



Vying for Prestige - Oxford and Cambridge Universities

A) Warm up

1. In your country, what are the most prestigious universities, and do they have a rivalry between them?
2. What do you know about Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England?
3. Would you describe yourself as a competitive person?

B) Adapted Text - Vying for Prestige - Oxford and Cambridge Universities

Vying for Prestige - Oxford and Cambridge Universities

Adapted from an article published in 2010 by BBC Travel

So good they named it once: Oxbridge. In many people's minds England's two most **prominent** university cities are interchangeable, forever linked to each other by history, tradition and academic heritage.

However, this is far from the truth.

It is not just a geographic divide which separates them, although they lie over 100km (around 67 miles) apart. While they have both just celebrated 800 years of scholarly study, the key attribute Oxford and Cambridge universities share is a strong pride - and a powerful desire **to prevail** over their rival.

The most physical demonstration of this rivalry is, famously, the annual University Boat Race: one spring Saturday each year the Light Blues (Cambridge) and Dark Blues (Oxford) each send their finest eight rowers to row the 4 miles and 374 yards along the Thames River between Putney and Mortlake in west London. In the men's

race, Cambridge have won a total of 85 races since 1929, and Oxford have won 81. Oxford, however, are enjoying more success during this current period, so will be aiming to **topple** Cambridge from the top of the leaderboard in the coming years.

However, the differences go far beyond the colour of rowing vests; linguistic **quirks** are **cherished** and held on to with pride.



For example, in Cambridge you might wander into a college and admire its fine “cloistered court” - but in Oxford you would be in a “quadrangle”. And the students running up the steps in the corner of the court might be late for their “tutorial”; if they are in Oxford, though, they will be heading to “supervision” instead.

They certainly would not want to be reported to the college's Master - whereas in Oxford they would be wary of getting into trouble with the college's Warden, Dean, Provost, President, Rector or Principal.

Oxford has produced **numerous** scholarly fantasy writers. Relax with a pint in the Eagle & Child pub, known locally as the “Bird & Baby”, and you can imagine CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien debating their Narnia and Middle-Earth epics, as they did last century. Characters from Phillip Pulman’s novels can also be heard around the colleges.

Cambridge, though, **has gained an edge over** Oxford in terms of the sciences. Here Isaac Newton theorised, Darwin discussed evolution, Crick and Watson discovered DNA and Stephen Hawking hypothesised. Admittedly, literary greats studied here, too: Byron, Tennyson, Wordsworth and Nabokov, and that is just the beginning.

But it is not just the universities that **cherish** their unique natures - despite both **boasting** absorbingly historic colleges, churches, libraries and museums, the nature of each town is quite unlike the other.

It has been said that Oxford is more like a city with a university, while Cambridge is more like a university with a city around it. Certainly, despite the symbolic “dreaming spires”, Oxford - with its industrial heritage of automotive production, including Morris and Mini cars - feels more urban.

Oxford is also continuously **raising the bar** in terms of culture; its fascinating museums include the Ashmolean - Britain's oldest public museum, built in 1683, packed with artistic and historic treasures.

Cambridge, on the other hand, has peaceful meadows leading down to the river with wonderful views of the old colleges, giving it a more countryside feel than “the other place”, as its students jokingly refer to Oxford.



But there is one thing that demonstrates best how **quirky** this rivalry really is. The tradition of “punting” - **propelling** a long, flat-bottomed boat along the river - is popular in both cities. Punts can be rented from alongside Magdalene Bridge in Cambridge, and Magdalen Bridge in Oxford - is it a coincidence that the two bridges have nearly exactly the same name?

But whereas in Oxford the “poler” works from the sloping end of the punt, in Cambridge you stand at the flat end to push. Which is better and why? What does that even mean? Who knows, and who cares - it is the tradition that is the point, not the reason!

The original article can be found in the link below:

<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20100719-the-oxford-versus-cambridge-gloat-race>

C) Key Words from Context

Based on the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

A quirk	prestige	to gain an edge over	to boast
To raise the bar	numerous	Prominent	to prevail
to vie for	to propel	To cherish	to topple

1. To remove someone from power or a powerful position at the top:

"Can anyone _____ Google in the race for search engine superiority?"

2. To talk with too much pride about your achievements or what you own: _____

"He _____ at length about his promotion."

In the article, the meaning is to have something that you should be proud of. This is an excellent phrase to talk about the facilities of your business:

"The hotel _____ a large swimming pool."

3. Many: _____

"We collected our data from _____ sources."

4. To compete intensively in order to achieve something: _____

"Many candidates are _____ the job position."

5. Important or famous in your field. This is preferable to famous especially in areas such as business, politics, academia, sciences or the arts: _____

"She is one of the most _____ economists in the world today."

6. To protect and care for something in a loving way: _____

"We really _____ our customers and staff."

7. To drive or push something forwards: _____

"It was his first essay on electromagnetism which really _____ him to prominence."

8. Widespread admiration and respect either for a person or an institution based on their achievements: _____

"Many people want to work at the company purely due to its _____ on the world stage."

9. To get an advantage or slightly superior position over a competitor:

"The new improved product will surely help the company to _____ over its competitors."

10. A strange characteristic of a person, culture, tradition or thing: _____

"Our Christmas traditions have many interesting _____."

11. To prove yourself to be more powerful or superior after a long battle:

"Who will _____ in the battle for sales this summer season, Pepsi or Coca Cola?"

12. To raise the standards against the competition: _____

"Apple have really _____ with the release of the latest iphone."

D) Comprehension

Can you answer the questions below about the text?

1. What does the author claim is a common misconception about Oxford and Cambridge?

2. What 3 things do Oxford and Cambridge Universities have in common in the 3rd paragraph?

3. What are Oxford aiming to do in the next few years of the famous boat race?

4. What are some examples of the “linguistic quirks” that the author refers to?

5. What does the author advise you to do with a beer in Oxford?

6. According to the author, what is contradictory about the overall symbolism and the overall feel of Oxford as a city?

7. What is one way that the students of Cambridge University mock Oxford?

8. What do you think is the writer’s attitude towards the differences in punting styles?

E) Key Words in a New Context

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

A quirk	prestige	to gain an edge.	to boast
To raise the bar	numerous	prominent	to prevail
to vie for	to propel	To cherish	to topple

The Search Engine Arms Race

Google has dominated the search engine world for many years, but could Microsoft be set to _____ it? Microsoft has teamed up with OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, a cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology which is about to _____ in terms of providing information based on a search query. ChatGPT is able to provide its own detailed answer to your search query. Not only that, but it is also to write a presentation, a recipe, a meeting agenda, even an essay when it is given a few prompts. It _____ the ability to do all this within a matter of seconds. This technology could help Microsoft’s Bing search engine to _____ over Google’s search engine for the first time in over a decade.

Naturally, Google feels threatened by the fact that this new technology could suddenly _____ Microsoft and its software to renewed _____ in the battle for supremacy and _____. Consequently, Google has since announce that it is also working on its own answer to ChatGPT, which it claims will be superior to the AI capabilities of ChatGPT.

However, this technology is not simply a matter of raising the bar for the quality of searches, it could completely change the game in terms of how we use search engines in the future. Instead of typing in a query and being presented with a list of _____ websites which can help to answer it, this new technology could simply answer our query with as much detail as is necessary without needing to visit a site at all.

Could we also be entering into an era where whole speeches, non-fiction books or even literature could be written by AI. Will this become vastly superior to anything that a human could write, or will we still _____ the _____ and imperfections of something written by human hands, or typed by human fingers?

Either way, expect a fascinating race over the coming years as the two companies _____ superiority in big tech. Who will _____?