



Spotlight on Modern Languages

Modern Languages at Oxford

Studying languages at Oxford is unique in that we offer teaching in all areas of language and literature from the Middle Ages right up to the present day.

There are different ways to study modern languages:

- Single honours courses can involve the study of one or two languages, including the option to learn one language completely from scratch alongside an existing A level language;
- Joint honours courses combine a modern language with another subject (see options on the right).

The main focuses of the modern languages course are literature and language. After the first year students have the opportunity to specialise in different areas of modern languages. There are various options in linguistics, history of thought, film studies, and translation studies and practice, for example. The further students progress, the more chance they have to develop their own interests with the help of their tutors and other lecturers across the university.

At St John's we admit around ten students each year for modern languages courses. We are located just over the road from the [Taylor Institution Library](#), which houses the largest specialist collection of research in modern European languages and literatures in Britain.

Meet our tutors

[Nikolaj](#) (left) is Tutorial Fellow in French and he is responsible for organising modern languages in College. Nikolaj's [research](#) focuses on 19th and 20th century French literature, and his current project looks at 'The Contemporary Feel-Bad Film' with a particular focus on European directors.



[Barry](#) (right) is Tutorial Fellow in German; his [research](#) interests are in eighteenth-century literature, modernism and contemporary pop-culture and drama.



[Frédérique](#) is our Teaching Fellow in French, specialising in literature from the early modern period, and [Ben](#) is College Lecturer in Spanish, with research interests in contemporary Latin American poetry. One of the big advantages of studying with us at St John's is that we also have our own dedicated language teachers: [Marie](#) in French and [Claudia](#) in German.

Teaching in other languages is shared with other Colleges, as is common across Oxford. For example, our Italian, Russian, and Linguistics students will be taught by [Emanuela](#), [Julie](#) and [JC](#) respectively.

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The courses

BA [Modern Languages](#)
 BA [Mod Lang and Linguistics](#)
 BA [European and Middle Eastern Languages \(EMEL\)](#)
 BA [Classics and Mod Lang](#)
 BA [English and Mod Lang](#)
 BA [History and Mod Lang](#)
 BA [Philosophy and Mod Lang](#)

Languages available

Celtic*, Czech (with Slovak)**,
 French, German, Modern
 Greek, Italian, Polish*,
 Portuguese, Russian and
 Spanish. Students on the EMEL
 course can also study Arabic,
 Hebrew, Persian or Turkish.

*not available in EMEL or with linguistics

**not available with linguistics

Subject choices at A Level or equivalent

Subject requirements vary depending on the language(s) studied. More information is available on the [course pages](#) of the University website.

Year abroad

All courses include a year abroad, either in the second or third year, depending on the course combination. Students will visit one or two countries depending on their language combinations.

This is an important and really popular part of our degree programme and we help students arrange their placement. Typically students work as English teaching assistants, enroll as exchange students, take intensive language courses or take part in internship programmes. Some of our past students have even found their future employers on their year abroad.

What do our students think?

We asked some of our students about their experiences as St John's linguists so far.

What's the best thing about studying languages at SJC?

Giulia (2nd year, French & Portuguese): The tutors are very enthusiastic and willing to help you, whether at the beginning you are struggling to keep the pace or later on you want to study some topics in more depth. It is an ideal learning environment.



being a large college is that you are very rarely the only one to be studying your language of choice, which means there's a community of linguists who are always ready to support one another.

Studying Literature

Will: Most Sixth Form language courses (mine - the International Baccalaureate - included) don't place a great emphasis on literature, and so the prospect of studying literature at degree level, particularly in a foreign language, may appear daunting. What you do notice very quickly, however, is how natural reading in another language becomes. You assimilate vocabulary rapidly, and learn to identify different registers.

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Having the opportunity to take a year out and spend it in a foreign country is essential in the acquiring and consolidating of language skills. The most valuable thing I've learned is not to be afraid to make mistakes. As soon as you get into this mindset, you begin to learn and gain confidence more rapidly.



In order to get the best possible experience, start thinking early about what may interest you; charity work, visiting countries literally on the other side of the world - it's worth thinking about!

Adrijana, 3rd year, French & Spanish

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Will (1st year, French & Spanish): St John's has its own library, with a very large section dedicated to languages and literary theory (and also extensive sections for English, History and Philosophy, all of which will doubtless prove useful!).

Lauren (1st year, History & French): At St John's, we are lucky in the fact that we get dedicated tutors for grammar and for translation, as well as really great tutors on the literature side. Plus, the Taylor Institution is just over the road, so getting to lectures is no hassle at all! The other benefit of

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There is a real sense of community among the linguists at St John's. The Moore Society, to which all Modern Languages students belong, has an annual meal, and students in the years above are always happy to give help and advice.

Will, 1st Year, French & Spanish

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Languages with teaching at other colleges

Giulia: Being taught Portuguese outside College was a great opportunity to get out of the St John's walls and meet people from other colleges, sometimes doing the same language combination. My Portuguese tutors know my French tutors at St John's, so I never feel like the teaching of the two languages is disjointed.



Studying a joint honours course

Lauren: Juggling languages with History can be demanding, but having juggled the two at A-Level I suppose I don't know any different! I love the fact that each side of my degree influences the other, and I can keep them very separate or mix the two. For example, I'm currently studying the French Revolution for history, which influenced some of the authors I'm studying in French. Joint Honours is a varied and exciting option and a great way to pursue both interests.

Careers after Modern Languages

Teachers and applicants often ask us what our students go on to do after graduation. The modern languages degree at Oxford develops world-class linguists with a wide variety of transferable skills. Our graduates have a high graduate employment rate, with around one third choosing to continue in further academic study.

Graduates from St John's have gone straight into a wide variety of careers including media and journalism, publishing and editing, education, and translation. Other students have secured internships following their year abroad and have moved into completely different fields such as banking and law.

Chris graduated in 2008 having studied Spanish and Portuguese at St John's. He's currently working in the Civil Service on the Fast Stream, a sought-after development programme for graduates with the potential to become future leaders. Before this, Chris combined his languages and interest in sport: "I worked for Opta Sports for four years, writing football stats for a living. With them I used my languages regularly, moving to Madrid for eight months as well as running a Portuguese-language social media page. I was even offered the opportunity to move to Sao Paulo to set up a Brazilian office."

"My time as a St John's linguist helped me in numerous ways, and has opened many doors for me".

Kathryn, graduated in 2006

Kathryn studied French and Spanish at St John's from 2006 to 2010. Like many St John's students, she is pursuing further study, and is now half way through an MA in Translation at the University of Geneva. Before this, she worked for a couple of years, including 5 months as an intern at the European Commission.

There's more information about the skills developed during our modern languages course on the [faculty website](#).

The Careers Service provides information and advice to students at all Colleges. To find out the types of occupation of recent graduates from St John's and the Faculty of Modern and Medieval languages, take a look at the [interactive destinations report](#).

You can find more information about careers using languages at www.languageswork.org.uk.

Finding out more about modern languages

Tutors at Oxford are looking for students who have an enthusiasm for studying both their chosen language(s) and the literature of that language. The Oxford Faculty of Modern Languages website has advice on [preparing for an application](#) to Oxford, and we've included some other suggestions from our tutors here.

Online resources

Generally you can prepare for studying languages at university by using media websites in your favourite languages and by using websites such as the BBC language and schools guides. You can also access a really wide range of international radio stations online.

The [Language Log](#) is a blog written by leading linguists focussing on topical language issues and debunking language myths.

Books

Even if you do not study literature as part of your A level course, it's important to begin reading texts in the original language as part of your preparation. Choose something you find interesting, or ask your teachers for recommendations. Think about what you have read and ask yourself what you liked or disliked about it. You can also apply this to films or plays by foreign authors.

The following books offer a general introduction to reading literature.

Erich Auerbach: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946/1953) is an older but still widely used and respected introduction to the history and forms of European literature; it's available in various newer editions too.

Martin Travers: *An Introduction to Modern European Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* (1997) will provide a useful introduction to key ideas of literary periods and history that you will encounter during the course.

M.H. Abrams: *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th edition 2001) is a good way to brush up on your literary vocabulary and help tell the difference between your metaphors and metonyms.

Open Days

The Modern Languages faculty holds [Open Days](#) for Year 12 students, where you can meet tutors and current students, and find out more about applying for any course including a modern language.

UNIQ Summer School

Find out more about the University's Summer School for Year 12 students from UK state schools at www.ox.ac.uk/uniq.



Contact us

If you have any questions about studying modern languages at Oxford, that aren't answered by the information here or on our websites, you can contact us. For general enquiries about applying for modern languages, email reception@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk. For questions about studying at St John's College, email admissions@sjc.ox.ac.uk.