

Dear Student,

I am writing to you in my role as Fellow and Tutor in Italian at Somerville to provide you with some preliminary information about the Italian course at Oxford and the work that students are expected to undertake over the summer in preparation for beginning their course in October.

Students holding conditional offers will only receive confirmation of a place at Oxford when the results of their final qualifications are known and the conditions satisfied but, in the meantime, I encourage you to keep up with your language and literature learning along the guidelines included below. We very much hope to welcome you at Somerville in the autumn.

(I) PRELIMINARY WORK IN LANGUAGE

Students are strongly advised to revise grammar thoroughly before beginning the course. In particular you will find it helpful to revise the following grammatical points:

- Definite and indefinite articles
- Adjectives and agreements (comparative and superlative adjectives included)
- Plural of nouns (regular and irregular)
- Present indicative of regular and irregular verbs
- *Passato prossimo* of regular and irregular verbs
- *Imperfetto*

If you are a beginner, by the time you come here you should have mastered the grammar of the language; so you should know the verb and noun systems, with their irregularities, and be able to understand and to use the subjunctive. You should have quite a large vocabulary: you should be able to read fairly straightforward Italian without having to look up every other word. In other words, you should be in a position to begin doing the language exercises which we set for the Prelims Examination. And you should be able to read the texts prescribed for Prelims, though you may find them slow going at first. The Beginners' Course during the first two terms works best if it is ironing out imperfections and filling gaps rather than taking you through the language from the beginning, or near it. Just before the start of the first term, students are usually asked to do a translation exercise into Italian and another into English to assess how much progress they have made and how much further they have to go.

It is quite possible for an interested student, with some experience of language-learning, to acquire a good level of oral and written Italian before starting the course here. If you are working by yourself (for which much is to be said, since you can set your own pace), *Teach Yourself Italian Grammar* by A. Proudfoot will be very useful. G. Milesi, *Italiano vivo*, has lots of good exercises but are best done with a teacher. Graziana Lazzarino and Annamaria Moneti, *Da capo* is better still and more recent.

You may also wish to start learning Italian via the RAI TV programme, *L'Italia e l'italiano per stranieri*, <http://www.italia.rai.it/>

If you are taking A level (or equivalent) in Italian, you still need to work on your language knowledge and your understanding of Italian grammar. Do practice grammar exercises that to reinforce or extend what you already know. You should also read Italian newspapers and magazines, and speak Italian whenever you have the chance.

(II) RECOMMENDED GRAMMAR BOOKS AND DICTIONARIES

Both for pre-university work and during their time here, all students **need a good grammar book**. You should choose one of the most useful recent grammars, all of which have copious exercises for you to work on each grammatical point:-

- A.L. Lepschy and G. Lepschy, *The Italian Language Today* (especially Part II)
- A. Proudfoot & F. Cardo, *Modern Italian Grammar*
- M. Mezzardi, *Essential Italian Grammar Practice + Answer Keys*
- G. Lazzarino & A. Moneti, *Da capo* (3rd ed)

For advanced students (and for subsequent years):

- M. Maiden and Cecilia Robustelli, *A Reference Grammar of Modern Italian* (2nd ed)

Students will also need a dictionary.

The following is a list of bilingual and monolingual dictionaries that are particularly recommended for university students. Medium to large-sized bilingual dictionaries (approx. 60000 entries or more) not mentioned below and edited, for instance, by Penguin, Rizzoli, or Le Monnier are also valuable and if you already own one of these then there is no need to buy a new dictionary for the time being. However, at this stage of your studies, a full edition of a good bilingual dictionary is highly desirable. Please note that all monolingual concise dictionaries mentioned below are available in full-length edition and may come with a CD-Rom: in both cases, the relevant prices do increase.

BILINGUAL (*= particularly recommended)

- *Il Ragazzini*, ed. by G. Ragazzini (Zanichelli 2007)
- *Il Grande Dizionario Hazon* (Garzanti 2007)
- *Collins-Sansoni Italian Dictionary*, ed. by V. Macchi (HarperCollins 2005)
- **Oxford-Paravia Italian Dictionary*, ed. by C. Bareggi (Oxford UP 2001)

MONOLINGUAL

- *G. Devoto & G. Oli, *Il Devotino. Vocabolario della lingua italiana*. Con CD-Rom (Mondadori 2007)
- *T. de Mauro, *Il dizionario di italiano compatto* (Paravia 2004)
- *Italiano compatto. Dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. by A. Cattana e M.T. Nesci (Zanichelli 2003)
- G. Devoto & G.C. Oli, *Nuovo Devoto Oli Compatto. Dizionario fondamentale della lingua italiana* (Le Monnier, 2002)
- N. Zingarelli, *Lo Zingarelli minore. Dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. by M. Cannella (Zanichelli 2001)

(III) PRELIMINARY READING: LITERATURE

Whether you are a beginner or a more advanced student, you must do some preparatory reading in Italian literature.

The works prescribed for the Prelims course that students study during the first term are as follows:

- 1) Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*
- 2) Italo Calvino, *Il cavaliere inesistente*
- 3) Giuseppe Ungaretti, *L'Allegria*
- 4) Eugenio Montale, *Ossi di seppia* (selection of 20 poems: In limine, Non chiederci la parola, Meriggiare 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')

We will study the texts in the order given above. You should try to **read three** of the 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), just ensure that the edition you work with is unabridged. Suggested editions for the poetry are as follows:

Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Vita d'un uomo: 106 poesie. 1914-1960* (Milan: Mondadori, 2016)
 Eugenio Montale, *Ossi di seppia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2016)

You would also do well to read as much additional Italian prose as you can. You could begin with something in the Danish-produced Easy Readers series, which include adapted Italian fiction (the A books have a vocabulary of under 600 words, the B under 1200 and so on). You might also try, as linguistically easy starters, the still appealing peasant-novel by Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara* (available with English notes and vocabulary in a Manchester University Press edition) or more recent and very readable commercial successes such as Alessandro Baricco, *Seta*, and Susanna Tamaro, *Va dove ti porta il cuore*. Italian books are most easily obtained in this country from Grant and Cutler, now sold through Foyles bookshop (<http://www.foyles.co.uk/languages>). Books published in Italy can be reliably obtained over the web from Internet Bookshop Italia (<https://www.ibs.it/>).

You might also do a language course in Italy (though it's not essential at this stage)

The Italian Cultural Institute in London, has basic information about costs and duration for almost all language courses in Italy (see: http://www.icilondon.esteri.it/iic_londra/it/imparare_italiano/i_corsi_di_lingua/i-corsi-di-lingua.html). Florence is possible, though it is full of English-speakers: of the schools there the Istituto Michelangelo and the British Institute are both good. The latter provides courses specifically for students about to start Italian courses at British Universities. I can also recommend Italiaidea in Rome. Otherwise there is the Università italiana per stranieri at Perugia, which is cheaper and very reasonable.

If you are a beginner and do plan to follow a course in Italy, you will get more from your visit if you have done quite a lot of work on the language beforehand. It is better to register for an intermediate level course, if it is possible to do so, since you will make the most rapid progress that way, in both writing and speaking.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Buon lavoro!

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