

Italian

Information for new students 2026/27

Welcome to Oxford! We are looking forward to meeting you in October. Here is some advice on how to prepare before the start of your first-year course.

Preliminary Examination Overview

All students reading Italian at Oxford will sit a Preliminary Examination ('Prelims' for short) at the end of their first year. This consists of four parts (or 'papers'), divided into language (I and II) and literature (III and IV).

1) Language

The language, oral and written, plays a crucial role at Prelims, both in its own right and as an essential tool for literary study. Language classes in your first year will give you a firm grasp of grammar, develop your vocabulary and language skills and prepare you for the Language Preliminary Exams at the end of Trinity Term. Teaching in your first year will consist of 4 to 6 hours a week (depending on entry level) comprising grammar and vocabulary, listening and reading comprehension, speaking, writing, prose (translation from English into Italian) and translation (from Italian into English). Material will be provided by the Language Tutors, who will also advise you on independent learning and weekly assignments.

You should use a good-sized bi-lingual dictionary throughout your years at Oxford, such as *Oxford-Paravia* or *il Ragazzini*. You may wish to purchase your own copy or you can use Dictionaries in your College Library or in the Taylorian Library. Dictionary apps, such as the *Ragazzini* bilingual dictionary, are also excellent tools and easier to carry around. The following reputable dictionaries are available online (free) and we would ask you that you become familiar with them as they will be recommended for your assignments:

Bilingual dictionaries:

[Dizionario di Inglese Sansoni](#)
[Dizionario Garzanti Linguistica](#)

Monolingual dictionaries:

[Dizionario di italiano Sabatini-Coletti](#)
[Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana](#)
[Treccani](#)
[Il Nuovo De Mauro](#)

Synonyms:

[Treccani Sinonimi e contrari](#)
[Hoepli Dizionario dei Sinonimi e dei Contrari](#)

Diagnostic Test:

All Freshers, both beginners and post A-Level, are required to sit a short online language test before the start of the academic year. The test will enable us to assign you to the appropriate class/level and it is therefore important that it reflects your actual knowledge before you come to Oxford. On or after the 14th September 2026 you will receive an email from the Medieval and Modern Languages Faculty

Office with a link for you to do the online language test. Please make sure you complete the test by the **24th September**.

NB: we will need a valid email address so we can send you the link. If the email address you gave in your application form is no longer valid or you no longer check it regularly, please inform the Faculty Office of your valid email address as soon as possible by writing to: office@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk

POST A-LEVEL STUDENTS:

You should continue to develop your language skills by reading and listening to Italian. In addition, you will need to work with a good Reference Grammar, such as:

- *Soluzioni! A Practical Grammar of Contemporary Italian*, by Denise De Rôme (Routledge, 2025; fifth edition) [with exercises and keys]
- *A Reference Grammar of Modern Italian*, by Martin Maiden and Cecilia Robustelli (Routledge, 2007; second edition). [workbook available separately]
- *Modern Italian Grammar. A Practical Guide*, 3rd edition, by Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo, (Routledge, 2013). [workbook available separately]

You may start by borrowing these grammar texts from the Oxford Libraries before purchasing your own copy, which you will need throughout your years at Oxford. You will receive further advice and material in class.

BEGINNERS:

Please make sure you acquire a copy of the following grammar book prior to the start of Michaelmas Term:

- *The Ultimate Italian Review and Practice*, by David Stillman, 2nd edition (McGraw-Hill, 2019).

Advice on how to prepare:

The Preliminary Examination at the end of the academic year is the same for all candidates, regardless of whether they started as beginners or post-A level. The Beginners' language course will start by covering the basic topics and will take you to an intermediate level by the end of the academic year. However, in order to benefit the most from the teaching (and not be too daunted by its fast and intense pace) students are strongly advised to prepare in advance. You should begin to acquire as much Italian vocabulary through any resources to which you may have access. And you may wish to begin studying the following grammatical points over the summer:

Nouns: gender and regular plural formation;
Definite and indefinite articles;
Adjectives: gender and plural formation;
Verbs: Present indicative of regular and irregular verbs;
Passato prossimo (regular participle formation and some common irregular participles);
Forms of the *Imperfetto*.

This will give you an excellent starting point. You can prepare through self-study on a grammar text such as *Italian Grammar in Practice* by Susanna Nocchi, which builds knowledge of the grammar gradually; or with the recommended *The Ultimate Italian Review and Practice* by David Stillman that you will be using during the year. You can make excellent progress by working on your own, going

through the above grammar points, doing some exercises, reading, listening etc. You can practice your Italian grammar and other skills also using online courses, such as the following:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~cmazzoni/3grammatica/grammatica/index.html>

You will find here explanations of the basic structures of Italian grammar, as well as many exercises.

Grammar and vocabulary go hand in hand, so always make sure you look up and make a note of the meaning of new words.

Reading

You may start reading some Italian short stories with parallel text: this will give you an introduction to Italian writers and will be an excellent way of getting used to reading in the original. There are many short stories collection available, including the recent *Great Italian Stories. 10 Parallel Texts*, ed. by Jhumpa Lahiri (Penguin, 2024). You will develop your skills so that by the second and third terms you can read the primary texts in Italian.

2) Literature

In the first year, you will be working on two literature papers, each with prescribed works:

➤ **"Modern Italian Narrative and Cinema" (Paper IV):**

In Michaelmas (first term) and part of Hilary (second term), we will read the following prescribed texts in this order (any edition, in Italian; beginners are allowed to read them in translation, in the first instance, but the examination will be based on the original Italian texts):

- 1) Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*
- 2) Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare*
- 3) Italo Calvino, *Il cavaliere inesistente*
- 4) *I cento passi* (film directed by Marco Tullio Giordana)
- 5) Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono*

Students will also be expected to have such knowledge of the literary, intellectual and historical background as is necessary for the understanding of these works.

➤ **"Italian Lyric Poetry" (Paper III):**

In Hilary (second term) and Trinity (third term), you will study an anthology of lyric poems, which span the period from the Middle Ages to the present day and include a range of poets, styles, and metrical forms. Developing skills in close reading and textual analysis, you will have the opportunity to get used to reading poetry if you have not done so before, and to consider the expressive potential that the lyric form offers as well as what it might be that makes a work 'lyrical' or 'poetic'. In turn, the scope of the lyric anthology will allow you to trace several thematic developments across texts and time periods, studying both language and form in depth, while learning about the history of Italian literature and the history of ideas, knowledge which will help you make more informed choices about the later part of your Italian course. A copy of the lyric anthology for Paper III is available at the Faculty Office or on Canvas. The exam will consist of writing two commentaries and one thematic essay.

Italian books can be ordered, among others, at any of these bookshops:

Blackwells, 51 Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BQ: www.blackwell.co.uk

Grant & Cutler at Foyles, 107 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0DT: www.grantandcutler.com

The European Bookshop, 123 Gloucester Road, London SW7 4TE: www.italianbookshop.co.uk

See also: www.amazon.co.uk www.unilibro.it www.inmondadori.it www.ibs.it

N.B. Before arriving in Oxford you should have read at least the first three prescribed texts for the "Modern Italian Narrative & Cinema" paper, and watched the film.

THIS SUMMER

Please note that, for your studies at Oxford to be successful, it is **CRUCIAL** that you use every long break that precedes a term to read and take notes on **all** the texts assigned for that coming term. In other words, these intervals are to be considered as **reading periods**.

Why is this? The terms at Oxford are short (eight weeks), and, each week in term, you will only have time to go back to your notes, re-read certain passages of the set texts, think about your essay questions, consult secondary sources, and write your essays. You won't have any time to do the primary reading properly. If you don't complete this reading during the summer, your first term will be a real struggle and you will be very likely to produce unsatisfactory work. Conversely, you will enjoy the seminars and tutorials and make good progress if you are properly organized and prepared.

NOTE TAKING WHILE READING

It is also important to take notes as you read the set texts. You will need these notes when writing your essays and taking your examinations at the end of the year. If you don't know where to begin, one way to proceed is to prepare for yourself a summary for each set text in which you identify and analyse: **1)** the (political, socio-historical, literary) context in which the text was written; **2)** the overall structure of the text, its plot and/or core images (poetry), **3)** its treatment of time and space if applicable, **4)** characterization if applicable, **5)** several key scenes/passages (four to six) that seem important and that you should close read meticulously, and **6)** its uses of form, language, and voice. In addition, you should identify and reflect on several key themes/questions (four to six) that seem prominent across the set texts.

PRACTICALITIES

The University of Oxford often uses a vocabulary of its own to refer to its organisation and members.

A helpful glossary of these terms can be found here:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation/history/oxford-glossary?wssl=1>

The university term dates can be found here (under "dates of full term"):

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/dates-of-term?wssl=1>

NOTA BENE: "Michaelmas Term" is the first term of the academic year (October to December). "Hilary Term" is the second (January to March). "Trinity Term" is the third (April to June). Every term is made up of eight weeks *and* of an additional week, called "Noughth Week" (0th Week) that precedes these eight weeks. Students are expected to be in College during 0th Week for scheduling meetings and/or collections (i.e. College examinations). If, for example, the official date for the start of term is 8 October, you should be in College the week before the 8th.

Prof. Emma Bond
15.06.26