ST EDMUND HALL
OXFORD OX1 4AR

Preparatory reading for literature and language study in Russian (post A-level only)

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....

Undergraduates at St Edmund Hall and The Queen's College can expect to be taught at different points in the first year by the colleagues in Russian who are Prof Andrew Kahn, Dr Oliver Ready, and Dr Jennifer Baines.

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. 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.

The first-year syllabus is laid out in the course Handbook (attached). Nowadays you can find almost anything on the internet (look for reliable editions). Numerous Prelims texts will be available and accessible to you through Canvas once you are registered here. The works you'll read in Michaelmas Term, your first term, are widely available through other resources online. We will be starting with *Pikovaia dama*, his great narrative poem *The Bronze Horsem*an, a set of stories by Anton Chekhov and also making a start on Lermontov's narrative poem *Mtsyri*, sometimes called *The Novic*e. Please make yourself thoroughly acquainted with these texts, checking that you understand meaning and can translate into English. For the two Pushkin works and the Chekhov (as well as the Blok for Hilary Ter), we recommend the Bristol Classical Press editions 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 Duckworth Publishers (www.ducknet.co.uk). Prices for the texts are in the £8.95 range. Blackwell's Bookshops operate an ordering service (www.blackwell.com). It's always worth trying elsewhere on the Web, such as second-hand on www.amazon.co.uk. Your local bookshop can order direct from Duckworth.

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. Vocab building is particularly important.

Language classes are taught centrally in Russian by our Russian lectors; 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, such as anything by Robert Service or Geoffrey Hosking (both in paperback) 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:

D. Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform* (Longman, 1993)
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.

Literature and Culture:

Caryl Emerson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature* (CUP, 2008) is good on cultural concepts and prose.

A.K. July 2026