



St Hilda's College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

June 2026

**French:
French/French and Spanish/English and French/Philosophy and French/French and
Linguistics**

The French Tutors are delighted that you have been offered a place to read Modern Languages at St Hilda's, and we look forward to welcoming you in October. Please find enclosed the syllabus for the first-year course (the three-term Prelim) in French for which you will sit exams in Trinity (i.e. summer) Term 2027. As you will see, the course requires you to study a substantial number of prescribed literary texts from the time you start in Michaelmas Term.

To help you to prioritise your reading: we will begin in October with the shorter texts for commentary (Paper III), and move on to the longer texts (Paper IV) after Christmas.

It is very important that you obtain and read the texts prescribed *before* you arrive. The more reading you can do in advance, the more enjoyable your studies will be when you get here, since you will not have to worry about 'catching up' in the midst of a demanding Oxford term. Although cheap student editions can be readily found on the internet, many are not appropriate for academic study since they lack parts of the text. We strongly advise that you follow the guidance in the enclosed reading list regarding which editions are best for your studies. You should retain the receipts for your book purchases as you will be able to apply for a College book grant to claim back up to £60 in total.

Please do not hesitate to write if anything is unclear or if you have difficulty obtaining books. We hope you enjoy preparing for the course and offer all good wishes for the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

H. J. Swift

Prof Helen Swift, Fellow in French

Dr Luke O'Sullivan, Fellow in French



Modern Languages & Joint Schools Prelims (French)

You will find a more detailed setting out of the information below in the Faculty Handbook for French Prelims for the academic year 2026-27 once it is uploaded in the summer. *You can find the handbook on Canvas, the Faculty Virtual Learning Environment:*

https://canvas.ox.ac.uk/courses/20010/modules#module_393804

The papers that you study in the first year are examined in what's called the Preliminary Examination ('Prelims') in June at the end of the year.

The following two papers will be taught throughout your first year, in classes with language tutors at St Hilda's. You will also have regular oral classes in College.

- **Paper I.** Language I (3-hour in-person assessment)

The paper will consist of: (a) 10 short sentences to translate into French, testing common points of grammar; (b) a passage of 150-200 words of English (post-1950) to be translated into French; (c) summary in French (150-180 words) of a passage of French (500-600 words) of a reflective, analytical or critical nature.

- **Paper II.** Language II (3-hour in-person assessment)

IIA. Unprepared translation: translation into English of a passage of French (post-1900) of about 250 words.

IIB. Prepared translation: translation into English of a passage of about 300 words from one of the texts set for Paper IV, excluding *La Chastelaine de Vergi*.

The following two papers will be taught sequentially: Paper III in the first term and the start of the second; Paper IV in the second half of the second term and into the third term. You will have lectures in the Faculty, and a combination of discussion seminars and tutorials (for which you'll produce written work – commentaries or essays) with your literature tutors at St Hilda's.

- **Paper III.** Literature I: Short texts for commentary

This paper will be taught in the first term, so you may wish to prioritise the short texts in your vacation reading. You will have difficulty finding time to read primary texts during term, so using the time over the summer before you arrive to read them in the original is invaluable.

Candidates will be required to study four brief but self-contained works. You will certainly need to show that you know the texts well by establishing the context of the passages, but the skill is to show that you can comment pertinently and in detail on the words and ideas in front of you. When commenting on texts written in verse, you are required to show an awareness of the author's use of versification.

Recommended editions are mentioned below:

Montaigne, 'Des cannibales' from *Essais*, volume I. Recommended edition: *Des Cannibales' and 'Des Coches'*, ed. by Michel Tarpinian (Paris: Ellipses, 1998);

Racine, *Phèdre*, ed. by Raymond Picard (Gallimard 'Folio', 2015);

Verlaine, *Romances sans paroles*, ed. by Arnaud Bernadet, (GF Flammarion, 2018 [2012]);

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

This paper will be examined by commentary in the form of a 3-hour online open book examination, with candidates required to answer on *three* texts.

- **Paper IV.** Literature II: Narrative fiction

This paper will be taught across the second and third terms. Whilst you will have some time in the two vacation periods at the end of Michaelmas and Hilary terms to read for Paper IV, we strongly encourage reading *all* your literature texts at least once over the summer before you start the course.

La Châtelaine de Vergy, (édition bilingue), ed. by Jean Dufournet and Liliane Dulac (Folio, 1994);

Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* notes and Préface by Michel Delon (Livre de Poche, 2001);

Sand, *Indiana [1832]*, ed. by Béatrice Didier (Paris: Folio Gallimard, 1984);

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

The paper will be examined by essay in the form of a 3-hour online open-book examination, with candidates required to answer on *three* texts. There will be a choice of questions on each.

A range of reference books are available for consultation in the College library. You will definitely want to buy your own dictionary and grammar books. You will need as good and as large a **bilingual dictionary** as you can afford: the *Collins-Robert French-English/English-French Dictionary* is particularly recommended. You will also need a **French grammar**; we strongly recommend Hawkins and Towell, *French Grammar and Usage*. You may additionally wish to buy a monolingual dictionary such as *Le Petit Robert* is extremely useful. We also recommend buying Bescherelle, *La Conjugaison pour tous* (Hatier 2006).

Wherever possible, we strongly encourage you to stick to the recommended editions of texts in this reading list. Do remember to keep receipts so that you can claim your College book grant (£60) once you arrive in Oxford.

A useful website for buying titles in French at a good price is www.amazon.fr. **Do not buy cheap mass paperback editions of your set texts, as they are liable to be incomplete.** You might also try amazon.co.uk – or for a France-specific alternative: one possibility is <https://www.librairie-compagnie.fr/>. You can also order them from Blackwell's bookshop (www.blackwell.co.uk), or from Grant and Cutler at Foyles (<http://foyles.co.uk/languages>).

- Candidates offering **French Sole** must do three additional papers:
- **Paper XI.** Introduction to French Film Studies

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.

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.

Films

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 the 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.

In addition to the seminars you must follow the modern languages lecture-series entitled *Introduction to Film Studies* in weeks 1-4 in the first 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 (except for *Beau travail*) 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).

This paper is examined by certification: at the end of the course, your tutor will normally submit your last essay to the examiners for moderation.

- **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.

P. Valéry, *Questions de poésie* and *Poésie et pensée abstraite* in *Théorie poétique et esthétique*, part of *Variété* (*Œuvres*, vol. 1 (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957)), pp.1280-1293, 1314-1339.

These extracts are supplied in scanned copy together with this reading list; you do not need to obtain the book.

J.-P. Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Folio, 2001). Sections I and II to be studied ('Qu'est-ce qu'écrire?', 'Pourquoi écrire?', 'Pour qui écrit-on?')

R. Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Seuil, collection 'Point Essais', 1999 [1966])

H. Cixous, 'Le rire de la Méduse' in *Le rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, ed. by Frédéric Regard (Paris: Galilée, 2010). (This essay will be available electronically on Canvas; you do not need to obtain the book)

The teaching for this paper takes place in the second term weeks 5-8 and the third 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 3-hour online open-book examination in the third 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.

R. Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, ed. L. Renault (Garnier-Flammarion, 2000)

J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (Folio)

S. de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (2 vols) (Folio)

[N.B. Both the French 'Idées' collection and the English translation have sections missing and cannot be relied upon.]

The extracts on which we will concentrate, and from which a passage for commentary will be set, are vol. I: 'Introduction', 'Mythes'; vol. II: 'La femme mariée', 'La mère'.

F. Fanon, 'Introduction', 'Le Noir et le langage', and 'Conclusion' in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Seuil – Points Essais)

The teaching for this paper takes place in the first term weeks 5-8 and the second 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 3-hour online open-book examination in the third term requires you to answer three questions, each on a 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.