

Academic Philosophy

The Newbury Hall Curriculum develops students' academic literacy across the disciplines. We work with each of our students as an individual to build their knowledge and skills and help them successfully face the challenges of understanding and responding creatively to complex ideas in English. With its intellectual, ethical and existential content, the Newbury Hall Curriculum is meaningful because it broadens interests and purposeful because it furthers ambitions. Academically literate students can generate both informed and personal opinions in fluent English, and enjoy being challenged by tutors they respect.

A blend of traditional methodology and contemporary innovations supported by robust research findings provides clear structure within which tutors can be maximally responsive to their students. Our small tutorial groups allow us to effectively support and challenge students of all prior abilities, whilst the variety of subjects and skills covered means that the Newbury Hall Curriculum is suitable for language development, to prepare for subject exams, to support home education, or simply for those seeking a more satisfying academic experience. Students may come for intensive short courses or for longer periods.

The Newbury Hall Curriculum enlivens the mind and emotions with a combination of rigorous entry profiling and progress monitoring, extensive literacy support, global cultural issues, inspiring biographies, debates, guided research projects, writing craft workshops, embedded and reactive grammar and pronunciation, skills outcomes in response to students' ambitions, eloquence workshops, training in philosophical thinking, etc.

Students develop a confidence founded on genuine improvements in their knowledge and skills and in increasingly proficient English.

Reports and updates to parents and a close relationship between our residence and academic teams ensure that we are all working together in the best interests of each student, whilst regular certificates and awards ensure that progress and excellence are rewarded and motivation to succeed continues to grow.

Literacy Support

Additional literacy support is provided for students on an individual basis as required and typically involves 1:1 phonics and reading skills sessions to help them better access their other lessons.



Entry Profiling & Progress Monitoring

Diagnostic entry profiling may include level and skills tests for language, character profiling, subject-specific tests, use of portals for career and university interests and planning, etc.

Changes to students' overall proficiency in academic English are tracked using weekly 100-gap C-tests. To this end, students' aim is to acquire as much new language and knowledge as possible during the week; we do not 'teach a little, test a little', but 'teach a lot, test a lot'. Students do, however, also take weekly spelling tests and pronunciation drills, enjoy a general knowledge quiz, present their guided research projects and complete a series of reading comprehension tests using a state-of-the-art adaptive online platform. Longer-term monitoring involves tracking reading and spelling ages, IELTS and subject mock-exam results, etc.

Exam Skills

If studying for specific exams, students follow a timetable that incorporates alternative or additional exam-skills sessions and extensive mock exams with feedback from tutors and progress tracked. If deemed beneficial, additional mock exam sessions may be timetabled over evenings or weekends to provide the best support and practice possible.

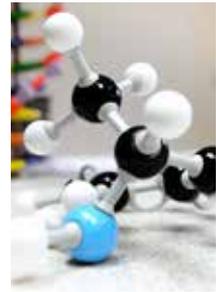
Subjects

The Newbury Hall Curriculum covers topics from across the academic disciplines for all students, and those wishing to prepare for courses or exams such as IGCSE may also attend dedicated lessons. Language-oriented programmes include subject lessons, and subject lessons include language support.



Prep Supervision

We view homework as prep (preparation) for future lessons. Dedicated areas of the school serve as quiet evening study areas under the tight supervision of staff providing learning support and checking students' prep diaries. Prep is typically two hours most evenings with more expected over weekends.



Language, Academic & Life Skills: English through Meaningful Content (EMC)

The core principle of EMC lessons, as with much of the Newbury Hall Curriculum, is that of ‘new knowledge and skills in the service of language acquisition and better thinking’.

In EMC lessons, tutors responsibly curate topics from a range of academic sources across the disciplines so that students learn something real as well as language, be it relevant to their own life and ambitions directly, to exams, or of general-knowledge interest. Lessons work towards tangible outcomes: the eloquent expression of ideas shared in speech and writing through intensive, critical reading, seminar-style discussions, clarification of lexical items arising, etc.

In a ‘TED Talk & Talk’ variation of EMC lessons, students use a set of analytical and reflective prompts to take notes from and re-present what they have chosen to watch based on their individual interests and ambitions. They thereby experience a model of a good presentation, broaden their knowledge of new theories, research, technologies, artwork, etc and practise note-taking ready for university lectures.



Biographies, Speeches & Quotations

Students learn how some of ‘the great and the good’ of global culture have built their ideas and achievements. For teenagers, this introduces them to worthy role models and helps them consider the context of their own lives from a broader perspective. Through speeches and quotations, students get a taste of rhetoric as well as some quotes to throw into ‘intellectual’ conversation. Students gain familiarity with the ideas, accomplishments and language of big thinkers and achievers on the world stage and a deeper appreciation of their own potential.



Debates, Ethics & the Self

“Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil.”

C.S. Lewis (attributed)

A good debating forum is a space for students to enter liminality on ethical issues in the safety of the classroom. Motions are never trivial: they span the academic disciplines, cultural and values systems, matters of equality & diversity, social and personal issues, etc. Quality of language and ideas are paramount: students research existing arguments to better inform their opinions before debating and then contribute liberally while tutors help them structure and elaborate on their argumentation with a stock of functional and formal debating phrases. Choice of debate format is outcome-oriented: sometimes open and discursive, sometimes formal.

Over time, the application of more nuanced thinking to preconceived, simplistic notions means students gain confidence in sharing their ideas tentatively and learn to respond with thoughtful consideration and tolerance rather than vagaries of emotion. Students may discover incongruence among their own thoughts, feelings and beliefs, in moral dilemmas, intercultural comparisons, etc. This allows tutors to present themselves as models of open-minded, curious, critical and creative thinkers: as thinkers who enjoy thinking.

Writing Craft: Essays & Argumentation

Through an intensive focus on essays and argumentation, students learn how to write critical, creative and eloquent academic English around a formal structure. Such reasoning and writing ability - understanding and being more capable of producing the components of good arguments at text, paragraph, sentence and word levels - as well as the functional terminology and broad vocabulary base needed to support it, is useful across the board and an explicit focus of these weekly lessons.



Guided Research Projects

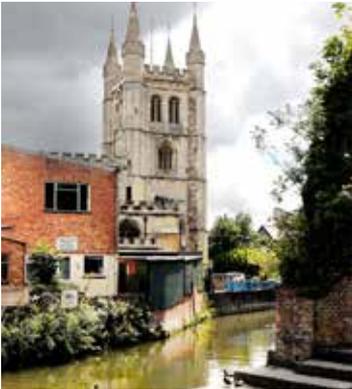
Guided research projects give students a chance to pursue academic, professional and personal interests and to develop good study, presentation and collaborative skills with their tutors and peers. Students work individually or in a small group over a series of lessons researching, redrafting and polishing their final piece before presenting their research to their peers and fielding questions on it towards the end of each week.

The research design and final product of projects may take a variety of forms: open research producing a video documentary, recorded interview with transcript, vlog, slideshow presentation, handbook or handout, etc; topics such as biographies, histories, predictions, semantics and symbology, critical media, cultural traditions, how-to guides, social systems such as the legal or political, etc may be covered; a career-related skill may be practised, such as creative writing, journalism, rhetoric, producing reports, drama, etc; a short open-access or MOOC online course may be followed with an institution such as the Open University, Allison, Coursera, etc. Students are encouraged to suggest their own project in discussion with tutors as to the knowledge, linguistic or skills benefits.



Cultural Calendar Journalism

Our in-house ‘cultural calendar’ allows students to identify world awareness days, cultural festivals and other important dates to inform a reporting and journalism workshop. Having chosen a topic, students research and report it in a single-page article which is added to our Cultural Calendar Magazine. Students thereby develop journalistic research skills, learn to work to tight deadlines, practise academic writing and become more aware of current and historical global issues. Their work is on display in school for peers and tutors to review and applaud.



Eloquence Walkshop

An 'eloquence walkshop' is a conversation class environment of sorts, but with better conversation in a better environment. Tutors and students come together to discuss sets of higher-order thinking questions whilst benefiting from some fresh air and greenery strolling around the local area. Everyone returns to school invigorated, conversing liberally and ready to continue productively into the next lesson.

Complexity, accuracy and fluency are all a focus: questions are generated from various taxonomies, immediate oral feedback is received and critical and creative fluency comes through repeated practice. The question prompts also help to generate ideas for later essays and to pre-empt speaking exam questions such as in IELTS. At a curriculum and whole-school level, students interact across languages and cultures, converse in English outside the physical classroom, and discuss topics over most academic disciplines and relating to ethics, careers, future plans, etc.

World News Webquest & Articles

A series of weekly research and quiz questions prompt students to explore current affairs through a webquest. They acquire collaborative research skills and broader knowledge of the world around them and the terminology used to present it in the media. Having gained an overview of some of the week's news through the webquest, students then look in depth at selected articles for intensive reciprocal reading and discussion practice on a specific issue.



Adaptive Reading

We use a state-of-the-art adaptive online platform that generates texts at exactly the right level of challenge for each individual student. Students read a series of short academic articles and quizzes throughout each week, each time given a text at a higher level if they answer correctly, or at a lower level if they do not. Lexile and grade levels are tracked, a motivational system of 'knowledge points' is used, and students' results are graphed in detail with a winner's certificate at the end of each week.

The platform also supports improvements in general knowledge across disciplines, which is a major predictor of success in any language reading test, as well as the reading skills of comprehension, inference, genre identification, etc - and of course vocabulary.



Embedded & Reactive Grammar and Pronunciation

Stand-alone grammar and pronunciation classes are a rare feature of the Newbury Hall Curriculum. Instead, tutors identify areas of both error and lack in what students know and can do, and adapt lessons to cover what students have either mislearnt, learnt only partially or are yet to learn at all. Grammar and pronunciation are thus embedded throughout most lessons in response to individuals and groups.



Literature & Readers' Theatre

Versions of classic texts - typically Shakespeare - curated for English level and age are used so that an entire play can be accessed in a single lesson. This broadens students' literary culture and encourages them to read for pleasure outside the classroom; they enjoy literature more because we intentionally do not study towards tests but towards personal engagement; they feel a sense of achievement at having 'done a little Shakespeare' in English; they build vocabulary, fluency, confidence, theatrical skills, etc; they discuss human issues in relation to the characters, plots and ethical dilemmas, etc; they may even feel more capable of tackling the full original or spending time at the theatre.

Dictations & Discussions

A traditional, formal dictation or more contemporary dictogloss is chosen by the tutor for its relevance in terms of language as well as academic, professional, personal or topical interest. Then follows a focus on language issues arising and a seminar-style discussion of the topic itself. Outcomes include skills practice in listening for detail, (re-)reading and (re-)drafting, as well as better knowledge of the topic itself.



Book Club & Presentations

In Book Club, students each choose a CEFR-levelled book, read it in its entirety overnight and then present it the following day. Tutors and other students are provided with prompts to help them ask explorative questions on the presenter's reading to make sure they have properly digested the plot and considered the issues it poses.

Book Club provides extensive reading practice for the consolidation of language at each student's individual level, a broadening of students' literary culture, and practice in presentation skills and in responding to the kinds of probing questions raised in seminar-style discussions. Titles range from the works of classic authors to contemporary fiction to informational prose.



Mindfulness

Short mindfulness sessions improve mental clarity and perceived wellbeing. Mindfulness practice can develop a person's self-knowledge and self-discipline, and has been shown to both alleviate depression and anxiety as well as slowing their onset. As an integral part of the school day they help students relax and concentrate, relieve the distractions of technology for a short time, and clear the mind.



Personal Trajectories & Global Citizenry

Discussing their personal trajectories with students allows them to see their ambitions and the paths to fulfilling them more clearly. For those who have clear goals, this may mean deliberate practice of interview skills, formalising CVs or drafting personal statements, etc; for those yet to be inspired, an exploration of university courses or direct entry to a profession, etc may be more relevant. Tutors may also do welfare and ambitions coaching with individual students or the class as a whole to help them develop greater clarity about their own future and wider social issues.

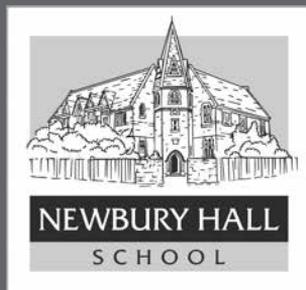
A knowledge of the global citizenry permits students to consider some of the wider matters in the world today - human rights, social issues, significant institutions and organisations, etc - to better locate their own life and ambitions in this context. Topics are taken from the PSHE Association curriculum and invited speakers from local and national organisations often feature.



Philosophical Thinking

Questioning sources of input from a more philosophical perspective - asking 'bigger' questions and sharing 'bigger' ideas - helps students develop academic literacy and sophistication of mind. Such lessons are a relatively light-hearted and open exploration of ideas following advice from the Philosophy Foundation on best practice in engaging teenagers with philosophy.

Students learn to enjoy contemplating life in more enlightened ways.



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