

Russian (in ML): Advice to first-years

Undergraduates in the first year have quite a lot of contact hours for literature and language. In the first term they will be taught out of college in central classes held in the Faculty. These include weekly prose classes [translation from English into Russian] and grammar classes. The latter are normally taught by the Faculty Lecturers in Russian, Mrs Natalia Keys and Dr Sasha Krasovitsky. The college lecturer Dr Jennifer Baines will teach vocabulary building and literature throughout the first year. Professor Andrew Kahn, the Fellow in Russian, usually teaches much of the literature scheduled for Hilary Term, but will also see the first-year undergraduates in the course of Michaelmas Term.

There is a very good mix of teaching modes. Undergraduate are expected to attend the lectures for Prelims, as posted on weblearn and published by the Faculty in the lecture list. These lectures cover all the core subjects in the literature syllabus. Literature tutorials/classes will involve both essay and commentary work and afford an essential opportunity to learn how to excel in these types of exposition.

Undergraduates can get off to a flying start by working systematically on the Russian language, especially aspects of grammar they find difficult. Language work is cumulative and requires momentum. So do consult reference grammars or textbooks and review areas of the language that you know require revision and improvement (this might mean going back over your “A” level works). That will make a big difference and enhance your learning when you are here. The course is well balanced between literature and language but literature does begin to pull away in the second year. So take advantage of the greater amount of formal instruction in language you are offered in the first year.

As for preparatory tasks, it's a good idea to have read as much of the reading lists as possible. It also helps enormously to have some grasp of Russian history. There are large and small textbooks. The recent Very Short Introduction to Russian History (OUP) by Geoffrey Hosking, an eminent specialist, is warmly recommended and can tell you an awful lot efficiently. I'd encourage that.

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