# BEGINNERS' GERMAN AT ST EDMUND HALL

For students starting in Michaelmas Term 2026

My name is Dr Alex Lloyd, and I am the Fellow by Special Election in German at St Edmund Hall and Lecturer in German at Magdalen College and University College. I will be your college tutor. My role is to teach you, organise your studies, and provide a source of support. As well as teaching, I research and write about modern German literature and culture.

This document introduces the Beginners' German course at Oxford and contains important information about your studies and how you can best prepare before your first term begins. When you begin your studies, you will also have access to the Faculty Handbook which provides further information.

If you have any questions before you arrive in Oxford, do please get in touch with me by email: alexandra.lloyd@seh.ox.ac.uk. It is good practice to address academics by their title (e.g. Dear Dr Brown). Most will then invite you to address them by their first name.

## THE PRELIMINARY COURSE

You will attend a pre-sessional course in order to prepare for the intensive language work leading up to the Preliminary examination. This pre-sessional course consists of an online course and a residential course.

You need to have completed the online course by the time you start the residential course. You are advised to allow at least 14 days for completion of the online course, which will be available from 1 September.

A letter with details about the online course and information on the residential course will be sent out to students in advance.

The first-year German for Beginners course will consist of four components: three will be focussed on intensive language study, while the fourth will give you an opportunity to work on literature also studied by the post-A level cohort. The course for the three language papers (Papers I, II and III) is centrally organised, and is specific to students of Beginners' German. The course for the literature paper (Paper IV) is organised and taught by your college in the Hilary Term. For Paper IV, Beginners' German students will read three narrative works, initially primarily in translation. You will be expected to use the translation consistently in conjunction with the original, maximising the focus of your reading over time on the original German text. In addition, you will study one film, with subtitles, to learn the techniques of analysing cinematic works. The college-organised tutorials or classes on these works will bring together students from the Beginners' German group and the post-A-level group, and will focus on the German text. Alongside these tutorials or classes, your reading skills in German will be developed in a centrally organised class that will complement, and interact with, both the language papers

and the literature/film paper. The Preliminary Examination is taken at the end of the first year, and consists of the following papers:

**Paper I: Reading Comprehension, Essay and Grammar**

a) Reading comprehension exercise (in German) on a passage in German.
b) One essay in German (250-400 words). A choice of questions will be set.
c) Grammar exercises designed to test grammatical knowledge and the ability to apply it appropriately.

You should be sure to have your own copies of the following when you begin your studies:

*Kurs DaF A1–B1: Deutsch für Studium und Beruf. Kursbuch mit Audios und Videos inklusive Lizenzschlüssel allango (24 Monate).* Hybride Ausgabe allango. Stuttgart: Klett, ISBN 978-3-12-676844-3.

*Kurs DaF A1–B1: Deutsch für Studium und Beruf. Übungsbuch mit Audios und Videos.* Stuttgart: Klett, ISBN 978-3-12-676845-0.

*Thematischer Basiswortschatz*, Klett Verlag 2016. ISBN 978-3125195073.

**Paper IIA: Translation into German**
Translation into German of a prose passage.

**PAPER IIB: Translation from German**
Translation from German of a prose passage in a modern literary register.

**PAPER III: Oral**
An oral exam with a spoken part and a listening comprehension.

**Paper IV: Prose and Film: Essays**

All students of German, non-beginners and beginners, will study the prescribed prose texts and the prescribed film in Hilary Term.

Prose texts and film prescribed for study:

> Theodor Fontane, *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1888) [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006) [Suhrkamp BasisBibliothek 81]
> Also: *On Tangled Paths*, trans. by Peter James Bowman (London: Penguin Classics, 2013)
>
> Franz Kafka, Die Verwandlung (1912/1915) [Stuttgart: Reclam XL, 2021. ISBN 3150161096]
> Also: *The Metamorphosis*, trans. by Joyce Crick, in *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: OUP, 2009)
>
> Elfriede Jelinek, Die Liebhaberinnen (1975) [Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, current edition. ISBN 978-3499124679]
> Also: *Women as Lovers*, trans. by Martin Chalmers (London: Serpent's Tail, 1994)]
>
> Fatih Akın (dir.), Aus dem Nichts (2017) [DVD: Warner Home Video, 2018]

Also: *In the Fade*, with English subtitles [DVD: Curzon Artificial Eye, 2018]

Candidates on the Beginners' course are encouraged to use the original German text as far as possible and to refer to it when quoting from the work, including in the Paper IV examination.

## TEACHING

Your teaching during the first year at Oxford year will be arranged as follows:

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|---|---|
| Michaelmas Term (October-December): | Weeks 1-8: tutorials, lectures, seminars |
| Hilary Term (January-March): | Weeks 1-8: tutorials, lectures, seminars |
| Trinity Term (April-June): | Weeks 1-6: tutorials, lectures, seminars<br>Week 7: revision<br>Weeks 8-9: exams |

The time you spend on your studies at Oxford will be divided between attending classes and lectures and working independently on reading and preparing written work to be marked by your tutors and discussed in tutorials.

Your lectures, seminars, classes, and tutorials will take place in a few different places: in college, at the Taylor Institution, and at the Schwarzmann Centre.

## SPEAKING AND LISTENING CLASSES

There is no formal oral examination in the first year, but to pass the Preliminary Examination in German you must attend and actively participate in no fewer than eight oral classes in German of at least one hour before the end of the fourth week of the Trinity Term of your first year. Candidates who fail to satisfy this requirement for the June examination shall have their mark for each of the two written language papers in German reduced by ten marks. This is an important requirement of the course that you should be aware of.

# HOW THINGS WORK AT OXFORD (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

## ACADEMIC WORK

**What skills will I work on as part of my course?**
There are four complementary skills involved in the study of Modern Languages: listening comprehension, speaking, close reading and writing. The Prelims course is designed to help you develop and hone these skills. The German course is tightly structured. By the end of the first year, you should have the skills you need for the second year and beyond, when you will have much more choice in the texts and topics you study.

**How is reading literature going to help my language skills?**
It expands your vocabulary, helps with fluency, and exposes you to new structures, phrases, registers, and ways of saying things in German. The best way to approach reading is to do it regularly. Make time for it and remember that it's directly related to your language skills – not a completely separate exercise.

**How should I approach reading texts in German?**
Reading in a foreign language can be tiring for non-native speakers, especially if you haven't done it much before or you're a beginner in the language. It may be helpful to consider the following: keep a vocab book to keep track of new words and phrases; find out about the plot of the book before you start reading to make it easier to navigate; keep notes on each chapter of a book as you read and include a brief plot summary and note down any quotations that stick out as interesting or even strange (be sure to note page numbers if you do this: it will make life easier when you come to use the notes, and it is good scholarly practice; don't be despondent if it feels like a slog at first. Stick with it as it's an excellent way to improve your language skills and vocabulary and should ideally be, or become, an enjoyable task!

**What is a tutorial?**
A tutorial usually lasts for an hour, and we discuss a particular text, topic, or set of issues related to the primary material. You usually write an essay in preparation for a tutorial. You can find out more here: www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/tutorials?wssl=1.

**How do I do a translation homework?**
Use a dictionary (consider using both an English-German one, but also a monolingual dictionary such as www.duden.de). Read the original text carefully and think about it with your 'literary hat' on before translating. Look at the language used, the structures, style, tone, and register. Check your final version carefully before you hand it in.

**How do I complete an essay assignment?**
There are lots of helpful guides online giving tips on how to do academic writing. Here's a rough outline of how you might approach researching and writing an essay for tutorials:

- Secondary reading and research
- Planning, paragraphing, thesis statement (a sentence beginning 'In this essay, I
- argue that...')
- Writing
- Editing
- Checking

You can find out more here: www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills?wssl=1.

**What if I don't think I'm good at writing?**
Part of the point of the first year at Oxford is to make you a better writer. Good writing takes practice and academic writing is a very particular skill. Take on board any feedback that tutors give you and ask if anything is unclear. It's all about practice.

**What is secondary literature?**
In Literary Studies, secondary literature refers to academic (sometimes referred to as 'scholarly') works that discuss, analyse, and interpret primary texts. Your tutors are all 'research active' – that means they do research and publish articles and books about literature, film, literary history etc.

**Why do I need to read secondary literature?**
If you write an essay on a work of literature, the chances are that someone else will have thought about it and written about it before you. In academia, we are always interested in what others have to say about texts. We may not always agree with them, though, and sometimes academic write about texts to 'set the record straight' or to show how the way they are interpreting the text makes more sense. You should read secondary literature at this stage to get a sense of how other academics have read the texts you are studying. But start to think about whether you agree with these people. Just because something was published, doesn't mean it is right or that it is well written!

**How do I use secondary literature in my essay?**
Tutors will often indicate which secondary literature you should make it a priority to read. At this stage, it's more valuable to spend time analysing the primary texts. Use secondary literature to get a sense of the context and others' arguments, but don't feel you have to read everything ever written!

**What are footnotes and how should I use them?**
Footnotes are a way of recording other academics' arguments and showing where the evidence you use (e.g. quotations from texts) come from. This is good and ethical academic practice. When you read secondary literature, have a look at the footnotes. Sometimes the author will suggest other avenues or works to pursue, or there may be ideas that weren't relevant enough for the main text but which the author still wants to convey.

**How do I get access to secondary literature?**
You should receive an introduction to SOLO (Oxford's online library catalogue) at your library induction. If you're ever in doubt as to how to access a book, contact a librarian either in college or in the Modern Languages Faculty Library. You can also use JStor (https://www.jstor.org) to find articles. Take note of there a particular essay or article has been published (e.g. the *Oxford German Studies* journal).

**Should I take notes in lectures? If so, how?**
You'll develop a sense of what works best for you. Making lots of notes isn't always the best approach. You could try listening to lectures as though they were a podcast (especially the ones that are available to download rather than watch live). When the lecture is over, try to write a paragraph summarising what the lecture was about/what you learned. Is there anything you didn't understand and would like to ask your tutor about?

**How should I organise the time I spend on academic work?**
Break tasks down into their smaller parts. E.g. don't just plan to 'write the essay' – think about all the different tasks you need to do as part of this (reading, planning, writing). That is a good

way of making big tasks seem less daunting or overwhelming. Make sure you have a diary of some kind and mark deadlines clearly.

**What should I do if I don't understand an assignment?**
Ask the tutor for help as soon as possible. Tutors want to help you understand your academic work.

**What should I do if I can't get my work in by the deadline?**
Communication is key. Be upfront and honest if this happens. It may be that something unforeseen came up, it may be that you simply didn't plan your week or allow enough time to complete the assignment. Tutors are usually flexible and understanding, but you should never miss a deadline without getting in touch (unless, of course, it's some kind of emergency situation and you can't - in that case, contact the tutor as soon as possible afterwards).

**Will I have to work during the vacations?**
Yes. They are vacations, but not holidays. It's important to have a break after a busy term, but then you should make a plan to complete the vacation work set by tutors and to read the texts you'll be studying in the coming term. Avoid the temptation to leave everything till the last moment! The vacations are likely longer than the ones you're used to, so this planning is essential.

## REPORTS AND FEEDBACK

**Will I get marks for my work?**
Some tutors give numerical marks on all pieces of work; others give written feedback but only give marks for vacation work and collections. Marks for Prelims are usually out of 100. A mark of 70 or above is a 'distinction'; a mark of 40 or above means you passed. If you're unclear about how you're doing, ask the tutor.

**Will I get reports?**
Yes, you will get a report at the end of every term from all tutors who have taught you for college-based tutorials and classes. These will be available for you to read. Your reports will also be discussed in end-of-term meetings with your Organising Tutor (for German that's me) and the Director of Studies for Modern Languages, and at collections with your Head of House (a meeting once a year where you meet with the head of college and your main tutors to discuss your progress).

## EXAMS

**What are 'collections'?**
Collections are exams taken at the start of every term (except Freshers' Week). They are usually 3 hours' long and you sit them with other students or online. They are not the same thing as Tutor's Collections or collections with your Head of House which are end-of-term meetings. Collections are a way to monitor your progress and for you to get a feeling for exams at Oxford.

**What end-of-year exams will I sit?**
You will sit four end-of-year exams for German, one for each of the Papers (I-IV).

## ACADEMIC WORK AND BEYOND

**What should I do if I'm unhappy with how the course is going or have other academic-related concerns?**
You should direct these to me, or to another one of your tutors. No one will be cross or disappointed if, for example, you think you might have chosen the wrong course or if you just aren't understanding how to approach the work. The important thing is to get in touch and talk it through so that we can help. Starting university can be extremely daunting (as well as exciting!) and often it just takes a bit of time to get used to everything. Also, the course is demanding, and you may well need time to adjust from how things were at school.

**What should I do if I have a non-academic problem or issue?**
You are always welcome to discuss this with me or another of your academic tutors. However, we understand that this is not always possible or desirable, and that it may well be more appropriate to seek help elsewhere. Every college has a Welfare Team to support you in lots of different ways. Never be afraid to ask for help, no matter how small or how scary a problem might seem. You are not alone.

## SOME TIPS COLLECTED FROM PREVIOUS STUDENTS

- Look properly at the essay feedback tutors give you. Make a list of things you did well and what you could improve on next time.
- Deadlines are for your benefit, not the tutor's. Organise your time well and get things in on time!
- Read all the books. Read them in English first if that helps, but then read them in German. Look up words and write them into your copy.
- Find online texts where you can as being able to search them for key words/terms/characters is helpful when researching essay topics.
- Try explaining what you're studying to people at home/friends who don't do language and literature.
- You aren't expected to be fluent when you start. You're going to need to look up words in the dictionary.
- Remember why you wanted to do this degree course in the first place! Keep hold of the joy of reading and doing Modern Languages!