



Starting Spanish at Oxford

General

Your initial terms at Oxford can seem daunting and you should not worry if they do. Your tutors will be on hand to support your transition to university life and they understand the (often exciting) challenges this involves. You *will* need to put in a significant amount of work to achieve the standard required by the end of the first year, but, again, your tutors will help you gauge this, and they will offer guidance and recommend that you read particular books and works of criticism, for instance. It is worth highlighting now, just for the avoidance of doubt, that you will have to do much of the core work independently, and that means learning to be well organized, to use your time effectively, and to be self-disciplined. So that you can get as much as possible out of your contact time, you must attend all tutorials, classes and lectures (unless you have a good reason for absence, e.g., illness, medical appointments, etc.). What follows is a series of recommendations regarding both general background reading and the specific works of literature that you will study in your first year, along with some suggestions for boosting your Spanish-language knowledge and skills.

Language

Grammar and Syntax

Some Spanish A-level courses do not involve much formal study of grammar and syntax, so you will need to study these quite intensively over the coming months, learning the associated technical terminology in both English and Spanish. The best available textbook is Butt and Benjamin's *A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish* (6th edition), which you should buy, ideally, as we will be using it in many of our college language classes. Also very useful is Batchelor and Pountain's *Using Spanish: A Guide to Contemporary Usage*. More recently, our own former Spanish Instructor, Javier Muñoz-Basols, collaborated on two books which he wrote as a direct result of teaching the Oxford course. They are titled *Speed Up Your Spanish: Strategies to Avoid Common Errors* (London: Routledge, 2009) and *Developing Writing Skills in Spanish* (London: Routledge, 2011). The former will be of immediate and lasting use to you, while the latter will come into its own in your second year.

Vocabulary

You will need to build up your Spanish vocabulary quickly and extensively. There is no easy way of doing this – you must simply look up all the new words which you encounter and note them in a designated vocabulary book. One excellent way of going about this is by studying the Prelim Paper III texts in minute detail. You should also make sure to read a good Spanish-language newspaper online at least once a week. *El País*, Spain's leading national daily, charges modest subscription rates and they are often on special offer. You should read the leading articles (especially on Sundays) and, on Saturdays, the cultural supplement 'Babelia', which deals with recent developments in Hispanic literature, art, music, etc. Many leading Spanish and Spanish American writers are regular contributors.

There are also various books which will help you increase your vocabulary and learn how to use it in appropriate contexts. The two best are probably *Using Spanish Vocabulary* and *Using Spanish Synonyms*, both by Batchelor and published by Cambridge University Press. The former is largely topic

based, is particularly useful when it comes to distinguishing between the register of words, and includes many examples from Latin American Spanish. Your college library should have copies of all the books mentioned here, so you do not necessarily need to acquire your own copy (except of Butt and Benjamin), though you may wish to.

You should also read widely and frequently in English (a good newspaper, contemporary fiction, etc.), both because you will be required to translate from Spanish into English throughout your degree and because it will help you write your tutorial essays. Developing the range and fluency of your English expression will be important.

Dictionaries

There is no wholly satisfactory bilingual dictionary currently available, though both the Oxford and Collins dictionaries (full length) are usable for the basics. Both can be consulted online, though it would be very useful for you to possess your own hard copy of one of them, since you will be using it virtually every day.

Of the monolingual dictionaries, the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* is by far the most comprehensive and can be accessed free at www.rae.es. You should get used to using it. On the same site you will also find the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*, which deals with common grammatical, lexical and syntactical confusions in all forms of Spanish, and the *Diccionario de americanismos*, which lists many thousands of words and expressions (designated by country and region) from across Spanish America that are not found in peninsular Spanish. Also very useful, particularly with regard to precise usage of words, is María Moliner's *Diccionario de uso del español* (2 vols).

In your first year you will attend a variety of language classes and undertake a range of exercises in those classes. At the end of the year, you will sit two language exams in Spanish. Paper I will involve translating a passage of English and also twenty 'grammatical sentences' into Spanish. Paper II consists of two passages in Spanish for translation into English.

Literature

General

Many incoming freshers will not have studied much literature formally prior to coming to Oxford. Tutors are aware of and sensitive to this, so it should not be a cause of excessive concern. You will gradually need to develop both a style and, in some cases, a specific critical vocabulary for writing about literary texts. You will also want to think about what literature is, why people write it and what it can, does and perhaps should do. A useful starting point for the consideration of these questions is Warren and Wellek, *Theory of Literature*. If you want to find out about specific aspects or genres of literature (for example, 'metaphor', 'realism', 'the grotesque', 'pastoral', 'the short story', etc.), an excellent starting point is Routledge's Critical Idiom series.

If most freshers will have studied at least some literary prose, fewer of you are likely to have much experience reading and analysing poetry. Doing this well requires a good deal of technical knowledge, both of rhetorical terms and metrics. You can find a list of the former in the appendix to Brian Vicker's *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon), but better still is Richard Lanham's *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley: University of California). For the latter, you might consult Paul Fussell's *Poetic Metre and Poetic Form* (McGraw-Hill) and Phil Robert's accessible and engaging *How Poetry Works* (Penguin). Another very useful general work is Jeffrey Wainwright's *Poetry: The Basics* (London: Routledge), which covers both areas clearly and concisely.

As for Spanish metrics, you could begin by reading the 'Introduction' to Janet Perry's *Harrap Anthology of Spanish Poetry*. Another extremely useful primer, full of clear examples and also containing a potted history of poetic form in Spanish, is Antonio Quilis's *Métrica española* (Barcelona: Ariel). The most technical discussion of the subject is provided by Tomás Navarro in his *Métrica española*.

Many of you will have done relatively little practical literary criticism when you arrive in Oxford and may have no experience at all of writing literary commentaries. Again, tutors are aware of this and make

no assumptions about what you 'should' be able to do when you begin your degree course. Reading John Peck and Martin Colye's *Practical Criticism* (London: Palgrave) will help you get started.

The above are intended as suggestions of some useful background reading you might want to do before coming up to Oxford. This is entirely optional, though. The next section details the pre-reading that is compulsory (and which should, therefore, be your priority).

Set Texts for Papers III and IV

These are the two literature-based papers which you will be required to sit as part of the Preliminary Examination at the end of your first year. You should obtain all the following texts before you come up to Oxford, and you should read carefully (that means looking up all the unfamiliar vocabulary) all the set texts for Paper IV (note the reverse order we'll study the papers in), as we'll be covering this paper over the first term. Ideally, you would read the Paper III texts too before October (since time further down the line might be tight), though this is not essential. You should try, wherever possible, to get hold of the editions listed below (where a prescribed edition is designated), though the crucial thing is that you read the texts (in any edition you can obtain) before you begin your course.

Note that anyone reading Spanish with a Middle Eastern language will only need formally to sit one of these papers (Paper III). But such students will still follow the full course, including Paper IV, because it is intended that the first-year course will offer a broad panorama of Hispanic literature that will inform your paper choices from the start of your second year.

The teaching for these literature papers will involve lectures at the Faculty and college-based tutorials with me and with one or two other first-year undergraduates.

Paper III: Introduction to Hispanic Prose

Campobello, Nellie, *Cartucho*, ed. Josebe Martínez (Madrid: Cátedra) [ISBN-10: 8437634326].

Carpentier, Alejo, *El reino de este mundo* (Barcelona: Austral) [ISBN-10: 8432224952].

Cervantes, Miguel de, 'Rinconete y Cortadillo', in *Novelas ejemplares I*, ed. Harry Sieber (Madrid: Cátedra) [ISBN: 9788437602219].

Matute, Ana María, *Primera memoria* (Barcelona: Destino) [ISBN: 9788423343591], or, alternatively, within the trilogy *Los mercaderes* (Barcelona: Austral) [ISBN-10: 8423352781].

Paper IV: Introduction to Hispanic Poetry and Drama

El romancero viejo, ed. Monserrat Díaz Roig (Madrid: Cátedra) [ISBN: 9788437600802]
Poem numbers: 1, 3, 5-9, 14, 18, 38, 40, 50, 52, 54, 56, 66, 68, 72, 76, 86, 97, 97a, 99, 110-11, 117, 121, 125, 127-28.

A selection of Golden Age sonnets (PDF booklet to be made available in due course).

Calderón de la Barca, Pedro, *El médico de su honra*, ed. Don Cruickshank (Madrid: Castalia) [ISBN-10: 8497403754].

García Lorca, Federico, *Doña Rosita la soltera*, ed. Mario Hernández Sánchez (Madrid: Alianza) [ISBN: 9788420675725].

Vallejo, César, *Los heraldos negros*, ed. René de Costa (Madrid: Cátedra)
[ISBN-10: 8437616697].

If you have any questions about the above, please do feel free to get in touch. My email address is: roy.norton@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk. I hope you enjoy the preparatory reading and I look forward to meeting you properly in October. A happy summer in the meantime!

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