

European Languages

German/French/Spanish/Italian BA



MINIMUM A-LEVEL GRADE REQUIREMENTS

AAA

LENGTH OF COURSE

4 years with a year abroad

A-LEVELS REQUIRED

One or more modern languages (depending on course choice).

2-3 pieces of written work will have to be submitted.

ADMISSIONS TEST

MLAT - Modern Languages Aptitude Test; paper-based test which assesses your grammar and your translation skills. Which section or sections you take will depend on the languages for which you are applying.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Studying Modern Languages provides both practical training in written and spoken language and an extensive introduction to literature and thought written in European languages. As well as learning to write and speak the language(s) fluently, you must study a broad range of literature, and can focus your studies on any period from the medieval to the present day. A wide range of options allow you to explore subjects including linguistics, philology, film or gender studies or (in French and German) advanced translation. Modern Languages students spend a compulsory year abroad, usually in the third year. Past opportunities abroad have typically included working as a paid language assistant in a school, undertaking an internship and/or studying at a University, all of which provide valuable experiences for improving language competence. The Erasmus scheme has now been replaced with the Turing scheme, so some funding to support your choice of activity will be available.

STRUCTURE OF MODULES

1st year

Practical language work, Study of important works and/or topics in the literature of each language. First University examinations: seven or eight written papers, including translation and literature

2nd year

Practical language work, A period of literature in each language, Optional subjects including: linguistics; medieval literature; detailed study of individual authors

3rd year

Typically spent abroad

4th year

Continues the course from Year 2, plus special subjects across a wide range of options including film studies.

Final University examinations: nine or ten written papers and an oral examination are taken, including unseen translations, literature, special subjects and linguistics. Some special subjects are examined by submitting a portfolio of essays or a dissertation.

APPROXIMATE NO. OF CONTACT HOURS PER WEEK

Tutorials: 3-4 hours

Lectures: 3-5 hours

Classes: 3-6 hours

WHY EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AT OXFORD?

I chose this degree because literature was my favourite part of the A-level course and the course in Oxford is different from other universities as it has such a big focus on literature. I didn't expect there to be so many translation classes but it's something I have really enjoyed as it allows a bit of creativity.

STUDYING

Languages have more contact hours than most humanities subjects as we have translation, oral and grammar classes as well as tutorials and lectures. The majority of the actual language learning happens in small groups during classes. Every week we are asked to do a translation which we then go through together the following week and we have vocabulary to learn weekly as well. The grammar and oral classes work in a similar way and you normally have a few exercises to prepare before the classes. The main literature teaching happens in tutorials and seminars. You normally talk through a passage or an essay you have written with your tutor and the discussion of your ideas with your tutorial partners forms the main part of the learning process.

AVERAGE DAY/WEEK

There is normally an essay a week for each language and this takes up the majority of your time. For literary commentaries, there isn't a reading list so those don't take as long to write as you have to analyse in detail a passage from one of the texts you have been reading. For essays, it's a good idea to spend some time reading and planning so you can make sure you've understood the question and the critical arguments. Once you have a plan, it doesn't take too long to actually write the essay. The rest of the time is normally spent doing translations - in contrast to at school there is a big emphasis on making what you write sound natural so this can take some time to figure out and perfect.

PERSONAL STATEMENT TIPS

- Write about a variety of different ways in which you have shown that you have a genuine interest in your subject.
- Mention books/films/podcasts but try not to make vague comments.
- Try to write about an interesting theme or character as this could be something to base a discussion off of at interview.

INTERVIEW TIPS

- Make sure you have an in-depth knowledge of the books or films that you have mentioned on your personal statement as they tend to ask questions that require you to give examples to back up your opinions and show that you are able to think critically and analyse.
- Also, don't be thrown off by any of these questions. Try your best to give an opinion (even if you think it's something really simple) or even ask questions yourself, and the tutor will guide you to develop your ideas.
- The interviews genuinely feel more like a conversation than an interrogation.

MLAT TIPS

- Work through the past papers online (with a teacher if possible) and make sure you practice trickier grammar points like the subjunctive and tenses.
- The test requires translation of short phrases into your chosen language so make sure you practice this as it isn't something that comes up at A-level.

CAREER PROSPECTS

A languages degree provides skills that are adaptable to many different career paths including but not limited to: law, journalism, publishing, teaching, translation, marketing and interpretation. It is a degree that opens many doors and possibilities for the future.

ONE THING I WISH I KNEW WHEN I WAS APPLYING

Try to enjoy the interview experience as it's a taste of life at Oxford.

Recommended Reading/Viewing

French

- **Le Horla**, Guy de Maupassant - this is a short story so it's relatively easy to read and would be good to put on a personal statement as you could easily remember specific themes/characters/ideas when asked in interview.
- **Les Mains Salles**, Jean-Paul Sartre - this is a play that centres around the philosophy of existentialism but the fact that it is a play makes it an accessible way to understand some complex ideas. If you're interested in 20th century French literature this would be a good one to read that isn't L'Étranger (which everyone reads!)

Spanish

- **La casa de Bernada Alba, Yerma, Las Bodas de Sangre**, Federico García Lorca - these plays are all part of Lorca's trilogía rural and they all centre around themes of 20th century Spain, religion, honour, the place of the woman in society and reality vs appearances.
- **Volver**, Pedro Almodóvar - this is a film by one of the most iconic Spanish directors and is a great example of his unique and eccentric style. There is a lot to be learnt about Spanish culture and traditions from this film about motherhood and family.

German

- **Poetry by Mascha Kaleko** - a German-Jewish poet whose verse is really playful and accessible. It's easy to understand in the original German, but still really striking - a great bridge towards reading more widely past your A Level texts.
- **May Ayim** - a black German poet you might want to look into for similar reasons - her work is stunning!
- **The Datteltaeter** on YouTube - a group of Berlin-based Muslim film makers who make hilarious satirical content about Muslim/immigrant identity in Germany. Their work is super entertaining, great for developing your conversational German, and a really important part of changing narratives around Muslims in Europe.
- **Germania** - a similar project, making short films on creatives 'mit Migrationshintergrund' (from migrant backgrounds_
- **The Expanding German Studies project** - aims to shed light on diverse films and texts that aren't so commonly studied but really important. Each entry comes with a suggestion of what level of student might engage with it best.

General

- **A short introduction to Spanish/French/German Literature**: these shorts guides are a good start if you're not sure what genre/author you would be interested in. They give a broad overview rather than detailed or specific information.
- **Is that a fish in your ear?**, David Bellos: this is a really interesting read on general questions to do with how languages and translation works. This would be good to read to get thinking about some of the more general questions that could be asked at interviews like 'what is translation?', 'why is language necessary?' etc.