

**ST EDMUND HALL
OXFORD OX1 4AR**

Preparatory reading for literature and language study in Russian

Congratulations on coming up to Oxford and St Edmund Hall to read Russian. Time to start thinking about the next stage in your study of this fantastic language and literature!

A point of essential general guidance on your Oxford education: The entire Oxford system throughout your course here relies on your having done the basic preparation for each term in the preceding vacation; terms are only 8 weeks long and highly intensive. It is therefore essential that you come up thoroughly acquainted with the texts that you are going to study in this first term. That does not mean the entire list in the first instance, but rather the works of literature you will study in Michaelmas Term. Ditto for further terms....The whole system is predicated on your having read and absorbed the texts and being ready to write essays and commentaries on them. There is no time to read them for the first time in term. This applies throughout the whole course – imagine reading *War and Peace* for the first time, plus two or three full-length critical works, and then writing an essay on it all in one week.

LITERATURE

The double aims of the Prelims course is to help you consolidate and improve your command of Russian grammar, vocabulary, syntax; and to introduce you to the study of literature, and Russian literature in particular, via two genre papers ('paper' is Oxford lingo for 'option' except you have no options in Prelims) composed of some masterpieces of poetry and prose. Nowadays you can find almost anything on the internet (look for reliable editions). Texts of the Derzhavin and Akhmatova with vocabulary are available in a bundle with notes to the Dovlatov from the Faculty Office in 41 Wellington Square, for which they charge you a couple of pounds each. The Dovlatov notes in particular are essential. Ask for the Russian Course A bundle. Although you will not be studying any of these last three authors until after Christmas, you should acquire the basic texts and familiarize yourself with them as much as possible. The entire syllabus and approach are laid out in the Handbook for Prelims, which is attached.

Tuition in the first year will take the form of lectures, classes, and tutorials. In the first year, language classes will consist of a prose class in which you translate from English into Russian; an Unseens class in which translation is in the opposite direction; and a grammar class taught centrally. There are also conversation sessions held weekly.

Michaelmas Term:

We will start with Pushkin, *Pikovaia dama*, *Mednyi vsadnik*, the Chekhov stories, and Lermontov's narrative poem *Mtsyri* (The Novice). Please make yourself thoroughly acquainted with these texts, able to translate any part of them on sight. By prepare I mean reading carefully in Russian with a view to comprehension in the first instance. It will be a struggle, but highly worthwhile and essential on the way to fluency. If you use the editions

recommended below then the notes and glossaries will help with vocabulary and particular problems of translation. There will be lectures on all these texts and the tutorial assignments will give you secondary literature. For the two Pushkin works, the Chekhov and the Blok, we recommend the Bristol Classical Press editions (now published by Bloomsbury) which have useful introductions, notes and vocabulary. Most of these texts are also on the web, but without the apparatus provided by the BCP editions. The Bristol Classical Press Catalogue is available from Bloomsbury Publishers: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk>

LANGUAGE:

Improving and securing your command of Russian grammar is one of the main goals of the first-year course, ideally setting you up to read heaps in Russian from year 2 and improving your active command of the written and spoken language. You can work toward that goal by reviewing declensions, conjugations, numbers and syntax systematically. Grammatical accuracy will be the first concern in your language classes, followed closely by attention to vocabulary and syntax. If you have not been taught e.g. declensions or conjugations parrot fashion, like multiplication tables, do your best to learn them securely before you come up. It is well worth your while devoting just a little extra time on a regular basis to securing the grammar at this stage.

Language classes are taught centrally in Russian by our Russian lecturers; translation classes are a college affair. There is no set syllabus, but any of the following reference books (most of them available by mail order from Blackwell's or, quicker, on Amazon) would be helpful. Offord and occasionally Wade are used in grammar classes, so it is advisable to have your own copy. The Prelims BCP texts assume a knowledge of Waddington's first book, so do not list words contained there in their vocabularies for the texts. We use the second Waddington book in translation classes, learning chunks throughout the first year.

Patrick Waddington: *A first Russian vocabulary*, Bristol Classical Press, £5.95

(the BCP literature texts' vocabularies list only words not given in this)

Patrick Waddington: *Russian by subjects*, Bristol Classical Press, £6.95

Terence Wade: *A comprehensive Russian grammar*, Blackwell, £16.99 in paperback (specify paperback, as hardback is £50). There is an accompanying exercise book, with answers, which you would find extremely useful for consolidating grammar.

Derek Offord: *Russian grammar course*, Bristol Classical Press, £14.99

BACKGROUND READING:

Reading a good history of Russia, will acquaint you with aspects of its social structure, political history, etc., very helpful in thinking about contexts for literature. Reading some literary history or about a single key figure like Pushkin should open up new dimensions:

G. Hosking, *Russia, People and Empire* (Fontana 1998, available in paperback); or the same author's *Very Short Introduction* published by OUP—great value!

Joseph Frank, *Between Religion and Rationality. Essays* (Princeton & Oxford, 2010). Worth

perusing.

Caryl Emerson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature* (CUP, 2008)

Andrew Kahn
Professor of Russian Literature, University of Oxford
Fellow and Tutor, St Edmund Hall, Oxford

