Congratulations on being offered a place at Queen’s. While you'll be taught by a number of different tutors with a wide range of specialisms during your time at Oxford, I'll be advising you and organising your French tutorials throughout your course. I write today with some information about how best to prepare for your first year’s study.

First: your first year will take place. The College and University are taking all appropriate measures so that we can all be healthy, safe, and focused on the work before us. Rest assured: this is really happening. We’re eager to welcome you to College and begin working with you.

Your first year will be taken up with work for the Preliminary Examination in Modern Languages which will be sat in June, at the end of Trinity Term. For those reading French with another language or subject, the Examination will consist of four papers: two on language and two on literature (as set out below).

**Language Papers:**

Paper I. This paper will consist of (a) French grammar (20 short sentences for translation into French); and (b) a summary in French (180-200 words) of a passage in French (500-700 words) from a work of reflective, analytical, or critical writing.

Paper II. This paper will consist of (a) a prose passage of ca. 250 words in French for translation into English; and (b) translation into English of a passage of ca. 300 words from one of the texts prescribed for Paper IV (excluding the medieval text).

**Literature Papers:**

Paper III (Short Texts). You will study six brief but self-contained works (below), arranged in three contrasting pairs. In the examination you will be asked to write commentaries on three passages, one from each section (A, B, and C):

a) Montaigne, ‘Des cannibales’, from the *Essais*, vol. 1
Diderot, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*

b) Baudelaire, ‘Spleen et Idéal’ from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (30 poems only are set: see list printed at the end of this letter)
Césaire, *Cabier d’un retour au pays natal*

c) Racine, *Phèdre*
NDiaye, *Papa doit manger*

Paper IV (Prose Fiction). You will study four texts (below). In the examination you will be asked to write essays on three of these, from a choice of questions on each text:

*La Chastellaine de Vergi*  
*Sand, Indiana*

*Laclos, Les Liaisons dangereuses*  
*Proust, Combray*
How should you prepare?

Language Work

While you are at Oxford, you will be improving your knowledge of the French language not only by reading literature but also by engaging (in weekly language classes) in a number of different linguistic exercises. For these you will need a secure grammatical grasp of French, including knowledge of verb paradigms for all tenses (including the past historic, for reading and for writing) and moods (including the subjunctive), and an ability to reproduce the full range of constructions. The harder you work on this aspect of your studies this summer, the more enjoyable you will find your first year.


Literature Work

There will be lectures on the Short Texts during the first term and on the novels during the second term. In Michaelmas Term you will have tutorial work on four of the Short Texts; in Hilary Term, on the remaining Short Texts and on the first two novels; and in Trinity Term, on the remaining two novels. The second half of Trinity Term will be given over to revision.

It will be essential for you to have read the texts in advance of the lectures, and so you must read all the Short Texts before you arrive. Since the Christmas Vacation is not very long (for the amount of reading you are likely to have), you should plan on reading at least two of the novels before October also.

A list of recommended editions is enclosed. It is important to have your own copies of the set texts (and please note the recommended editions) because you will want to make notes in the margins. If your local bookshop is unable to supply the books you require, you may find it helpful to order them from Blackwell’s (Broad St, Oxford, either in person or online). It is important to read and annotate (whether in the text itself or on separate paper) as thoroughly as possible so that you retain a detailed memory of the text: keep track of page numbers and fill your books with post-it notes so you can return to passages easily. The more slowly you read the text the first time round, the more quickly you will be able to reread it later when you have to produce a commentary or essay on it for your tutorial. You must read the texts in the original French, even if a translation can sometimes be a useful reference.

Please feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions. On behalf of all of the French tutors at Queen’s, I wish you a productive summer and look forward to seeing you in October.

Seth Whidden
Fellow in French
Paper III

Poems prescribed for study from the ‘Spleen et Idéal’ section of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*

Au Lecteur
3 Élévation
7 La Muse malade
10 L’Ennemi
19 La Géante
21 Hymne à la Beauté
23 La Chevelure
25 ‘Tu mettras l’univers entier dans ta ruelle’
28 Le Serpent qui danse
29 Une charogne
31 Le Vampire
36 Le Balcon
40 *Semper eadem*
44 Réversibilité
48 Le Flacon
49 Le Poison
50 Ciel brouillé
53 L’Invitation au voyage
62 *Mœsta et errabunda*
66 Les Chats
69 La Musique
74 La Cloche fêlée
75 Spleen (‘Pluviôse, irrité […]’)
76 Spleen (‘J’ai plus de souvenirs […]’)
77 Spleen (‘Je suis comme le roi […]’)
78 Spleen (‘Quand le ciel bas et lourd […]’)
81 Alchimie de la douleur
83 L’Héautontimorouménos
84 L’Irrémédiable
85 L’Horloge

Recommended editions for Papers III and IV

**Paper III**


Diderot, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, ed. Michel Delon (Gallimard [Folio], 2002)

Racine, *Phèdre*, ed. Raymond Picard (Gallimard [Folio], 2015)


Césaire, *Return to My Native Land / Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, trans. M. Rosello and A. Pritchard (Bloodaxe, 1995); the original was published by Présence africaine, 1983.

[The bilingual edition may be of help for points of vocabulary, and has an excellent introduction, although it is essential to read the text in full in the original French.]

**Paper IV**

*La Chastelaine de Vergi*, in *Nouvelles courtoises*, ed. Suzanne Méjean-Thiolier and Marie-Françoise Notz-Grob (Livre de Poche, 1997)

*or* *La Châtelaine de Vergy*, édition bilingue, ed. Jean Dufournet and Liliane Dulac (Gallimard [Folio], 1994)


Sand, *Indiana* [1832], ed. Béatrice Didier (Gallimard [Folio], 1984)

Proust, *Combray*, in *Du côté de chez Swann* (which is the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*), ed. Antoine Compagnon (Gallimard [Folio], 1987-8)