

**University of Oxford
Italian Sub-Faculty**

**READING ADVICE FOR NEW STUDENTS OF ITALIAN
Academic Year 2026-2027**

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).

ITALIAN LANGUAGE

The language, oral and written, plays a crucial role at Prelims, both in its own right and as an essential tool for the study of literature and culture. 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.

You should use a good-sized bi-lingual dictionary throughout your years at Oxford, such as *Oxford-Paravia* or *il Ragazzini*. You may wish to purchase your own copy or you can use Dictionaries 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) and we would ask you that you become familiar with them as they will be recommended for your assignments:

Bilingual dictionary:

[Dizionario di Inglese Sansoni](#)

Monolingual dictionaries:

[Dizionario di italiano Sabatini-Coletti](#)

[Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana Treccani](#)

[Il Nuovo De Mauro](#)

Synonyms:

[Treccani Sinonimi e contrari](#)

[Hoepli Dizionario dei Sinonimi e dei Contrari](#)

DIAGNOSTIC LANGUAGE TEST:

All Freshers, both beginners and post A-Level (or equivalent), are required to sit a short online language test before the start of the academic year. The test will enable us to assign you to the appropriate class/level and it is therefore important that it reflects your actual knowledge before you come to Oxford. You will receive an email from the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages on or after the 14th September 2026 with the link for you to do the online language test. Please make sure you check your email and that you complete the test **by the 24th September**.

NB: we will need a valid email address so we can send you the link. If the email address you gave in your application form is no longer valid, please inform the Faculty Office of your valid email address as soon as possible by writing to: office@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk.

POST A-LEVEL STUDENTS:

You should continue to develop your language skills by reading and listening to Italian. In addition, you will need to work with a good Reference Grammar, such as:

- *Soluzioni! A Practical Grammar of Contemporary Italian*, by Denise De Rôme (Routledge, 2025; fifth edition) [with exercises and keys]
- *A Reference Grammar of Modern Italian*, by Martin Maiden and Cecilia Robustelli (Routledge, 2007; second edition). [workbook available separately]
- *Modern Italian Grammar. A Practical Guide*, 3rd edition, by Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo, (Routledge, 2013). [workbook available separately]

You may start by borrowing these grammar texts from the Oxford Libraries before purchasing your own copy, which you will need throughout your years at Oxford. You will receive further advice and material in class.

BEGINNERS:

Please make sure you acquire a copy of following grammar book prior to the start of Michaelmas Term, and bring it to all your Grammar classes:

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

Advice on how to prepare:

The Preliminary Examination at the end of the academic year is the same for all candidates, regardless of whether they started as beginners or post-A level (or equivalent). The Beginners' language course will start by covering the basic topics and will take you to an intermediate level by the end of the academic year. 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 should begin to acquire as much Italian vocabulary through any resources to which you may have access. And you may wish to begin studying the following grammatical points over the summer:

Nouns: gender and regular plural formation;
Definite and indefinite articles;
Adjectives: gender and plural formation;
Verbs: Present indicative of regular and irregular verbs;
Passato prossimo (regular participle formation and some common irregular participles);
Forms of the *Imperfetto*.

This will give you an excellent starting point. You can prepare through self-study on a grammar text such as *Italian Grammar in Practice* by Susanna Nocchi, which builds knowledge of the grammar gradually; or with the recommended *The Ultimate Italian Review and Practice* by David Stillman that you will be using 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.

Grammar and vocabulary go hand in hand, so always make sure you look up and make a note of the meaning of new words.

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 used to 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.

ITALIAN LITERATURE

Whether you are a beginner or a more advanced student, you should do some preparatory reading in Italian literature before arriving in Oxford.

During the course of your first year, you will be introduced to Italian works from a variety of periods – from the Middle Ages to the contemporary – and will study a range of genres and forms, including lyric poetry in Paper III, and narrative works and cinema in Paper IV.

The prescribed texts for the Prelims (First Year) course which you will study in your first term (Michaelmas Term) are:

- 1) Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (1947)
- 2) Italo Calvino, *Il cavaliere inesistente* (1959)
- 3) An anthology of lyric texts, spanning medieval to contemporary poetry

Please read the two narrative texts (Levi, Calvino) before October, since this will put you in the best position for starting your course, and there will not be time to read them from scratch during term. Any modern Italian paperback edition of the narrative texts would be fine (e.g. by Einaudi, Mondadori, Rizzoli etc), but please ensure that the edition you work with is unabridged. Italian books are available to order from e.g.: Grant and Cutler (at Foyles Bookshop); Blackwells; or other online outlets, including second-hand stockists such as Abebooks.

A copy of the anthology of lyric texts, compiled by the sub-faculty of Italian, will be made available to all students on arrival in Oxford, at the start of the course.

In the following two terms of your first year (Hilary term and Trinity Term) you will study two more literary works, Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare* (1963) and Igiaba Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010), and a film, *I cento passi* (2000), directed by Marco Tullio Giordana. More detailed information about the Italian course will be given to you on arrival. I look forward to meeting you in October.

Buona estate e buon lavoro!
Francesca Southerden

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