

Dear Student,

I am writing to you in my role as Fellow and Tutor in Italian at Somerville College 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.

(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 basic 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.

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.initalia.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

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.

Students are asked to do an online test prior to coming to Oxford, and they are subsequently streamed into four different levels (Level 1 for Beginners, Level 4 for Advanced). Teaching in your first year will consist of 4 hours a week, comprising weekly classes of Grammar, Prose (Translation from English into Italian), Listening and Reading comprehension, and two fortnightly classes of Essay writing and Translation from Italian into English.

Those who applied for Beginners Italian (Level 1 and 2), are advised to purchase a copy of:

- *The Ultimate Italian Review and Practice*, by David Stillman (McGraw-Hill, 2013)

Advanced Beginners and Post-A Level students (Levels 3 and 4) are advised to purchase:

- *Soluzioni: A Practical Grammar of Contemporary Italian*, by Denise De Rome (Routledge, 2015) (NB: **third edition**).

If you are unsure to which level you will be assigned, you may wait to buy the relevant grammar book/s after the language test and after the groups have been formed. Textbooks will be available at Oxford Blackwell's. **If you are attending the Italian Pre-session course, you will be receiving separate information on how to prepare.**

At a more Advanced level, we also recommend the following reference books for all students:

- *A Reference Grammar of Modern Italian*, by Martin Maiden and Cecilia Robustelli (Routledge, 2007; second edition).
- *Using Italian Vocabulary*, by Marcel Danesi (Cambridge University Press, 2003)

You are also strongly advised to acquire a good-sized bilingual Dictionary (such as Oxford-Paravia, Collins, Ragazzini), which are also available in libraries. You may also use the following online dictionaries. Whether using a paper or an online dictionary, we recommend you always write down the word or expression you've looked up in your own vocabulary notebook.

Bilingual dictionaries:

<http://www.garzantilinguistica.it>

Monolingual Italian dictionaries:

<http://www.treccani.it>

http://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario_italiano/

Once at Oxford you'll have access to the language learning resources at the Language Centre Library (12 Woodstock Road) and the Taylor Institution, where you can find all of the above and much more.

(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, 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')

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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