UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

FACULTY OF MEDIEVAL AND MODERN LANGUAGES

Information for the Preliminary (Prelim) course in

RUSSIAN

2026/27

This handbook gives subject-specific information for your Prelim course in Russian.

For general information about your studies and the faculty, please consult the Faculty's Undergraduate Course Handbook

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SUB-FACULTY TEACHING STAFF

The Sub-Faculty of Russian and Other Slavonic Languages is part of the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages. The following are Faculty post-holders and Sub-Faculty teaching members (their general areas of research and teaching are given in brackets):

Professor P. R. Bullock (Wadham) (Russian Literature and Music).

Dr R. Chitnis (University College) (Czech and Slovak Language and Literature).

Dr H. Eckhoff (Lady Margaret Hall) (Slavonic Philology, especially Russian, Old Church Slavonic, Church Slavonic).

Dr J. Fellerer (Wolfson) (Slavonic Philology, especially Polish and Ukrainian).

Professor P. Jones (University College) (Russian Literature)

Dr T. Koplatadze (Christ Church, St John's College, Magdalen College) (Russian and Russophone literature)

Professor A. S. Kahn (St Edmund Hall, The Queen's College) (Russian Literature).

Dr M. Vaysman (Jesus College, New College, Merton College) (Russophone literature)

Mrs N. Keys (Senior Lecturer in Russian)

Dr A. Krasovitsky (Lecturer in Russian)

Dr Oliver Ready (Stipendiary Lecturer, St Edmund Hall) (Russian Literature)

Dr Panayiotis Xenophontos (Stipendiary Lecturer, University College)

Dr Katherine New (Stipendiary Lecturer, Wadham)

Dr Rowan Dowling (Stipendiary Lecturer, New, Merton and Jesus Colleges)

THE FIRST YEAR POST-A2 COURSE (COURSE A)

The first year of the Russian post-A2 course is designed as a bridge between the kind of work done at school and the kind of study expected in the second part of the course. Preparation for four examination papers is devised to achieve two aims. The first goal is to consolidate and improve written and spoken language skills. The second aim is an introduction to the close study of literature at university level.

LANGUAGE

A major aim of the Preliminary Course is to build a more secure knowledge of Russian grammar, idiom and vocabulary. The Sub-Faculty provides grammar classes involving written exercises, classes in spoken Russian with a native speaker, and classes to develop active command of the written language and translation technique by translating from English into Russian. You will have additional classes organised through your college for translation from Russian into English. All of these language classes will expose you to a wide range of styles and registers of modern Russian and will help you to read and understand a diverse range of literary texts with accuracy and confidence.

At the end of their first year, all those studying post-A2 Russian (no matter what their other subject is) take the following two language papers, each of which is assessed by written examination lasting three hours:

PAPER I

The paper tests translation into Russian, and command of Russian grammar and syntax. It consists of a passage of English for translation into Russian, and of exercises in Russian grammar.

PAPER II

The paper tests translation from Russian into English and comprehension of Russian, and gives students an opportunity to show their knowledge of vocabulary and sensitivity to nuance and register. It consists of one passage, usually of literary prose, for translation, and a second passage, usually of discursive prose (journalism, literary criticism, etc.) on which a number of questions are set, to be answered in English.

ORAL

In order to pass the Preliminary Examination in Russian, colleges must present, for each candidate, a certificate of attendance and active participation in oral classes.

Candidates must attend and actively participate i**n no fewer than eight oral classes of at least one hour before the end of the fourth week of the Trinity Term of their first year.** The classes may consist of reading aloud with attention to proper pronunciation and intonation, and/or discussion of passages dealing with issues in contemporary culture. The Senior Tutor of each candidate's college is required to submit to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator, Modern Languages, Examinations Office, The Schwarzman Centre, a certificate endorsed by the Senior Tutor and a Modern Languages Tutor (the latter acting on behalf of the sub-faculty) stating that they have attended, and participated in, the required number of classes. Certification is required by noon on the Friday of 5th week of Trinity Term. Candidates who fail to satisfy this requirement for the June examination shall have their mark for each of the two written language papers reduced by ten marks. Candidates for a language paper or papers in the September examination who have not previously in that academic year satisfied the attendance requirement will be examined viva voce to demonstrate at least basic competence in the spoken language.

LITERATURE

Many students begin the course without having had the opportunity to undertake much formal study of Russian literature. Both literature papers require a close reading in the original Russian of a range of literary texts selected from different periods and different genres. The close study of these texts provides a valuable way of getting a feeling for the interconnectedness of Russian literature and history, gradually building up reading speed and learning how to analyse literature. You will be trained in basic analytical techniques and categories, such as (in prose) narrative point of view, the handling of 'real' time and narrated time, and evolving nature of gender relations; (in verse) metre, rhythm, rhyme, and the stanza in their historical development, figurative language, stylistic registers, and authorial point of view. Over the course of the year, you will learn how to write critical essays and commentaries that will form the basis of work on literature in subsequent years of the course.

Lectures are offered on set texts over the three terms of the year, putting them in context and elucidating thematic and formal questions and problems. There are also lectures on general subjects, for instance introducing the techniques of versification, the analysis of language and style, and discussing the historical background to the texts. Throughout the year, tutorials and classes in college will give you the opportunity to discuss these works and to write about them in essays and commentaries.

The literature sections of the Preliminary examination are examined by examination: paper III and paper IV are both assessed in the form of written papers sat over three hours each. Paper III is assessed by three commentaries and paper IV by a commentary and two essays.

Candidates in Modern Languages (Russian) and Middle Eastern language take *either* Paper III *or* Paper IV. Candidates in the post-A-level Russian course take Paper III and Paper IV. All others studying post-A2 Russian take both Paper III and Paper IV.

PAPER III - Poetry

This paper introduces the techniques of close reading through the study of six great works of narrative poetry, stretching from the period of Catherine the Great to the Soviet period. Many themes, such as the relation of the writer to the ruler or state, the individual to nature, and the image of St Petersburg, link these works:

1) *Felitsa* (1782): An ambiguous tribute to Catherine II by perhaps Russia's greatest eighteenth-century poet, Gavrila Derzhavin, this lively, sardonic, and entertaining poem will introduce you to the riches of pre-1800 Russian literary culture, and to the tradition of the formal ode.

2) *Mednyi vsadnik* (1834): Pushkin's famous masterpiece, a gripping evocation of the

catastrophic 1824 floods in St Petersburg, is also a profound meditation on the costs of historical change and the nature of historical greatness.

3) *Mtsyri* (1839): A high point of Russian Orientalism, Lermontov's lush and sensual evocation of the landscape of the Caucasus is also a powerful psychological study of the tormented Byronic personality.

4) *Na pole Kulikovom* (1908) and 5) *Dvenadtsat' (1918)*: Two contrasting works by one of Russia's foremost Modernist poets, Aleksandr Blok. *Na pole Kulikovom* is a cycle of lyric poems evoking the Battle of Kulikovo (1380), a famous victory of the Russians over the Tatars and a key moment in the emergence of both Russian national identity and imperial ambition. Blok addresses this battle as a historical parallel to the period at which he himself was writing, and agonises over the future of Russia in the wake of the Russia-Japanese War. *Dvenadtsat'* captures the violence and confusion of the 1917 October Revolution through a collage of fleeting impressions, half-glimpsed events, and revolutionary songs.

5) *Rekviem* (1935-1940): Anna Akhmatova's famous and poignant lament for the victims of Stalin's Great Terror (1934-1938), a monument of writerly resistance to the totalitarian state.

PAPER IV - Russian Prose Fiction

Russian literature has produced many masterpieces of short narrative, and this paper will introduce you to the development of the short story over nearly a century. Irony and a critical distance on social reality are hallmarks of all these works:

1) *Pikovaya dama* (1834): Pushkin's prose masterpiece, lying somewhere between a ghost story and a psychological study, is the precursor of the introspective fiction of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov.

2) Chekhov: *Anna na shee* (1895), *Dom s mezoninom* (1896), *Sluchai iz praktiki* (1898): Three contrasting stories by an internationally recognised master of short prose, ranging in style from the ironic and anecdotal to the lyrical, and dealing with various ways in which male and female characters interact.

3) *Chemodan* (1986): Sergey Dovlatov's collection of sketches, based on memories evoked by the few objects he was able to take with him in his suitcase into emigration in 1979, provides a sophisticated, wry, sometimes bitter, picture of Russian life in the fading years of the Soviet regime. Bureaucracy, the black market, social and political structures, personal relationships, and the nature of dissidence and the Soviet underground are examined in a language which, while accessible, is challenging in its use of contemporary lexis and reference.

RUSSIAN SOLE – FURTHER TOPICS

The first year of the Russian post-A2 course includes three Further Topics:

PAPER XI. Further Topics I

Introduction to Russian Film Studies

This paper aims to equip students with basic skills in film analysis. It is taught in two parts. A methodological part, consisting of four lectures devoted to four international films, presents the basic concepts of film analysis: montage, story, self-reference, spectatorship. These international films are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. A representative selection might include: Sergei Eisenstein: *Battleship Potemkin*; Alfred Hitchcock: *39 Steps*; Antonioni: *Blow-up*; Claire Denis: *Beau Travail*.

The second part of the paper focuses on four films designed to examine the development of Soviet and post-Soviet film, as well as exploring the relationship between film and wider aspects of Soviet and post-Soviet history and society. The first film is Dziga Vertov's 1929 *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*, a silent documentary that both depicts the everyday life of Soviet citizens in a range of urban landscapes, and exploits a wide range of experimental cinematic techniques. Larisa Shepit'ko's *Kryl'ya* (1966) is a lyrical masterpiece of post-Stalin cinema that raises questions of the legacy of the Second World War and handles the complexity of gender relations and intergenerational relationships. In *Astenicheskii sindrom* (1989), Kira Muratova, conjures up the apathy of late socialism and challenges many of the norms of Soviet propriety and morality. Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Vozvrashchenie* (2003) examines the fate of masculinity in post-Soviet culture in the form of an ambiguous road trip to the haunting spaces of the Russian north. The paper will be taught through a series of seminars, during the course of which students will give presentations and write tutorial essays on various formal and thematic aspects of the four set films. Candidates will also be expected to show awareness of other relevant cinematic and cultural material from the period.

PAPER XII. Further Topics II

Russian Church Slavonic Texts and Elements of Comparative Slavonic Philology

This paper consists of two parts, A and B. Part A aims to equip students with a basic reading competence in Russian Church Slavonic, which they will need for the obligatory papers on medieval and Enlightenment literature in the Honours course (Papers VII and IX), and which will also be useful to them if they take either of the historical linguistic Papers IV and V(1), or if they wish to engage with the traditional religious culture of modern Russia. Part B, an elementary introduction to Comparative Slavonic Philology, aims to draw together and

enhance their study of Church Slavonic, Russian and Polish. On the basis of examples from those languages they will become familiar with the comparative method of reconstruction in application to palatalizations of consonants, treatment of syllables containing liquid consonants, the development of nasal vowels and the vowel *jat'*, and the outcomes of the short vowels (*jers*) in late Common Slavonic.

The set texts for explanation of select grammatical forms in **Part A** are:

> The Lord's Prayer, as included in Russian reading primers, and the church texts to which allusion is made in texts set for Paper III in the Preliminary Examination: the *heirmos* of the ninth ode from the Canon for Holy Saturday Mattins and the prayer, *kontakion* and *oikos* for the repose of the dead (to be supplied in photocopy).
>
> The *Tolkovaya azbuka* (2nd redaction), as included in Russian reading primers, from Demkova, N. S., Droblenkova, N. F., 'K izucheniyu slavyanskikh azbuchnykh stikhov', *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, xxiii (1968), pp. 56-57.
>
> The legends of S. Andrew's visit to Rus' and of the conversion of Rus' under Vladimir (anno 987), from *Pamyatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. XI-nachalo XII veka*, pp. 26 and 120-124.
>
> *Slovo o pogibeli russkoi zemli*, from *Pamyatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. XIII vek*, p. 130.
>
> The *Stixi pokayannye* from *Pamyatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. Vtoraya polovina XV1 veka*, pp.550-562.
>
> *Azbuka o golom i nebogatom cheloveke*, from *Pamyatniki literatury drevnei Rusi. XVII vek. Kniga vtoraya*, pp. 185-186.

Part B makes reference to comparative data from Church Slavonic, Russian and Polish.

PAPER XIII. Further Topics III

Elementary Polish

The paper is designed for complete beginners. Students acquire the full range of basic vocabulary and basic knowledge of Polish grammar, notably foundations in correct spelling and pronunciation, nominal and verbal inflection and basic syntactic structures, including structures with numerals. The level to be achieved is commensurate with the levels A1 and A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, as further specified in the criteria for the Certificate Examinations in Polish as a Foreign Language.

Teaching for the paper will be delivered in two to three weekly hours of general beginners' tuition, targeting all four language competencies: writing, speaking, listening, reading.

THE FIRST YEAR BEGINNERS' COURSE (COURSE B)

The primary aim of the first year course in beginners' Russian is to provide a thorough grounding in Russian grammar, as well as practice in writing Russian accurately, and to build up vocabulary and grasp of syntax so that students can start to read moderately demanding texts by the end of the year. Students receive seven hours per week of classes which cover Russian grammar, speaking, listening and comprehension, and, in Hilary Term one hour per week of reading classes with other teaching members of the Russian sub-faculty, based on a selection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry available in a booklet from the faculty office for a small charge.

At the end of the first year, beginners in Russian take an examination consisting of the following papers:

PAPER BI

Translation from English into Russian and Russian grammar exercises.

The paper tests translation into Russian and command of Russian vocabulary and grammar. It consists of a passage of English for translation into Russian and exercises in Russian grammar.

PAPER BII

Translation from Russian into English and comprehension of a passage of written Russian.

The paper tests translation from Russian into English and comprehension of Russian, and gives students an opportunity to show their knowledge of vocabulary and awareness of translation technique. It consists of one passage of narrative prose, for translation, and a second passage, usually of discursive prose (journalism, literary criticism, etc.) on which a number of questions are set, to be answered in English.

PAPER BIII

Dictation and Aural Comprehension

PAPER BIV

Oral Skills

REPARATION FOR THE SECOND YEAR OF THE BEGINNERS' COURSE

Students who have taken Course B in Russian are required to spend the second year of their studies on a specially designed seven-month course studying Russian, details of which will be circulated by the Slavonic sub-faculty during the first year. The aim of the course is to consolidate first-year work and develop active competence in both written and especially spoken Russian. During the year abroad undergraduates are required to read in Russian a number of texts, mostly those set for the post-A2 Preliminary Examination. Beginners students will not be required to pay for the compulsory seven-month language course. They will be liable to pay the year abroad fee (currently £1,430), and will be responsible for covering all other costs relating to the year abroad, including administration and visa fees, living expenses and flights.

When abroad, you are strongly advised to register with your country's embassy and to sign up for FCDO travel advice (https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice),

FURTHER INFORMATION FOR BOTH COURSES

GENERAL

Oxford has significant communities of speakers of Russian and other Slavonic languages, with associated cultural and social institutions.

Within the university, there are many student-run associations and societies, which organize parties and other social events as well as film showings, talks (many by outside speakers), and debates. Undergraduates are also very welcome at the Slavonic seminar series, which features speakers from a wide range of institutions, and takes place most Thursdays of term at 5pm.

A good way to keep up with Russian and East European events is to send a message to the Administrator of the Russian and Eurasian Centre at St Antony's College, Mr Richard Ramage (richard.ramage@sant.ox.ac.uk), asking to be put on his mailing list.

When drawing up this handbook we have tried to be as accurate and clear as possible. The texts prescribed for study for individual papers are now listed in this handbook.

The Examination Conventions, detailing the structure of each examination paper, including rubrics, are also available as a separate document at:

Examination conventions: MML UG Information (ox.ac.uk)

The revised edition of the University's Examination Decrees and Regulations lists the examination papers and their permitted combination for your degree course. (For further details, refer to the handbook and the examining conventions.) See:

Exam Regulations - Search (ox.ac.uk)

Courses and regulations are constantly under review, so always check also with your college tutor to confirm what is written here and in the Examination Conventions.

In addition, do not hesitate to ask for clarification about the course from any member of the Sub-Faculty who is lecturing to you or tutoring you; we will always do our best to help.

Revised: 05/08/25