on getting your place at Cambridge, and especially at Pembroke, which is of course the nicest college! My name's Katie and I'm the second-year Asnac at Pembroke. Sadly there are no third-year Asnacs at Pembroke – we're a rare breed.

As the only Asnac in my year, and therefore the subject rep, I've been asked to give you an idea of what to expect during your time at Pembroke. In first year you'll be studying six papers, which you choose from ten options. Most people arrive with a fairly good idea of which papers they're interested in, but the first few weeks are flexible and you can try out different classes if you're not sure – for instance, I decided to take up Medieval Welsh a few weeks into term, and everyone was fine about it. (Paul, our Director of Studies, when I asked him if changing papers would be a problem, said to me in a tone of honest bewilderment, "Someone wants to do Welsh – why would that be a problem?") In my first year I went to lectures for all the papers apart from Paleography and Latin, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have about the other papers when we meet up for the subject lunch during Freshers' Week.

Some bad news – while the other freshers are getting drunk and going shopping, you will be dragged into the Asnac department for a 3-day introduction to the subject. These were the longest three days I actually encountered at Cambridge, but very worthwhile. Everybody starts at the beginning with Asnac, and the main aim of the introductory course is to make sure everybody is up to speed on grammar. I'd never done much grammar at school, so this was a big help for me, and I was surprised how fast we all picked it up. You also get to do a mini-supervision with a potential supervisor, which enables you to try out a subject you're not sure about, and find out how supervisions work. Basically you write an essay (a very short one) and discuss it one-on-one with your supervisor.

At the end of first year (ie in June) you'll be sitting Prelim exams in four of your chosen papers, and Preliminary Assessment Tests (PATs) in the other two papers at the end of Lent term (ie in March). The PATs are straight-forward and are basically designed to make sure you haven't been asleep all year. The Prelims are less fun, but they don't count towards your degree (or anything else really) so there's no need to stress about them. You'll be given a certain number of supervisions in each of your four Prelim subjects. I found supervisions a bit scary initially – I'd never had to do anything like them in school – but they are very helpful, and most supervisors will go out of their way to make you feel at home, and clever, during the discussion. You'll be given a reading list, of which you read as much as possible (usually around 8 – 12 articles/chapters, not the entire list), and you usually have around a week to write the essay.

The number of lectures per week varies depending on which papers people are taking. History papers involve one lecture a week, and lots of independent reading.

Language papers involve one literature lecture per week, and one language class (two for Old Irish, and I think four for Beginners' Latin), and homework involves translating texts which you'll then go over in class. There's no need to do any language preparation before you arrive, other than maybe reading some of the literature in translation. My main advice for language classes would be to avoid getting behind with the class translations, as you will be expected to have done the homework if you turn up for class.

Although Asnac is ostensibly an arts subject, we, unlike almost all other arts students, actually have to get up in the mornings and go to our lectures. Asnac lectures are geared towards the course, and you get useful hand-outs and things, so life is a lot easier if you can make it to your lectures. We tend not to start any earlier than 10am, so it's still more civilised than school.

You'll be living in college during your first year. I found this a great experience – not only is Pembroke a beautiful place to live, but it makes it really easy to get to know the other students, and Pembroke is very central so you're nice and close to both shops, lectures and 'trough' (college name for the dining hall). Freshers' Week is very relaxed and well-organised, with plenty to do and lots of opportunities to make new friends, and very little pressure to conform to any kind of stereotypes. Everyone can be themselves at Pembroke, it's a very friendly place. Your college family will probably show you around, and you'll be given a tour of the Asnac department to make sure you can find your way to lectures, round the library, etc. If you need directions, want advice, have locked yourself out of your room or suchlike, the Pembroke porters are always patient and helpful. And, if you have any other questions, feel free to get in touch with me and I'll do my best to help out.

Looking forward to meeting you soon, and hope you enjoy the rest of the summer!

Katie x

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