

TARA vs TSA

What changed, what transferred, and why an old TSA paper is useful practice but not a TARA mock.

THE SHORT ANSWER

For 2027 entry, sit **TARA** if your course requires TARA. Oxford’s current course list names TARA, not TSA, for the relevant courses. Old TSA Section 1 papers remain useful because UAT-UK itself links the archive, but TARA separates Critical Thinking and Problem Solving into two 40-minute modules and adds its own 40-minute, 750-word Writing Task.

Checked against the sources named in this guide, August 2026. British English. Free to share.

1 The booking answer is course-first

TSA is the historical test many Oxford applicants know. TARA is the current UAT-UK test named for relevant 2027-entry courses at Oxford and UCL. You do not choose between them according to which paper style you prefer. The exact course page decides.

Oxford’s 2027 admissions list names TARA for Economics and Management, History and Economics, History and Politics, Human Sciences, PPE, Experimental Psychology, and Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics. It also names TARA for the Astrophoria PPE Foundation Year. UCL’s requirements vary by department, so “UCL applicant” is not enough information: Computer Science and Mechanical Engineering use TARA in the 2027 cycle, while other courses may use a different test or none.

1 The tell

If advice says “Oxford uses TSA” without an entry year, it is historical. If it says “UCL uses TARA” without a course, it is too broad. Book from the current university course page.

2 The formats are close, not identical

	TARA	TSA Oxford archive
Multiple choice	22 Critical Thinking in 40 min, then 22 Problem Solving in 40 min	50 mixed questions in 90 min, normally 25 of each type
Writing	One from three prompts, 40 min, maximum 750 words	Historically one from four prompts, 30 min, constrained answer space
Delivery	Computer at Pearson VUE; erasable booklet	Archive papers were paper-based
Scoring	Separate 1.0–9.0 scores for CT and PS; Writing Task unscored by UAT-UK	Historical TSA scale and Oxford use do not convert into TARA scores
Knowledge	No subject-specific knowledge; basic listed maths for PS	Same broad thinking-skill ancestry

The average multiple-choice pace is strikingly similar:

$$\frac{2400}{22} = 109.1, \quad \frac{5400}{50} = 108.$$

3 What transfers cleanly

The figures are seconds per question. The near match makes TSA useful for pace. The separation makes it imperfect: unused Critical Thinking time cannot rescue Problem Solving in TARA, or vice versa.

UAT-UK says TARA's scored modules share a common history with TSA and BMAT Section 1. Its preparation page links TSA Section 1 papers from 2008–2023 and BMAT Section 1 papers from 2003–2023.

Use the archive for:

- identifying conclusions, assumptions and reasoning errors;
- drawing only the conclusion the passage supports;
- selecting relevant information from tables, schedules and rules;
- finding procedures in unfamiliar numerical settings;
- recognising structural similarity between problems;
- maintaining roughly 108–109 seconds per multiple-choice item.

The old labels and thought processes are valuable. The old score table is not.

4 What needs adapting

1. **Split the paper.** Build separate 22-question, 40-minute sets for Critical Thinking and Problem Solving.
2. **Move working off the question.** Display the PDF on a monitor and use a separate sheet, because live TARA is computer-based.
3. **Use the current Writing Task instruction.** Practise one of three prompts, three required moves, 40 minutes and no more than 750 words.
4. **Do not convert marks.** Record raw accuracy and error causes. UAT-UK does not publish a TSA-to-TARA conversion.
5. **Save current material.** Use the TARA specimen and Pearson player for final-format rehearsal after learning from the archive.

Worked example A relevant-selection problem that transfers

A concert hall has 240 seats. Thirty are reserved for performers' guests. All remaining seats are sold. Of the sold tickets, 60% are student tickets at £12; the rest are adult tickets at £18. Venue hire costs £1,620 and printing costs £85. What is the ticket revenue?

The costs are irrelevant because the question asks for revenue. Seats sold:

$$240 - 30 = 210.$$

Student and adult ticket counts:

$$0.60 \times 210 = 126, \quad 210 - 126 = 84.$$

Revenue:

$$126 \times 12 + 84 \times 18 = 1512 + 1512 = \boxed{3024}.$$

Correct: The answer is £3,024. The capacity, reservation and price split are needed; the two costs are not.

Trap: Subtracting hire and printing calculates a form of surplus, not the revenue requested.

The question could sit naturally in either archive tradition or TARA. The delivery and score interpretation are the parts you must update.

5 A paper ladder that preserves the scarce material

Stage	Material	Job
1	TARA specification and Question Guide	Learn the exact modules, question types and Writing Task instruction
2	One old TSA or BMAT Section 1 set, untimed	Label question type and first move; ignore the old score scale
3	Archive sets split by type	Repair one skill at a time, then mix it again
4	Custom 22-in-40 sets	Rehearse TARA's module boundary and reach
5	TARA specimen	Check current stem language and explanations
6	Pearson practice test	Rehearse navigation, screen delivery and the full sitting

Do not spend both current official versions in Week 1. The archive supplies volume. The specimen supplies teaching. The Pearson player supplies dress rehearsal.

2 Try it

Take one TSA Section 1 paper and mark every item CT or PS before solving. Build two separate clocks. Stop each group after 40 minutes or 22 questions, whichever comes first. You have turned useful ancestry into a closer TARA drill without pretending it is a live TARA form.

6 Sources

UAT-UK, TARA and TARA Preparation Materials

Current format, scoring and delivery: [TARA overview](#). UAT-UK's linked TSA and BMAT archive: [preparation materials](#).

University of Oxford, TSA Question Guide

The historical 50-question, 90-minute mixed format and 30-minute Oxford Writing Task. [Read the archived guide](#).

University of Oxford, admissions tests for 2027 entry

The current list of courses requiring TARA and the October-sitting rule for standard Oxford applicants. [Check Oxford](#).

TSA papers are practice ancestry, not released TARA papers. Use the current university page to decide what you must sit. UniGenius is independent.