



FACULTY OF
**MEDIEVAL
AND
MODERN
LANGUAGES**

Information for the Preliminary (Prelim) course in

FRENCH

2025/26

This handbook gives subject-specific information for your Prelim course in French.

For general information about your studies and the faculty, please consult the Faculty's [Undergraduate Course Handbook](#)

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SUB-FACULTY TEACHING STAFF

The Sub-Faculty of French is part of the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages. For a complete list of members, please see:

<http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/people/french>

On that page you can see the list ordered in different ways. The first is by 'post': here you will see whether a member is a 'postholder' in the Sub-Faculty as well as a college tutor, or whether they work only for a specific college or colleges. Most of your lectures will be given by 'postholders'. You can also choose to see the list in alphabetical order by surname, or by the period of teaching and research specialisation. You may have a few tutorials outside your college during your first year. In the second and final year most students taking French will be taught by tutors from more than one college.

THE PRELIM COURSE

The first year of the French course is designed to effect a transition from the kind of work you have done at school to the kind of work you will move on to when you start preparing for the Honour School in your second year. Your language skills will be consolidated and improved, and you will be introduced to some techniques of literary study. The examination is taken at, or just after, the end of Trinity Term and consists of four papers. If you are studying French Sole, the examination is taken at the same time, but you will have three further papers.

LANGUAGE

Language Teaching

French language teaching is provided mostly by your college, but at some stage in the year the Senior Lecturer in French, Michaël Abecassis, typically organises a series of classes open to students from any college, if they feel that their French grammar needs further attention (see below). Classes in college will give you practice in all aspects of the work on which you will be examined, and will provide you with classes to improve your spoken French. Tutors will offer advice about the use of dictionaries and grammars.

The Senior Lecturer in French organises centralised grammar classes which are open to all students who feel they need extra help on top of their college classes. (Similar additional grammar classes are offered by graduate teaching assistants.) Further classes cover essay writing, and oral/aural skills. The Senior Lecturer in French offers advice throughout the year to newly-appointed lecteurs and lectrices, helps college language tutors to network effectively, organises and conducts intensive language-learning weekends for specialists and non-specialists, and plays an important part in reviewing and developing the syllabus for language teaching.

Examinations: all parts of Prelims except the Oral and Paper XI Introduction to Film Studies are assessed by in-person three-hour examinations in Trinity Term as detailed below.

Language Examinations and Oral Requirement

PAPER I - French Grammar, Translation, and Summary

(3 hour in-person).

1. Grammar Test

10 short sentences to translate into French, testing common, not exceptional, points of French grammar such as those explained in R. Hawkins and R. Towell, *French Grammar and Usage*, 4th edn., 2015.

2. Prose Translation into French.

A passage of 150-200 words of English (post 1950) to be translated into French.

3. Summary

A passage of 500-600 words of French from a work of reflective, analytical or critical writing. To be summarised in French, using 150-180 words and bringing out clearly the writer's argument. Candidates must not simply reproduce the expression of the original passage.

PAPER IIA and IIB - Translation

(1½ each / 3 hours in total, in-person)

IIA Unprepared translation into English (90 minutes)

A passage of about 250 words of French, taken from a post-1900 creative or discursive text testing accuracy in negotiating common grammatical and syntactic structures and some appropriately challenging vocabulary, but also requiring imagination and fluency in English expression.

IIB Prepared translation into English from Prescribed Texts (90 minutes)

A passage of about 300 words from one of the three novels set for Paper IV, i.e., excluding the medieval text.

Oral

In order to pass the Preliminary Examination in French, candidates must present a certificate of attendance and active participation in oral classes. Candidates must attend and actively participate in no fewer than eight oral classes of at least one hour before the end of the fourth week of the Trinity Term of their first year. The classes will help with proper pronunciation and intonation, and include discussion in French of passages dealing with issues in contemporary French culture. Candidates are required to submit, via the Senior Tutor of their college or society, to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator, Modern Languages, Examinations Office, The Schwarzman Centre, a certificate endorsed by the Senior Tutor, and their French tutor (the latter acting on behalf of the sub-faculty of French) stating that they have attended, and participated in, the required number of classes. Candidates who fail to satisfy this requirement for the June examination shall have their mark for the written paper in French language (French Paper I) reduced by ten per cent. Candidates for the September examination in French language who have not previously in that academic year satisfied the attendance requirement will be examined viva voce to demonstrate their competence in spoken French. Certification is required by noon on the Friday of 5th week of Trinity Term.

LITERATURE

Many students begin the course without having had the opportunity to undertake much formal study of French literature. Both literature papers require you to undertake a close reading in the original French of a range of literary texts selected from different periods and different genres so that you will gradually build up your reading speed and learn how to write critical commentaries and essays. This will provide a sure grounding for the literary study you will do from the second year onwards.

PAPER III - Short Texts

(Note that if you are doing French as part of the Joint School of European and Middle Eastern Languages, you do not take this paper)

This paper will introduce you to the techniques of close reading through the study of four short works. You will certainly need to show that you know the texts well by establishing the context of the passages, but the skill is to show that you can comment pertinently and in detail on the words and ideas in front of you. When commenting on texts written in verse, you are required to show an awareness of the author's use of versification.

- (i) Montaigne, 'Des Cannibales' from *Essais*, vol. 1 (recommended edition: *Essais*: 'Des cannibales' et 'Des coches', ed. by Tarpinian, Éditions Ellipses, 1994)
- (ii) Racine, *Phèdre* (recommended edition by Raymond Picard, Gallimard 'Folio', 2015)
- (iii) Verlaine, *Romances sans paroles* (recommended edition by Arnaud Bernadet, GF-Flammarion, 2018 [2012].
- (iv) NDiaye, *Papa doit manger* (recommended edition Éditions de Minuit, 2003)

This course is examined by 3 hour in-person examination; three commentaries from a choice of four, one on each text

PAPER IV - French Narrative Fiction

This paper introduces you to four narrative texts written between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century:

- Anon, *La Chastelaine de Vergy*
- Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*
- Sand, *Indiana*
- Condé, *Traversée de la mangrove*

This paper will be examined by three essays in the form of a 3-hour in-person examination. There will be a choice of two essay questions on each text, and you are required to answer three questions, each on a different text. You will need to show that you can construct a clear, relevant, and convincing argument, supported at every stage by detailed knowledge of the text. If your argument can be enhanced or sharpened by making comparisons between texts, you are positively encouraged to do so, though you are not penalised for not doing so.

Lectures, first introducing you to the study of literature, and subsequently turning to the four short texts, setting them in context and showing how passages from them might be commented on in detail, are provided in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms. There are also lectures introducing you to techniques of versification. In Hilary and Trinity Terms there are lectures on the longer narrative texts. Throughout the year you will be required to read and write about the prescribed texts for your tutor in college who will discuss your work with you in a series of tutorials or seminars. Lecturers will offer bibliographical advice, as will your tutors.

FRENCH SOLE PRELIM

If you are doing French 'Sole', in addition to the above papers you also take three further papers.

PAPER XI Introduction to French Film Studies

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth- and twenty-first century film directors. In your essay writing you will be able to engage with their ideas and with their particular way of realising them. The prescribed films are:

- Jean-Luc Godard: *Pierrot le fou* (1965)
- Maurice Pialat: *À nos amours* (1983)
- Claire Denis: *Beau travail* (1999)
- Céline Sciamma: *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (2019)

Course outline:

This paper aims to equip students with basic skills in film analysis. It is taught in two parts in Michaelmas Term.

The first part is a methodological one, consisting of four lectures devoted to four international films in Weeks 1-4. It presents the basic concepts of film analysis: montage, story, self-reference, and spectatorship. These international films are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. The films are: Sergei Eisenstein: *Potemkin* (1925); Alfred Hitchcock: *39 Steps* (1935); Michaelangelo Antonioni (1967): *Blow-up*; Claire Denis: *Beau Travail* (1999).

The second part is a study of the four prescribed French films above, which illustrate these concepts in the context of French history and society. This part of the course is taught in seminars in Weeks 2, 4, 6, and 8; there are no lectures within the language-specific part of the course. Students are encouraged to develop their skills in scene analysis through seminar discussion. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the films, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. This course is examined by certification at the end of term. Your tutor will be submitting your last essay (which will either be the essay on Céline Sciamma, or, if you are doing an oral presentation on Sciamma, the essay on Claire Denis) to the examiners.

PAPER XII - Introduction to French Literary Theory

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth-century literary critics. In your essay writing you will be able to engage with their ideas about literature and with their particular way of expressing them. You will be encouraged to apply these ideas to your own reading of texts.

The prescribed texts are:

- **Valéry**, 'Questions de poésie' and 'Poésie et pensée abstraite', in *Théorie poétique et esthétique*, part of *Variété: Œuvres*, vol. I (Gallimard, 'Pléiade') [both essays are available electronically on Canvas]
- **Sartre**, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Gallimard, 'Folio') [Sections I and II only]
- **Barthes**, *Critique et vérité* (Seuil)
- **Cixous**, 'Le rire de la Méduse' in *Le rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, ed. by Frédéric Regard (Paris: Galilée, 2010).

The teaching for this paper takes place in Hilary Term weeks 5-8 and Trinity Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. This course is examined by 3-hour in-person examination; three essays on a choice of two questions on each text.

Paper XIII - Key Texts in French Thought

This paper will introduce you to four thinkers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In both essay and commentary writing you will be able to engage with their ideas and with their particular way of expressing them.

The prescribed texts are:

- **Descartes**, *Discours de la méthode*, edited by Laurence Renault (Garnier-Flammarion)
- **Rousseau**, *Discours sur l'inégalité* (Gallimard, 'Folio')
- **Beauvoir**, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Gallimard, 'Folio'), I, 'Introduction'; 'Mythes'; II, 'La femme mariée'; 'La mère'.
- **Césaire**, *Discours sur le colonialisme, suivi de Discours sur la Négritude* (Paris: Présence Africaine: 2004).

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term weeks 5-8 and Hilary Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay or commentary on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on

the fourth. Written work should include at least one essay and at least one commentary. The three-hour in-person examination in Trinity Term has one commentary and one essay question on each text. You will answer three questions, each on a different text: one commentary, and two essays.

WHEN DRAWING UP THIS HANDBOOK WE HAVE TRIED TO BE AS ACCURATE AND CLEAR AS POSSIBLE.

THE EXAMINING CONVENTIONS – A SEPARATE DOCUMENT – DETAILS THE STRUCTURE OF EACH EXAMINATION PAPER, INCLUDING RUBRICS. SEE THE RELEVANT SECTION OF 'COURSE INFORMATION' ON CANVAS:

[Examination conventions: MML UG Information \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

THE REVISED EDITION OF THE UNIVERSITY'S EXAMINATION DECREES AND REGULATIONS LIST THE EXAMINATION PAPERS AND THEIR PERMITTED COMBINATION FOR YOUR DEGREE COURSE. FOR FURTHER DETAILS THEY REFER TO THE HANDBOOK AND THE EXAMINING CONVENTIONS. SEE:

[Exam Regulations - Search \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

COURSES AND REGULATIONS ARE CONSTANTLY UNDER REVIEW, SO ALWAYS CHECK ALSO WITH YOUR COLLEGE TUTOR TO CONFIRM WHAT IS WRITTEN HERE AND IN THE EXAMINATION CONVENTIONS.

IN ADDITION, DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK FOR CLARIFICATION ABOUT THE COURSE FROM ANY MEMBER OF THE SUB-FACULTY WHO IS LECTURING TO YOU OR TUTORING YOU; WE WILL ALWAYS DO OUR BEST TO HELP.

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