



FACULTY OF
**MEDIEVAL
AND
MODERN
LANGUAGES**

Information for the Preliminary (Prelim) course in

GERMAN

2025/26

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

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

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THE PRELIM COURSE

In the first year of the German course, you will consolidate and improve your language skills while exploring the culture of German-speaking countries. All students, whatever their course combinations and including beginners, will study literature from the 1880s to the beginning of the 21st century via a selection of representative works intended to introduce aspects of the development of genre while also addressing important themes of class, gender, and minority ethnic and racial identity in the German-speaking countries over the course of the long twentieth century. While you will engage with questions of literary style, language, and characterisation, and the ways in which authors experiment with these aspects of their craft, you will also be encouraged to see literature as a space for critical debate, in which a range of views and experiences are portrayed and analysed. Taking in canonical authors as well as Jewish and female perspectives, and including one film, the course engages with issues of inclusion and marginalisation and the impacts of systems of power. Non-beginners also study a diverse selection of poetry from the late medieval period to the present. German Sole students (i.e. those studying only German with no other language or Joint Schools subject) take additional papers, detailed below.

Your language work will include classes focussed on grammar and translation, aimed at improving your confidence in written and spoken German as well as your comprehension. Language work complements and enhances your study of German culture (and vice versa) and constitutes half of the Prelims course. The Sub-Faculty's commitment to highlighting the diversity of German-language culture is therefore a key element of our language teaching, too. In classes with the Lektor*innen, you will learn confidently to discuss topics including nationalism and ethnic difference, gender and women's emancipation, environmental issues, education and political systems. Translation classes in your college will help you to hone your style and expression in German and in English, while also introducing you to writers of various backgrounds from the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Preliminary Examination is taken at the end of the first year, and consists of the following:

POST-A-LEVEL COURSE

LANGUAGE

PAPER I

'Deutsche Gesellschaft und Kultur', focussing on the following topics: Generationen und Geschlechter; (Aus-)Bildung, wozu?; Umwelt; Nation und Nationalismus.

The examination will consist of two parts:

- i) Reading comprehension exercise (in German) on a passage relating to the theme of the paper.
- ii) One essay in German on a topic relating to the theme of the paper. A choice of questions will be set.

This paper will be examined as a 3-hour in-person examination.

PAPER II

This paper develops skills of translation into and from German, focusing primarily on prose passages in a modern literary register.

PAPER IIA - Translation into German

Translation into German of a prose passage.

PAPER IIB- Translation from German

Translation from German of a prose passage in a modern literary register.

This paper will be examined as a 3-hour in-person examination.

Books required for the language papers:

- Martin Durrell, *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage* (7th edition; Routledge)
- Martin Durrell, Katrin Kohl, Claudia Kaiser, *Practising German Grammar* (4th edition; Routledge)
- *Collins German Dictionary (Complete and Unabridged)*. Current edition.

Oral

There is no formal oral examination, but in order to pass the Preliminary Examination in German, colleges are required to present, for each candidate, a certificate of attendance and active participation in oral classes. Candidates must attend and actively participate in no fewer than eight oral classes in German of at least one hour before the end of the fourth week of the Trinity Term of their first year. The classes may consist of reading aloud with attention to proper pronunciation and intonation of German, and/or discussion of passages dealing with issues in contemporary German culture. The Senior Tutor of each candidate's college will be asked to submit to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator, Modern Languages, Examinations Office, The Schwarzman Centre, a certificate endorsed by the Senior Tutor and a Modern Languages Tutor (the latter acting on behalf of the Sub-Faculty of German) 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 each of the two written language papers in German reduced by ten marks. Candidates for a language paper in the September examination (re-sits) who have not previously in that academic year satisfied the attendance requirement will be examined *viva voce* to demonstrate at least basic competence in spoken German. Certification is required by noon on the Friday of 5th week of Trinity Term.

PAPER III – Drama and Poetry: Essay and Commentary

All non-beginners will study four prescribed dramas for this paper in Michaelmas Term (see prescription below). In addition, over the course of the first year (usually in Trinity Term, but potentially, depending on your college, in college classes at earlier points of the year), you will study a selection of poems from the anthology *Deutsche Gedichte 1500 Gedichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Hans-Joachim Simm (Insel, 2009) ISBN 3458174400.

The examination will comprise three exercises: (1) ONE essay on the prescribed plays, (2) ONE commentary set from ONE of the prescribed dramas (the drama from which the commentary passage will be set is to be identified each year; in 2025-26 it will be *Frühlings Erwachen*), and (3) ONE commentary from a choice of three of the prescribed poems.

Note that for the poems this is above all an exercise in close reading: you are not expected to have special knowledge about the context of the poems except for occasional details which will be given in tutorials and lectures. The lectures on the poems take place in the second half of Hilary and the first half of Trinity Term.

Examination will be by 3-hour examination (whether in-person or online to be confirmed).

The prescribed dramas are:

- Frank Wedekind, *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891) [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991. ISBN 3150079519]
- Bertolt Brecht, *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (1943) [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2024 (BasisBibliothek 25). ISBN: 978-3-518-18825-5]
- Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz* (1988) [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2023 [1995]. ISBN:3518389742]
- Dea Loher, *Unschuld* (2003) [Stuttgart: Reclam Theater der Gegenwart, 2022. ISBN: 3150142059]

The list of poems from *Deutsche Gedichte* set for special study is as follows:

Der von Kürenberg: Ich zôch mir einen valken (28)
Walther von der Vogelweide: Ich saz ûf eime4 steine (73)
Fleming: An Sich (232)
Greiffenberg: Auf meinen bestürmeten Lebens-Lauff (285)
Goethe: Erlkönig (430)
Goethe: Römische Elegien VI (435)
Hölderlin: Hälfte des Lebens (536)
Hölderlin: Andenken (537)
Müller: Der Lindenbaum (603)

Eichendorff: Lockung (622)
Droste-Hülshoff: Die tote Lerche (656)
Heine: Sie saßen und tranken am Teetisch (668)
Heine: Gedächtnisfeier (677)
Mörike: Auf eine Lampe (706)
Meyer: Der römische Brunnen (784)
Rilke: Archaischer Torso Apollos (835)
Rilke: O dieses ist das Tier, das es nicht giebt (842)
Lasker-Schüler: Ein alter Tibetteppich (853)
Stramm: Patrouille (863)
Trakl: Grodek (873)
Benn: Kann keine Trauer sein (948)
Brecht: Schlechte Zeit für Lyrik (995)
Celan: Sprachgitter (1066)
Bachmann: Böhmen liegt am Meer (1075)
Mayröcker: nachdenken über Zeitläufte, (1099)

PAPER IV - Prose and Film: essays

All students of German, non-beginners and beginners, will study the prescribed prose texts and the prescribed film in Hilary Term. For the examination candidates will be required to write THREE essays on the prescribed works (see list below).

Examination will be by 3-hour examination (whether in-person or online to be confirmed).

Prose texts and film prescribed for study:

- Theodor Fontane, *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1888) [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006] [Suhrkamp BasisBibliothek 81]
- Franz Kafka, *Die Verwandlung* (1912/1915) [Stuttgart: Reclam XL, 2021. ISBN 3150161096]
- Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Liebhaberinnen* (1975) [Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, current edition. ISBN 978-3499124679]
- Fatih Akin (dir.), *Aus dem Nichts* (2017) [Warner Home Video, 2018]

GERMAN FOR BEGINNERS

You will attend a pre-sessional course in order to prepare for the intensive language work leading up to the Preliminary examination. This pre-sessional course consists of an online course and a residential course.

You need to have completed the online course by the time you start the residential course. You are advised to allow at least 14 days for completion of the online course, which will be available from 1 September.

A letter with details about the online course and information on the residential course will be sent out to students in advance.

The first-year German for Beginners course will consist of four components: three will be focussed on intensive language study, while the fourth will give you an opportunity to work on literature also studied by the post-A level cohort. The course for the three language papers (Papers I, II and III) is centrally organised, and is specific to students of Beginners' German. The course for the literature paper (Paper IV) is organised and taught by your college in the Hilary Term. For Paper IV, Beginners' German students will read three narrative works, initially primarily in translation. You will be expected to use the translation consistently in conjunction with the original, maximising the focus of your reading over time on the original German text. In addition, you will study one film, with subtitles, to learn the techniques of analysing cinematic works. The college-organised tutorials or classes on these works will bring together students from the Beginners' German group and the post-A-level group and will focus on the German text. Alongside these tutorials or classes, your reading skills in German will be developed in a centrally organised class that will complement, and interact with, both the language papers and the literature/film paper.

The **Preliminary Examination** is taken at the end of the first year, and consists of the following:

LANGUAGE

PAPER BI - Reading Comprehension, Essay and Grammar

- A) Reading comprehension exercise (in German) on a passage in German.
- B) One essay in German (250-400 words). A choice of questions will be set.
- C) Grammar exercises designed to test grammatical knowledge and the ability to apply it appropriately.

This paper will be examined as a 3-hour in-person examination.

PAPER BII - Translation into and from German

PAPER BIIA - Translation into German

Translation into German of a prose passage.

PAPER BIIB- Translation from German

Translation from German of a prose passage in a modern literary register.

This paper will be examined as a 3-hour in-person examination.

PAPER BIII – Oral

An oral exam with a spoken part and a listening comprehension. This paper will be certified.

Books required for the language papers:

- Hueber Verlag (ed.) (2019) *Akademie Deutsch A1+: Intensivlehrwerk mit Audios online*. Ismaning: Hueber. ISBN 978-3-19-101650-0.
- Hueber Verlag (ed.) (2020) *Akademie Deutsch A1+: Zusatzmaterial mit Audios online*. Ismaning: Hueber. ISBN 978-3-19-111650-7.

- Hueber Verlag (ed.) (2020) *Akademie Deutsch A2+: Intensivlehrwerk mit Audios online*. Ismaning: Hueber. ISBN 978-3-19-121650-4.
- Hueber Verlag (ed.) (2020) *Akademie Deutsch A2+: Zusatzmaterial mit Audios online*. Ismaning: Hueber. ISBN 978-3-19-131650-1.

- Hueber Verlag (ed.) (2021) *Akademie Deutsch B1+: Intensivlehrwerk mit Audios online*. Ismaning: Hueber. ISBN 978-3-19-141650-8
- Hueber Verlag (ed.) (2021) *Akademie Deutsch B1+: Zusatzmaterial mit Audios online*. Ismaning: Hueber. ISBN 978-3-19-151650-5
- Thematischer Basiswortschatz, Klett Verlag 2016. ISBN 978-3125195073.

PAPER BIV - Prose and Film: essays

All students of German, non-beginners and beginners, will study the prescribed prose texts and the prescribed film in Hilary Term. For the examination candidates will be required to write THREE essays on the prescribed works.

Prose texts and film prescribed for study:

- Theodor Fontane, *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1888) [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006] [Suhrkamp BasisBibliothek 81]
Also: *On Tangled Paths*, trans. by Peter James Bowman (London: Penguin Classics, 2013)
- Franz Kafka, *Die Verwandlung* (1912/1915) [Stuttgart: Reclam XL, 2021. ISBN 3150161096]
Also: *The Metamorphosis*, trans. by Joyce Crick, in *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: OUP, 2009)
- Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Liebhaberinnen* (1975) [Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, current edition. ISBN 978-3499124679]
Also: *Women as Lovers*, trans. by Martin Chalmers (London: Serpent's Tail, 1994)]
- Fatih Akin (dir.), *Aus dem Nichts* (2017) [DVD: Warner Home Video, 2018]
Also: *In the Fade*, with English subtitles [DVD: Curzon Artificial Eye, 2018]

This paper will be examined as a 3-hour examination (whether in-person or online to be confirmed).

Candidates on the Beginners' course are encouraged to use the original German text as far as possible and to refer to it when quoting from the work, including in the Paper IV examination.

GERMAN SOLE PRELIM

The papers below are taken only by candidates who are reading German as their **sole** subject.

PAPER XI - Introduction to German Film Studies

This paper is studied in Michaelmas Term of the first year and is taught in a weekly intercollegiate seminar for which written work is set. The course focuses in particular on the cinema of the Weimar Republic. The course will examine the development of film style and film technology in the 1920s and early 1930s, as well as putting the films in the wider context of German culture after the First World War. You will develop skills of commentary (on sequences of stills) and write essays relating to questions of film form and technique, and to thematic issues. You will also give at least one presentation as part of certification for this paper.

There are four set films and the recommended editions:

- *Asphalt* (1929, dir. Joe May). [DVD: Eureka Masters of Cinema No. 7]
- *Menschen am Sonntag* (1930, dir. Robert Siodmak). [DVD: BFI History of the Avantgarde editon]
- *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931, dir. Leontine Sagan). [DVD: Zweitausendeins Edition, available from [amazon.de](https://www.amazon.de)]
- *Viktor und Viktoria* (1933, dir. Reinhold Schünzel) [DVD: Deutsche Filmklassiker]

Introductory reading:

- David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction* (London, 12th edn. 2019) [or any edition from the 6th edn. onwards].
- Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London, 2nd edn. 2007).

To support your language-specific study of film, there will also be four general methodology lectures in Weeks 1-4 of Michaelmas Term devoted to four international films, presenting the basic concepts of film analysis, such as montage, story, self-reference, and spectatorship. The international films taught in this part are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. In 2025-26, these will be: *Potemkin* (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, 1925); *The 39 Steps* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1935); *Blow-Up* (dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, 1967); and *Beau Travail* (dir. Claire Denis, 1999).

This paper will be certified.

PAPER XII - Introduction to German Medieval Studies

Hartmann von Aue, *Gregorius*, [Reclam edition: Middle High German text with a facing page translation in modern German].

This paper starts in the second part of Michaelmas Term with a weekly reading class which continues into the first part of Hilary Term; it is then taught in 8 intercollegiate seminar sessions. It will focus on the close study of *Gregorius* by Hartmann von Aue. Students will be expected to read the set text in Middle High German and will be given an introduction to the language. The examination will consist of: (1) a commentary question, (2) a guided commentary question, and (3) ONE essay question from a selection. The essay questions will relate both to the set text and to more general issues arising from it.

This paper will be examined as a 3-hour examination (whether in-person or online to be confirmed).

PAPER XIII - Key Texts in German Thought

This paper is studied in Hilary and Trinity Terms of the first year. Tuition will take the form of intercollegiate seminars. The focus will be on close reading of four short texts. Translations may be consulted, but students are expected to develop a good grasp of the original works. For the examination, you will write ONE commentary on a passage taken from ONE of the texts studied, and TWO essays from a selection of questions on subjects which invite wider discussion of the questions raised by the texts and the relationship between them. You will also give at least one presentation in class for this paper. The texts are:

- Immanuel Kant, 'Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht' in Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung?* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999; **NB not the Reclam volume with the same title**)
- Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2014) [Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 19266]
- Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Zur Naturgeschichte der Moral', in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel zu einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988)
- Sigmund Freud, *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod. Warum Krieg? Der Briefwechsel mit Albert Einstein* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2022) [Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 14276]

This paper will be examined as a 3-hour examination (whether in-person or online to be confirmed).

TEACHING PATTERNS

Language work will concentrate on the topics Generationen und Geschlechter; (Aus-)Bildung, wozu?; Umwelt, and Nation und Nationalismus, which will be introduced in a series of four University lectures and four classes in Michaelmas Term and then pursued in college language classes. The oral and written work in these topics will be based on the literary works you are studying, on journalistic texts, video material etc. You will have regular language classes in your college to practise your translation skills from and into German, and you will be required to attend a systematic grammar course given by a language instructor, based on *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage*. As a rule at least one piece of written work per week will be required during term, and you will be encouraged to develop learning strategies enabling you to expand your knowledge of the language effectively and independently. Considerable emphasis throughout all parts of the course will be placed on developing your reading skills in various registers, so that you learn to read texts closely, while also gaining the confidence to tackle long articles and read novels.

German Grammar. This is a compulsory University course for most first-year students (those who scored highly in the admissions test will be exempt). It is organised by the Senior Language Lecturer and offers systematic grammar tuition throughout the year. There are four groups, with approximately 15 students in each, which run in parallel. The course is based on *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage*, seventh edition by Martin Durrell (London, 2021) and *Practising German Grammar*, by Martin Durrell, Katrin Kohl and Claudia Kaiser, 4th edition (London, 2017). There will be a grammar test to check progress at the end of Michaelmas and Hilary Terms.

Work on literature will, through lectures, tutorials and college classes or seminars, focus on the dramas, prose texts, film, and poetry listed under Papers III and IV, with an eight-week lecture course on each genre. Your work on the dramas and narrative texts will introduce you to a sequence of works that demonstrate the changes taking place in German-speaking society and its literature over the period from the 1880s to the early 21st century. By contrast the selection of poems will take you from medieval times to the twentieth century, enabling you to gain an understanding of different periods of literature and developments in the German language. You will be encouraged to develop your own ideas and construct a coherent argument in essays, and to analyse a text with close attention to detail in commentaries. Your work on prose, drama and poetry will help you gain an appreciation of literary genres and will interact with your work on film, together with journalistic texts, videos etc. used in language classes to give a broad sense of different registers, modes of expression and media.

Writing Prelims Commentaries: A commentary should offer a coherent account of the impressions the text in question makes upon you (visual, acoustic, emotional, intellectual, linguistic), whilst never becoming a simple paraphrase. There is no single formula for writing a successful commentary and your tutor will guide you about what is expected. In any case,

the shape and content of any particular commentary will arise from the passage or poem in question. In general, however, you might be expected to 'situate' the passage or poem and sum up its wider significance, remembering that 'what it is about' will necessarily be more than its simple lexical meaning. In the course of your commentary you will want to support your comments by examining some of the following: the movement, direction, shape or form of the passage or poem, the register of the piece, any difficulties or ambiguities, vocabulary, syntax, rhetorical figures, striking patterns and any aspects particular to the genre in question: e.g. metre and rhyme (in a poem), stage directions (in a drama), narrative perspective (in prose). Again, the relative importance of these different aspects will depend on the text in question. Your aim is to show how the choice of those particular words or that particular phrase, structure or metre is a vital ingredient in that passage or poem. Detailed observation should always be supported by analysis in your commentary, remembering that it is not necessarily your task to discover an exhaustive meaning in the piece set for study, but to comment on the way the text in front of you works. In writing on the prose and drama passages you are encouraged to make connections with the rest of the text from which your passage is taken – and indeed more generally if you wish. For the poetry, you are not expected to have specific knowledge about the individual poets or about the context of a given poem, though occasionally some context will aid comprehension and you might also find comparisons useful in clarifying a point you are making. You should remember that your main task is to offer a close reading of the passage or poem in question.

OXFORD GERMAN NETWORK

The Oxford German Network is a cultural network designed to establish connections between staff and students in the Sub-Faculty of German and institutions and people in Oxford and beyond who have an interest in German and the German-speaking countries. The website www.ogn.ox.ac.uk with our Twitter feed acts as a hub for information about events and activities and offers a wide range of useful resources. Undergraduates can get involved on a regular or more ad hoc basis – if you are interested, send an email to ogn@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk. Please let us know about events or other information you think would be of interest.

When drawing up this handbook we have tried to be as accurate and clear as possible. The texts prescribed for study for individual papers are now listed in this handbook.

The Examination Conventions, detailing the structure of each examination paper, including rubrics, are also available as a separate document at:

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

The revised edition of the University's Examination Decrees and Regulations lists the examination papers and their permitted combination for your degree course. (For further details, 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.

Revised: 18/08/25