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**Reading List for Students coming up to Oxford to read Russian
on our post-A level course (revised 2026)**

Congratulations on being offered a place and welcome to your post-A level Russian course at Oxford! I am looking forward to meeting you in October.

It is important that you should spend some time between now and October, when you will be starting your course in Oxford, preparing for the work you will be doing here.

The Preliminary Examination, which is held at the end of the first year, is a challenging examination, and it is vital that you should keep your Russian language up in the meantime. One obvious way of doing this is to **start on some of the reading of the literature texts set for the course** (see below); otherwise, take every opportunity you can find to talk and hear Russian, look at Russian websites (try the BBC's online version of news in Russian, for example: <https://www.bbc.com/russian>), and watch Russian films (many films, often with English subtitles, can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/c/Mosfilm_eng), or on Netflix (which also has Russian subtitles for a lot of its big shows).

You will also need to **make sure that your grammar is up to scratch**: make sure that you know your regular and irregular **declensions** and **conjugations** off by heart. We recommend you buy the handy paperback *Oxford Russian Verbs and Grammar*, and learn all the tables in that book (Amazon link here: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Oxford-Russian-Grammar-Verbs-Dictionary/dp/0198603800>; or check out second hand options on e-bay). We also recommend that you acquire – or at least familiarize yourself with – the following language resources, as you will find these essential both now and during your course (Oxford University login details will be required to access the links given below):

- Wade, Terence, David Gillespie, S. K. Gural', and Marina Korneeva. *A Comprehensive Russian Grammar*. Fourth ed. Hoboken, NJ, 2020. Blackwell Reference Grammars. Web. (https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:11190/plink?key=100.69.132.212_8000_228309024&site=ehost&scope=site&db=nlebk%2cnlabk&AN=2436414)
- Wade, Terence Leslie Brian., and David. Gillespie. *A Russian Grammar Workbook*. 2nd ed. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. Blackwell Reference Grammars. Web. (<https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=1120895>)
- Offord, Derek, *Modern Russian: An Advanced Grammar Course* (Amazon link: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Modern-Russian-Advanced-Grammar->

[Studies/dp/1853993611/ref=sr_1_3?crid=1A79WVOZQS69X&keywords=offord+russian+grammar&qid=1660659012&s=books&sprefix=offord+russian+gramma%2Cstripbooks%2C138&sr=1-3\)](https://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/full/10.1093/oxfordjournals/ajsl.a111111)

- [Oxford dictionaries. Russian. \[electronic resource\]](#) Oxford: Oxford University Press

The Preliminary Examination tests your language skills, and also requires that you should read (in Russian) and are able to comment in close detail on works by seven Russian authors. The examination tests your knowledge of four “Papers” (Oxford term for modules) that you will complete over your first year. Paper I has a passage for translation into Russian and grammatical exercises, and Paper II comprises translation into English and comprehension. The two literature papers provide a general introduction to reading Russian literature. Paper III is made up of a selection of *poemy* (narrative poems) ranging in date from the late eighteenth to the mid twentieth centuries; and Paper IV (prose) contains five short stories written between the 1830s and the 1960s.

Roughly, in order of difficulty, starting with the easiest, **the set texts for your first year are as follows:**

- 1) Chekhov's stories *Случай из практики*, *Анна на шее* and *Дом с мезонином* (annotated texts available in A.P. Chekhov, *Selected Short Stories*, Bristol Classical Press).
- 2) Pushkin's short story *Пиковая дама* (also available in an annotated BCP edition).
- 3) Pushkin's poem *Медный всадник* (also available in an annotated BCP edition).
- 4) Lermontov's poem *Мцыри* (available in anthologies and collections of his works).
- 5) Akhmatova's poem *Реквием* (available in anthologies/collections of her works and from the ML Faculty Office when you arrive).
- 6) Blok's poems: *На поле куликовом* and *Двенадцать* in *Selected Poems*, edited by James Woodward (available in an annotated BCP edition).
- 7) Dovlatov's short novel *Чемодан* (publ. Azbuka).
- 8) Derzhavin's poem *Фелица* (available in anthologies/collections of his works and from the ML Faculty Office when you arrive).

There are multiple copies of all these texts in the central Modern Languages library and College libraries. All the texts are available online. One site where the textual versions are pretty reliable is Aleksei Komarov's internet library: <https://ilibrary.ru/> It is also possible to get hard copies from good booksellers or through the Internet. The Bristol Classical Press Series available through Bloomsbury Academic has very useful annotated and footnoted texts. These texts should be available at Blackwells (here is a link to the Chekhov edition recommended: <https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/Chekhov-Selected-Short-Stories-by-Struve-Gleb/9781853994067>).

It is very important to make a good start on **reading your set texts before you come up**. Lectures on any of the Prelims authors can fall in any of the three terms, but our tutorials on **Pushkin, Mednii vsadnik and Pikovaia dama, and Lermontov, Mtsyri**, will be taken in Michaelmas Term. Therefore, you *must* have read **at least these three texts** before Michaelmas Term starts. You may find it necessary to keep an English translation to hand so that the work is not too laborious, but it is **essential** that you get to know **all** the texts in Russian as you will be asked to translate and comment on passages in the original in the examination. The course in Oxford is very intensive, and vacations need to be used for preparatory reading.

I am enclosing at this stage a much broader reading list and some additional information which should serve you in good stead throughout your time at Oxford; it is not meant to be tackled in depth at this stage, although you may find some of the suggestions worth pursuing.

Please get in touch with me if you have any queries at
margarita.vaysman@new.ox.ac.uk

Have a very good summer, and I look forward to seeing you in October!

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Suggestions for further reading in 19th- and 20th-century Russian literature

Nineteenth-century authors:

- Aleksandr PUSHKIN: any of the prose works (e.g. *The Captain's Daughter* and *The Tales of Belkin*), and a selection of his lyric poetry such as might be found in any bilingual anthology such as *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse*.
- Anna BUNINA: any of her poems from the anthology *An Anthology of Russian Women's Writing, 1777-1992*, ed. by C. Kelly.
- Mikhail LERMONTOV: the novel *A Hero of Our Time*, plus a selection of his lyric poetry - see an anthology, as above under PUSHKIN.
- Karolina PAVLOVA: novel in verse *Double Life* (available also in Barbara Heldt's translation)
- Aleksandr ALEKSANDROV (Nadezhda Durova): autobiographical narrative *Notes of a Cavalry Maiden*
- Nikolai GOGOL: the 'Petersburg Tales', including *The Overcoat*, *Nevsky Prospect*, *The Nose*, and *Diary of a Madman*; also his play *The Government Inspector*, and his novel *Dead Souls*.
- Evgeniia TUR: novella *Antonina* (available also in M. Katz's translation)
- Fedor DOSTOEVSKY: the four "big" novels - *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot*, and *The Possessed (The Devils)*, as well as his shorter novel *Notes from Underground*.
- Nadezhda KHVOSHCHINSKAIA: a short novella *Boarding School Girl*, to start with, and her sister Sofia KHVOSHCHINSKAIA's *City and Country Folk* (available in an e-book on Amazon (<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Pansionerka-Russian-Language-Nadezhda-Hvoshhinskaja-ebook/dp/B01DWEACMQ>), both novels are available in translations from Columbia University Press (<https://readrussia.org/russian-library/city-folk-and-country-folk.html>))
- Ivan GONCHAROV: the novel *Oblomov*.
- Lev TOLSTOY: his autobiographical *Childhood and Youth*; the story *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*; and the two great novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.
- Ivan TURGENEV: the novel *Fathers and Sons*, and the *Huntsman's Sketches*.
- Anton CHEKHOV: any selection of short stories, and the four major plays - *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century authors:

- Anna AKHMATOVA, Osip MANDELSHTAM and Marina TSVETAEVA; and, more recently, Iosif BRODSKY: any bilingual anthologies of the works of these poets.
- Lidiia ZINOVIEBA-ANNIBAL: short novel *Thirty Three Abominations* (available easily in Russian but also in a new bilingual edition here <https://edcat.net/item/thirty-three-monsters-by-lydia-zinovieva-annibal/>)
- Evgenii ZAMYATIN: the novel *We*, and any of his short stories.
- Mikhail ZOSHCHENKO: any of his short stories, especially of the 1920s.
- Nadezhda TEFFI: any short stories (available in English from Pushkin Press)
- Isaak BABEL: his cycle of short stories *Red Cavalry*.
- Mikhail BULGAKOV: his novels *The White Guard* and *The Master and Margarita*, as well as *The Heart of a Dog* and his play *Flight*.
- Lidiia Chukovskaia: her novel *Sofia Petrovna*, about Stalin's purges, available in English from Persephone Books
- Vasilii GROSSMAN: his epic novel of WWII, *Life and Fate*.
- Boris PASTERNAK: *Doctor Zhivago*, and any bilingual anthology of his poetry.
- Aleksandr SOLZHENITSYN: the short novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and his two longer novels *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*.
- Evgeniia GINZBURG: on the same topic, her autobiography *Into the Whirlwind* (also from Persephone books in English)
- Anna Nerbagi: her autobiographic novel of the life of indigenous Nenets people's *Aniko of the Nogo Clan* (for now, only available in Russian or Italian); recent English translation of *White Moss* available here: <https://pushkinpress.com/book/white-moss/>
- Svetlana Aleksievich: any of her Noble Prize-winning novel-length works
- Luidmila Petrushevskiaia: short stories, plays or her novel *The Time: Night*
- Luidmila ULITSKAIA: any of her collections of short-stories, or novels *Sonechka*, *The Kukotskii Enigma*
- Olga SEDAKOVA: any bilingual editions of her poems
- Viktor PELEVIN: any of his early novels such as *Generation P*, or short story collections (all widely available in English)
- Vladimir Sorokin: his short novel *Day of the Oprichnik*

Selected introductory works on 19th- and 20th-century Russian history and culture

It is difficult to appreciate Russian literature without having some knowledge of Russian history. You should try to look at least at a couple of the following, which should be available in your library or in paperback:

- Caryl Emerson: *Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature*
- Stephen Lovell, *The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction*
- Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: From Earliest Times to the Present* (Penguin, 2012)
- G. Hosking: *Russian History: A Very Short Introduction*
- Robert Service, *The Penguin History of Modern Russia: From Tsarism to the Twenty-first Century*
- Anthony Beevor, *Russia: Revolution and Civil War 1917-1921*

Booksellers specialising in Russian books:

Major university bookshops (Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Cambridge etc.) will often be able to provide some of the titles listed above. Otherwise, try the following booksellers:

- Blackwell's Bookshop, 50 Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BQ, tel: 01865 792792; <http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk>; mail.ox@blackwell.co.uk - like Thornton's, has a good second-hand section as well as standard new books.
- Thornton's Bookshop, (internet and mail order only): www.thorntonsbooks.co.uk tel. 01367-240056, e-mail: Thorntons@Booknews.demon.co.uk - the largest holdings of all, sometimes has things when no-one else can help.
- Bloomsbury Academic now sell the Bristol Classical Press student texts in Russian
- many Russian books can be found on Amazon as kindle e-books (you do not need a Kindle to read them, just the Kindle app on any of your devices or on your laptop).