

26 June 2026

Dear Student,

Congratulations on your offer of a place to read French at New College! We very much look forward to seeing you in Oxford in October, and hope you're excited to get started. We write now to give you some preliminary information about the Literature Papers in French Prelims (first year), so that you can set about getting hold of the books and reading them before you arrive in October.

We *strongly* recommend that you read all of the works once through before arriving in Oxford. We'll move swiftly through the syllabus from 3rd Week of Michaelmas onwards, and your day-to-day workload will make it impractical to read each work as you come to study it. You'll also find that you get a lot more out of the texts on a second and even third reading, so allowing yourself the time for that luxury is an excellent idea.

You must buy (or very long-term borrow) physical copies of all of the texts. Kindle versions and e-books are not acceptable. Where possible you should buy the recommended editions, since this makes group work much easier, and in all cases you should buy an edition by a reputable French publisher (Gallimard, Garnier-Flammarion, Livre de Poche and so on); random and (especially) print-on-demand editions from the internet will often be defective. The easiest way to find the books is on French internet sites (amazon.fr, fnac.com, chapitre.com and so on).

Inevitably, you'll consult many online resources for your language work. It's still worth investing in a physical French grammar, however, as well as in at least one really good dictionary. For grammar, Roger Hawkins and Richard Towell, *French Grammar and Usage* (Routledge) is accessible and can be purchased with a companion workbook. Serious aficionados may find Monique L'Huillier, *Advanced French Grammar* (Cambridge), dry but more comprehensive. We strongly advise you to have the latest Collins-Robert French Dictionary or the Oxford-Hachette dictionary. Be sure to get the full-size one, and not a 'compact', 'concise' or 'pocket' version. You should also consider investing in a monolingual French dictionary; *Le Petit Robert* is the best single-volume example.

Happy reading, and we look forward to seeing you in October.

Prof. Andrew Counter
Fellow and Tutor in French

Dr Thom Murphy
Career Development Fellow in French



Modern Languages, First Public Examination ('Prelims') in French

All French students at New College will be studying four papers in first year (Prelims). (French Sole students study others, detailed on pages 3-4; those not reading French Sole can ignore those pages.) The first two are language papers: Paper I (French Grammar, Translation, and Summary) and Paper II (Unprepared and Prepared Translation into English); these will be explained to you in more detail when you arrive.

The literary element of the Prelims course in French is made up of two papers, numbered III and IV. These papers will be co-taught by Prof. Counter and Dr Murphy. For Paper III, you read four short texts, and write commentaries on these as course work; at the end of the year, your tutors will 'certify' that you have performed adequately on the coursework. Paper IV is an introduction to the study of prose fiction, for which you read four longer works; again, you'll write an essay about any three of them in a three-hour examination at the end of the year.

The set texts for each paper are listed below, and it's *essential* to have read these before you arrive at College in Michaelmas. We have suggested which editions we think most useful. In all cases, you should buy serious scholarly editions by reputable French publishers (this usually means Gallimard or Garnier-Flammarion). Do *not* buy cheap, print-on-demand versions, which are often inaccurate and incomplete.

Paper III: Short Texts

Montaigne, 'Des cannibales' from *Essais I*, recommended edn: *Essais: 'Des cannibales' et 'Des coches'*, ed. by Michel Tarpinian (Paris: Ellipses, 1998)

Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, recommended edn: *Phèdre*, ed. by Raymond Picard (Paris: Gallimard Folio, 2015)

Paul Verlaine, *Romances sans paroles*, recommended edn: *Romances sans paroles*, ed. by Arnaud Bernadet (Paris: Flammarion, 2018 [2012])

Marie NDiaye, *Papa doit manger*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2003).

Paper IV: French Narrative Fiction

Anon., *La Chastelaine de Vergy*, in *Nouvelles courtoises*, ed. S. Méjean-Thiolier and M-F. Notz-Grob, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1997).

Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, ed. Pomeau (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1996)

George Sand, *Indiana*, ed. Béatrice Didier (Paris: Folio Gallimard, 1984)

Maryse Condé, *Traversée de la mangrove* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992)

Prelims French Single Honours ('Sole') Reading List 2026-27

Students taking the French Sole course take French papers I-IV along with other students studying French. In addition, they take the three papers described below. A brief outline is given here, and for each paper your lecturers/seminar tutor will also provide you with topic-specific reading lists and essay titles.

Paper XI Introduction to French Film Studies

Introductory reading:

- Michael Temple and Michael Witt (eds), *The French Cinema Book* (British Film Institute, 2004). A detailed introduction to French cinema as an industry.
- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art, An Introduction* (McGraw Hill, various editions). A very useful introduction explaining all the technical terms that are used to analyse a film.

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth- and twenty-first century French film directors. We discuss the concepts of realism, documentary and avant-garde cinema and introduce the basic tools of film analysis.

In your essay writing you will be able to engage with the directors' ideas and with their particular way of realising them. The films under discussion involve a wide range of themes such as love, power, gender relations and autobiography. Each director has a different style of filmmaking. The focus of the course is the question of how the film medium represents contemporary reality. We will look at the way each of these directors uses devices of storytelling to present a particular point of view upon the world we live in. You will be encouraged to watch more films by each of these directors.

The prescribed films are:

- Jean-Luc Godard: *Pierrot le fou* (1965)
- Maurice Pialat: *À nos amours* (1983)
- Claire Denis: *Beau Travail* (1999)
- Céline Sciamma: *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (2019)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term (first term), with seminars on the prescribed films in weeks 2, 4, 6 and 8. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the films and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. [Normally the three-hour examination in Trinity Term (third term) requires you to answer three questions, each on a different film. There will be a choice of two questions on each film.] **In 2026-27 this paper will not be formally examined, but instead certified on the basis of the submission of one of the essays written as part of the course.**

In addition to the seminars you must follow the modern languages lecture-series entitled *Introduction to Film Studies* in weeks 1, 3, 5 and 7 in Michaelmas Term. These lectures present basic concepts of film analysis – montage, story, self-reference, and spectatorship – in four lectures devoted to four international films. These films are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. The films are: Sergei Eisenstein:

Potemkin (1925); Alfred Hitchcock: *39 Steps* (1935); Michelangelo Antonioni (1967): *Blow-up*; Claire Denis: *Beau Travail* (1999).

Paper XII Introduction to French Literary Theory

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth-century literary critics. In your essay writing you will be able to engage with their ideas about literature and with their particular way of expressing them. You will be encouraged to apply these ideas to your own reading of texts.

The prescribed authors (note the recommended editions) are:

- Paul Valéry, 'Questions de poésie' and 'Poésie et pensée abstraite', in *Théorie poétique et esthétique*, part of *Variété: Oeuvres*, vol. I (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade) [both essays are available electronically on Canvas, accessible via Single Sign-On once you get to Oxford]
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Folio) [Sections I and II only]
- Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Seuil)
- Hélène Cixous, 'Le rire de la Méduse' in *Le rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, ed. by Frédéric Regard (Galilée). [essay available electronically on Canvas, accessible via Single Sign-On]

The teaching for this paper takes place in Hilary Term (second term), in weeks 5-8 and Trinity Term weeks 1-4, in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. **The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different author. There will be a choice of two essay questions on each author.**

Paper XIII Key Texts in French Thought

This paper will introduce you to four thinkers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In both essay and commentary writing you will be able to engage with their ideas and with their particular way of expressing them.

The prescribed texts (note the recommended editions) are:

- René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, edited by Laurence Renault (Garnier-Flammarion)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (Folio)
- Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Folio), vol. I, 'Introduction'; 'Mythes'; II, 'La femme mariée'; 'La mère'. (NB Both the French 'Idées' collection and the English translation have sections missing and cannot be relied upon)
- Frantz Fanon, 'Introduction', 'Le Noir et le langage', and 'Conclusion', in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Points-Essais)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term weeks 5-8 and Hilary Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay or commentary on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. Written work should include at least one essay and at least one commentary. **The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a**



NEW COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

different text, one a commentary, the other two essays. There will be a choice of one commentary passage from each text and one essay question on each text.