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### To all Incoming First Years reading French in 2023-24:

This letter, which I am sending on behalf of the Tutors in French, is intended to clarify how the first year course is structured and taught. What we offer here is a general outline of the Preliminary French course, its constituent parts, some reading you will need to do before you arrive in Oxford (assuming all goes well with your results in August), and how, over the next year, you'll be enabled to develop the range of different skills that a degree in Modern Languages requires and entails – from translation through to literary commentary, with all sorts in between! *Students doing French with another language or Joint Schools will receive something similar for the other part of their course. Students doing French sole will have extra French papers that are not addressed here.*

### Language work (Papers I and II)

All of your language teaching is provided 'in house' by St Edmund Hall in the First year. There are three languages classes a week, with preparation work to do for each class. These will be taught by the College Tutors and Lecturers in French, and by our Lectrice. Over the course of the year you will develop your skills in comprehension and expression, in translation between French and English, and your understanding of questions of both grammar and style.

**Please ensure that have developed the habit of working at French grammar exercises yourselves *before* you begin the course.** You might find the following useful:

- *Practising French Grammar: A Workbook*, by Roger Hawkins, Richard Towell, and Marie-Noëlle Lamy (available on Amazon for under £15)

You will need **language reference books** for language work throughout your course. There are no 'set' texts for this part of the course, but the following are useful:

- *French Grammar in Context*, edited by Margaret Jubb and Annie Rouxville (any edition is fine). One of the best language consolidation resources.
- *French Grammar and Usage*, edited by Roger Hawkins and Richard Towell (any edition is fine). A standard textbook used widely in Oxford.
- *A Comprehensive French Grammar*, revised by Glanville Price (any edition is fine). An older work, but very comprehensive.

A good *bi-lingual dictionary* (French to English and English to French) is essential, as is *Le Petit Robert* – still the best *monolingual* dictionary. Hard copies of these resources are available in our College Library.

The following **online resources** are recommended for language study:

- LEXILOGOS: a gateway into a number of online dictionaries and translation tools. If you are going to use Lexilogos for dictionary work, we recommend **ONLY** the following: Larousse, Wordreference  
[https://www.lexilogos.com/english/french\\_dictionary.htm](https://www.lexilogos.com/english/french_dictionary.htm)

We recognise the emergence of **AI technologies** such as ChatGPT. At present, the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages is still to publish its guidance on how to use AI in your

studies, what is allowable and what is not (especially in the context of assessment). At College level we shall discuss with you your previous experience of using ChatGPT and we will be able to give you guidance on the sort of role it might play in your studies at Oxford. At this stage, the rule of thumb is that **AI simply cannot do the work for you, and you should assume from the outset that it is no substitute for your own rigorous study.**

### **Literature work (Papers III and IV)**

Many of you will begin the course without having had the opportunity to undertake much formal study of French literature. The two first year literature papers (detailed on the next page) ask you to undertake a close reading in the original French of a range of literary texts selected from different periods and different genres, and to write about your response to them in English. This is to allow you to develop two skills at the same time: first, you will gradually build up your reading speed in French; and secondly, you will develop your own critical voice in English, by learning how to write commentaries and essays about French texts and their contexts (historical, political, theoretical, aesthetic etc).

These papers are taught through lectures, seminars and tutorials. There are weekly lectures given by members of the Modern Languages Faculty, and weekly seminars/tutorials in College. The essay and commentary work you do in the first year will provide a firm grounding for the literary study you will do from the second year onwards.

We begin the course with two weeks of introductory reflection on academic literary practice, focusing on questions such as: what is a commentary? what makes a good essay? when we read a text, how do we go about identifying its narrative voice, its style, its tone? In the third week of the course we'll begin exploring the **Paper III short texts**. We shall proceed chronologically, thus starting with Michel de Montaigne's 'Des cannibales' (see below). Paper III introduces you to the techniques of close reading required for writing commentaries and, to a lesser extent, essays. It is assessed by a portfolio of commentaries on each of the texts for study.

Each of the four Paper III texts exemplifies a different genre of writing: we'll cover sixteenth-century philosophical prose, seventeenth-century tragedy, nineteenth-century poetry, and twentieth-century drama. **We will expect you to have read all of the books to be studied in the first term (Michaelmas Term) before the start of term, i.e. before you arrive in Oxford, having acquired your own copies in the editions recommended below:**

1. Montaigne, 'Des Cannibales' from *Essais*, vol. 1 (*Essais: 'Des cannibales' et 'Des coches'*, edited by M. Tarpinian, Éditions Ellipses, 1994).
2. Racine, *Phèdre* (edited by Raymond Picard, Gallimard 'Folio', 2015)
3. Verlaine, *Romances sans paroles*, (edited by Arnaud Bernadet, édition avec dossier, 2e édition, Garnier-Flammarion, 2018).

As we have only two weeks of term time to study each text, it is imperative that you read them before we study them during term: real study starts with re-reading. You will find the work frustrating if you do not prepare well in advance. **It is important to acquire the recommended editions where possible – do not simply settle for the cheapest one that comes up on Amazon! Many lack editorial finesse and in some cases, sections of the text.** Furthermore, it is a waste of your time to read these books only in English

translation: literature and language work go together. You will improve your ability to read in French over time; don't worry if your progress is slow to begin with.

In the **second term (Hilary Term)** we continue with the Paper III format in weeks 1-2. The final short text we'll cover is a work of contemporary theatre raising questions about race and marginality. In week 3 we will begin work on **Paper IV narrative fiction**. Paper IV is taught (and examined) by essay. This paper introduces you to a further four texts, written between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century. We shall confront matters of gender, sexuality, relationships, and identity, as well as the various contexts that shape each text. So, our schedule for the second term is as follows:

1. NDiaye, *Papa doit manger* (Éditions de minuit, 2003)
2. *La Chastelaine de Vergy* (édition bilingue, by J. Dufournet & L. Dulac, Folio Classique, 2010)
3. Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (edited by René Pomeau, Garnier-Flammarion, 1964; get the 2006 reprint if you can)
4. George Sand, *Indiana* (edited by Béatrice Didier, Folio Classique, 1984)

In the **third term (Trinity Term)**, we work on the final Paper IV narrative text: Maryse Condé, *Traversée de la mangrove* (Paris: Mercure de France/Folio, 1992). Then we will look ahead to your second-year work, and to the Paper IV exam which will take place in June. There will be plenty of time for revision.

**To reiterate: you will need to acquire your own copies of ALL of the Paper III and Paper IV texts, ideally before you arrive in Oxford; and you should use the vacations preceding each term to read the texts to be studied that term. College Grant funds are available to support you in buying the books you will need.** You should retain the receipts for your book purchases as you will be able to apply for a College book grant of £100 when you arrive.

If you have any questions, do get in touch by email, and we will try to answer them; make sure you also consult the Faculty website and virtual learning environment (CANVAS) where there is a good deal more information:

<https://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/>

<https://canvas.ox.ac.uk/courses/37757>

Bonne lecture! And bon courage!



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