

ITALIAN READING LIST 2024

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). You will need to prepare for Paper IV prior to your arrival in Oxford (see below).

Language

The language, both oral and written, plays a crucial role at Prelims, both in its own right and as an essential tool for literary study. It should be noted that the Preliminary Examination will be the same for all candidates, regardless of whether they are beginners or post-A level. It is therefore of paramount importance that those who are beginners should acquire a sufficient knowledge of the language before arriving in Oxford. Once here, all first-year Italianists receive intensive language tuition through a variety of classes (grammar, prose, translation, oral, etc.), some of which are specially designed for beginners.

ITALIAN LANGUAGE

(a) For those with A-level Italian or equivalent

You should consolidate and extend your knowledge of Italian in any way possible, whether through regular reading of Italian newspapers, through reading of books beyond the preliminary course, or simply through careful study of prescribed texts. You should also spend time building up your knowledge of Italian grammar.

(b) For Beginners

You will take the same language (and literature) examinations after three terms as those in (a); for this purpose, competence well beyond A-level will be required. You therefore must make substantial progress with your language before coming to Oxford. You should follow the advice given in (a) and give priority to acquiring a firm grasp of the grammar.

(c) Further advice on language

Whether you have an A-Level or you start as a beginner, 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. In addition, you will need to purchase the following grammar book prior to the start of Michaelmas Term:

Beginners:

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

Post A-Level students:

- *A Reference Grammar of Modern Italian*, by Martin Maiden and Cecilia Robustelli (Routledge, 2007; second edition).

All students should acquire a good bi-lingual dictionary such as *Oxford-Paravia* or *il Ragazzini*. These and others will be available in the Oxford libraries. Reputable online dictionaries (please see links below) may also be used.

In addition, other texts you may find useful during the year are:

- *Upgrade Your Italian*, by Clelia Boscolo (Hodder Education, 2005).
- *Modern Italian Grammar Workbook*, by Anna Proudfoot, second edition (Routledge, 2005).
- *Modern Italian Grammar: A Practical Guide*, 3rd edition, by Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo, (Routledge, 2013).

Information for Beginners:

Diagnostic Test:

Prior to the start of the academic year, you will be required to take a language test online. You will be sent a link at the beginning of September and we'll ask you to do the online test between 10th and no later than 20th September 2024. The test will enable us to assign you to the appropriate class/level and it is therefore important that it reflects your actual knowledge at the time prior to coming to Oxford. Please make sure you complete the test, otherwise we'll be unable to assign you to the appropriate group.

Advice on how to prepare:

During the first year you will acquire a sound knowledge of the Italian language with regards to morphology, syntax, spelling and vocabulary and will be able to speak, read advanced texts and write using a good range of structures. The language course will start by covering the basics and students are not expected to have prior knowledge. 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 may wish to begin studying the following grammatical points over the summer: Nouns: gender and plural formation; Definite and indefinite articles; Adjectives: gender and plural formation; Verbs: Present indicative of regular and irregular verbs; *Passato prossimo* (regular participle formation); Forms of the *Imperfetto*. This will give you an excellent starting point for the whole academic year. You can prepare through self-study on any good grammar text you may already have, or with the recommended *The Ultimate Italian Review and Practice* by David Stillman that you will be using in class 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. Highly recommended.

http://www.iluss.it/schede_gram_free.html

A selection of exercises on grammar points, vocabulary and listening (with the transcript). From beginners to advanced, arranged by levels.

Online Dictionaries:

You will always be encouraged to use a good-sized bi-lingual dictionary throughout your years at Oxford, whether you have purchased your own copy or whether you are going to use the ones 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):

Bilingual dictionaries:

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

Monolingual dictionaries:

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

Synonyms:

[Dizionario dei Sinonimi e dei Contrari Rizzoli](#)
[Treccani Sinonimi e Contrari](#)

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 onto reading in the original. There are many short stories collection available, including the recent *Great Italian Stories. 10 Parallel Texts*, ed. by Jumpha Lahiri (Penguin, 2024). You will develop your skills so that by the second and third terms you can read the primary texts in Italian.

Reading and speaking will be much more rewarding if based on a formal grounding in grammar. The need to work as hard as possible at this task cannot be emphasized enough.

Courses in Italy

Spending some time in Italy in the summer before coming to Oxford is a good way to prepare for your first year here, although it should be emphasised that this is very much optional.

Useful information on language courses in Italy can be obtained from the Italian Cultural Institute:

Italian Cultural Institute
39 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8NX. Tel. 020 72351461
<http://www.italcultur.org.uk/>

Reading, speaking and/or going to Italy will be much more rewarding if based on a formal grounding in grammar. The need to work as hard as possible at this task cannot be emphasized enough.

ITALIAN LITERATURE & CINEMA

In your first year you will study two literature papers, each with a set of prescribed texts. These papers are taught through a combination of lectures (2–3 hours per week) and tutorial/seminars in college, for which you will prepare and present written work in groups of two to three in tutorials, or in seminars of about eight. If you are a beginner, you may start by reading the primary texts in translation, but once you have worked your way through about half of an introductory grammar (or straight away for those with A-level), you should be able to start reading some literature in the original. You might look at some short stories by modern writers such as Calvino, Ginzburg, Levi and you should then start reading the novels you will be studying in your first year.

The papers are as follows:

Paper IV: *Modern Italian Narrative and Cinema*

- I) Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) (transl: *If this is a Man*)
- II) Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare* [transl: *Family Lexicon*]
- III) Italo Calvino, *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959) (transl: *The Non-Existent Knight*)
- IV) Igiaba Scego, *La mia casa è dove sono* (Turin: Loescher, 2012) [no English translation available]

This section of the course includes the following film:

- V) *I cento passi* (film directed by Marco Tullio Giordana)

Background Reading:

A very useful introduction to Italian history and culture is Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge UP, 1994). An excellent introduction to modern Italian literature is Robert Gordon, *Introduction to Twentieth-Century Italian Literature* (Duckworth, 2005). For film studies, you might want to familiarise yourself with the subject by reading David Bordwell and Kirstin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th edn (London: McGraw Hill, 2008).

Paper III: Aspects of Italian Lyric Poetry

The poetry paper consists of three parts:

- I) Giuseppe Ungaretti, the collection *L'allegria* (1919) in (recommended edition): *Vita d'un uomo: 106 poesie*, Mondadori, Milan (Oscar series).

II) Eugenio Montale, *Ossi di seppia* (1925). Recommended edition: *E. Montale, Ossi di seppia* (Milan: Mondadori, Oscar Moderni, 2016). (selection of the following 20 poems: In limine, Non chiederci la parola, Merigiare pallido e assorto, Spesso il male di vivere ho incontrato, So l'ora in cui la faccia più impassibile, Gloria del disteso mezzogiorno, Felicità raggiunta si cammina, Il canneto rispunta i suoi cimelli, Forse un mattino andando, La farandola dei fanciulli sul greto, Cigola la carrucola del pozzo; and all nine poems from the section entitled 'Mediterraneo').

III) *The Sonnet* - an anthology of sonnets from the 13th to the 20th century will be provided after your arrival in Oxford. The study of sonnets will consist of close critical reading and analysis.

In Michaelmas Term, you will be studying, in order, **Levi, Ginzburg, Ungaretti and Montale**. You will have lectures on these authors and Reading Poetry classes. You should try to **read** these works before October, since there is not enough time to read them during term. Any modern edition of the narrative texts will be fine (by Mondadori, Einaudi, Rizzoli, etc), but please make sure that the edition you work with is unabridged. You will be required to read Calvino and Scego before the start of Hilary term.

In the UK, Italian books can be ordered online at <https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/home>. Alternatively, you could order them directly from Italy through an Internet vendor, for example Internet Bookshop Italia (www.ibs.it) or Amazon Italy (www.amazon.it).

If you have any queries or if you need further advice do not hesitate to contact me at any time. I look forward to meeting you in Michaelmas Term.

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