



NEW COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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**Reading List for Students coming up to Oxford to read Russian Ab Initio (RAI)
Course B: Beginners (revised July 2024)**

Dear Fresher,

Congratulations on being offered a place and welcome to your Beginners Russian course at Oxford! I am looking forward to meeting you in October.

It is important that you should spend some time between now and October, when you will be starting your course in Oxford, preparing for the work you will be doing here. The Preliminary Examination, which is held at the end of the first year, is quite a testing examination.

The RAI course is planned to suit complete beginners, so we do not expect you to have started work on the Russian **language** before you arrive. As soon as you come up to Oxford you will be instructed on the course textbook you will need to acquire.

You may also need to acquire a medium-sized Russian-English / English-Russian dictionary, such as those published by Oxford University Press or Collins. You might want to buy it as an e-book, so it is searchable as a PDF, but remember that online translation tools like Google translate, while useful, are no substitute for a dictionary. A dictionary includes additional information on usage and history of the words, which is essential for learning a language as a beginner. After you have begun to study Russian, you may find a paperback such as *Oxford Russian Grammar and Verbs* a useful volume for quick reference.

What you can do over the summer is to start on some reading (in English) of **literature**, texts you may choose to study (in Russian) after the first year of your course. Equally, you should take every opportunity you can to watch Russian plays and films, and programmes about Russia and Russian-speaking spaces. I am enclosing at this stage a broad reading list and some additional information which should serve you in good stead throughout your career here; it is not meant to be tackled in depth at this stage, although you may find some of the suggestions will provide you with a fascinating summer of reading.

Please do get in touch with me if you have any queries at margarita.vaysman@new.ox.ac.uk



Best,
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Suggestions for reading in 19th- and 20th-century Russian literature

This list may prove useful throughout your time at Oxford. It should be possible to obtain most of the following in English from your local Public Library, bookshops, or the internet. Getting to know some of these authors will help you to make choices about options in due course. Happy browsing!

Nineteenth-century authors:

- Aleksandr PUSHKIN: any of the prose works (e.g. *The Captain's Daughter* and *The Tales of Belkin*), and a selection of his lyric poetry such as might be found in any bilingual anthology such as *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse*.
- Anna BUNINA: any of her poems from the anthology *An Anthology of Russian Women's Writing, 1777-1992*, ed. by C. Kelly.
- Mikhail LERMONTOV: the novel *A Hero of Our Time*, plus a selection of his lyric poetry - see an anthology, as above under PUSHKIN.
- Karolina PAVLOVA: novel in verse *Double Life*
- Aleksandr ALEKSANDROV (Nadezhda Durova): autobiographical narrative *Notes of a Cavalry Maiden*
- Nikolai GOGOL: the 'Petersburg Tales', including *The Overcoat*, *Nevsky Prospect*, *The Nose*, and *Diary of a Madman*; also his play *The Government Inspector*, and his novel *Dead Souls*.
- Evgeniia TUR: novella *Antonina*
- Fedor DOSTOEVSKY: the four "big" novels - *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Idiot*, and *The Possessed (The Devils)*, as well as his shorter novel *Notes from Underground*.
- Nadezhda KHVOSHCHINSKAIA: a short novella *Boarding School Girl*, to start with, and her sister Sofia KHVOSHCHINSKAIA's *City and Country Folk*, both novels are available in translation from Columbia University Press (<https://readrussia.org/russian-library/city-folk-and-country-folk.html>)
- Ivan GONCHAROV: the novel *Oblomov*.
- Lev TOLSTOY: his autobiographical *Childhood and Youth*; the story *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*; and the two great novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.
- Ivan TURGENEV: the novel *Fathers and Sons*, and the *Huntsman's Sketches*.
- Anton CHEKHOV: any selection of short stories, and the four major plays - *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century authors:

- Anna AKHMATOVA, Osip MANDELSHTAM and Marina TSVETAeva; and, more recently, Iosif BRODSKY: any bilingual anthologies of the works of these poets.



- Lidiia ZINOVIEBA-ANNIBAL: short novel *Thirty-Three Abominations* (available in a new bilingual edition here <https://edcat.net/item/thirty-three-monsters-by-lydia-zinovieva-annibal/>)
- Evgenii ZAMYATIN: the novel *We*, and any of his short stories.
- Mikhail ZOSHCHENKO: any of his short stories, especially of the 1920s.
- Nadezhda TEFFI: any short stories (available in English from Pushkin Press)
- Isaak BABEL: his cycle of short stories *Red Cavalry*.
- Mikhail BULGAKOV: his novels *The White Guard* and *The Master and Margarita*, as well as *The Heart of a Dog* and his play *Flight*.
- Lidiia Chukovskaia: her novel *Sofia Petrovna*, about Stalin's purges, available in English from Persephone Books
- Vasilii GROSSMAN: his epic novel of WWII, *Life and Fate*.
- Boris PASTERNAK: *Doctor Zhivago*, and any bilingual anthology of his poetry.
- Aleksandr SOLZHENITSYN: the short novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and his two longer novels *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*.
- Evgeniia GINZBURG: on the same topic, her autobiography *Into the Whirlwind* (also from Perspehone books in English)
- Svetlana Aleksievich: any of her Noble Prize-winning novel-length works
- Luidmila Petrushevskiaia: short stories, plays or her novel *The Time: Night*
- Luidmila ULITSKAIA: any of her collections of short-stories, or novels *Sonechka*, *The Kukotskii Enigma*
- Olga SEDAKOVA: any bilingual editions of her poems
- Viktor PELEVIN: any of his early novels such as *Generation P*, or short story collections (all widely available in English)
- Vladimir Sorokin: his short novel *Day of the Oprichnik*

Selected introductory works on 19th- and 20th-century Russian history and culture

It is difficult to appreciate Russian literature without having some knowledge of Russian history. You should try to look at least at a couple of the following, which should be available in your library or in paperback:

- Caryl Emerson: *Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature*
- Stephen Lovell, *The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction*
- Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: From Earliest Times to the Present* (Penguin, 2012)
- G. Hosking: *Russian History: A Very Short Introduction*
- Robert Service, *The Penguin History of Modern Russia: From Tsarism to the Twenty-first Century*
- Anthony Beevor, *Russia: Revolution and Civil War 1917-1921*