

## 2 COURSE INFORMATION

### 2.1 Overview

This handbook covers the Preliminary Examination in English Language and Literature, the first year of BA (Hons) English Language and Literature award. Undergraduate awards are located at Levels 4, 5 and 6 of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications. The Subject Benchmark Statement for English can be found at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-english-15.pdf>

This handbook contains essential information about the Faculty and the course that you will need to refer to on a regular basis throughout the next year. You can find further useful information on the Faculty's Canvas pages for undergraduates at:

<https://login.canvas.ox.ac.uk/>

The subject matter of period papers is described as 'Literature in English'. Although most of your work, and exam questions, will focus on authors from the British Isles, students are welcome to study texts written outside these countries, in consultation with their tutors. You might find that there is greater scope for studying non-British authors on later period papers, where American and postcolonial texts are particularly important.

In some papers, you might like to write on texts which were not originally written in English. For all Prelims papers, apart from Paper 1b, the general rule is that you may write on such texts for no more than one-third of the paper. If discussing texts not originally in English, you should always assume that the examiner does not have knowledge of the original language.

Where authors' dates span the period paper boundary, you should discuss with your tutor where their work more appropriately falls given your interests. In the exam, it is perfectly acceptable to discuss the work of a cross-period author within either of the periods their work straddles, depending on how you wish to interpret it. You must not, however, include it in both periods.

If you have any issues with teaching or supervision please raise these as soon as possible so that they can be addressed promptly. Details of who to contact are provided in section [4.6](#) of this handbook.

### 2.2 Educational Aims of the BA in English Language and Literature

The programme aims to enable and encourage its students to:

- i) read widely, acquiring knowledge of written texts in most or all periods of English literary history;
- ii) develop as independent learners and thinkers;
- iii) develop their critical, analytical and comparative skills by engagement with a wide range of texts written in English;

- iv) pursue a curriculum that is broad and balanced in respect of historical and generic range, analytical approach, depth, and conceptual sophistication;
- v) acquire knowledge and understanding of the expressive resources of the English language and the ways in which this relates to and impacts on the production of literary texts;
- vi) develop skills in the marshalling and deployment of evidence, and in the oral and written exposition of complex ideas through discursive analysis and argument;
- vii) develop understanding of the relationship between literary theory and practice, including an awareness of debates regarding the acts of reading and writing;
- viii) think critically and in an historicised manner about the complex relationship between literary texts and their social, political, cultural and other relevant contexts;
- ix) develop their understanding of the formal and aesthetic dimensions of literary texts;
- x) acquire intellectual and personal skills which are transferable to a wide range of employment contexts and life experiences;
- xi) select and analyse appropriate examples; weigh evidence; investigate, analyse, and assess competing historical and critical viewpoints;
- xii) engage and enhance their enthusiasm for the subject and their awareness of its social and cultural importance;
- xiii) be appropriately prepared for further academic work in English or related disciplines.

### **2.3 Intended learning outcomes**

#### *A. Knowledge and understanding*

Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:

- literature written in English between the early Medieval period and the present day;
- aspects of the use of the English language in literary and other texts in modern and / or earlier times, based on an appropriate level of theoretical understanding;
- the intellectual processes involved in the collection and deployment of primary evidence in literary criticism and scholarship;
- a precise and professional technical vocabulary, appropriately deployed;
- some aspects of literary theory, and of the history of literary criticism;
- processes of literary production and dissemination operative in different historical periods.

*Related teaching/learning methods and strategies:*

Teaching is by means of Faculty lectures and classes, alongside tutorials and classes arranged by students' colleges. The general Faculty lectures and classes (open to the whole University) offer

instruction in and demonstrations of the application of critical method to literary materials. Faculty seminars are also the vehicle for delivering one of the third-year extended essay papers and are an opportunity for group analysis and discussion of a specific literary or linguistic subject area. College classes (typically about 8 students) may address contextual or textual issues and will encourage assimilation of material and oral analysis and exposition. The tutorial (typically 2 students) will focus on written essays and will often allow the student's own writing to set the intellectual agenda. The essay will form the basis for a wide-ranging discussion; it tests, on a regular (but non-examined) basis, the students' developing abilities in assimilation and analysis, presentation and persuasiveness.

Classes and tutorials, and preparatory work for them, require active learning from the student. The course requires students to read and analyse literature from a very wide range of historical periods and in most recognised literary genres. Cumulatively it allows students to develop their own intellectual archive of texts, approaches and contexts, and encourages them to synthesise, historicise and compare writings across the complete history of literature in English while also allowing work in other Anglophone literatures. While not making obligatory any explicitly theorised syllabus content, the course expects all students to develop a sensitised awareness of theoretical issues by exposure through lectures and other forms of teaching to a wide range of theoretical and ideological approaches to literary and cultural history. In Year 1 students study a core skills-led paper and three period-based papers. The skills-led paper is studied concurrently with, and supports, the period-based papers. The period papers' avoidance of set texts (except for commentary work in the Medieval Prelims and FHS papers) encourages wide reading, gives the students freedom to negotiate their own portfolio of authors and allows exploration and innovation alongside study of the 'canon', all within the parameters of guided tutorial work. Work in subsequent years completes the core of period papers and allows more specialised study of specific genres and authors, whilst also requiring compulsory work on Middle English language. Skills are developed cumulatively and are embedded in the assumptions and expectations of the syllabus.

*Assessment:*

Formally, aspects of the required knowledge and understanding are tested through written University examinations held during the course of the third and ninth terms, portfolios submitted in the third and eighth terms, and by two extended essays submitted in the seventh and eighth terms. At college level, extensive preparation for the organisation and communication of such knowledge and understanding is provided by highly personalised formative assessment offered in (typically) weekly tutorials and by practice examinations set and marked by college tutors. All colleges also have a regime of termly report writing that offers regular valuable feedback and formative assessment to the student.

*B. Skills and other attributes*

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

**i. Intellectual skills:**

The ability to:

- listen and read with an open but critical mind;
- exercise critical judgment and undertake sophisticated synthesis, analysis and evaluation of varying kinds of evidence;
- read closely, analytically, and with understanding, texts from a wide range of historical periods and in many different styles and genres;
- argue persuasively and with appropriate illustration and evidence, both orally and in writing;
- approach literary texts and critical issues with imagination, sensitivity and creativity;
- develop independence of mind, including an ability to challenge received opinion.

*Teaching/learning methods and strategies:*

There is emphasis throughout the programme on the skills relevant to the careful and critical reading and exegesis of primary texts and of secondary studies. These include the ability to gather, sift, and assess evidence, and the development of sophisticated skills of literary criticism.

Faculty lectures will aim to demonstrate the professional deployment of these skills in high-level analysis of texts and contexts, ideas and ideologies. The skills of presentation and discussion are honed within the tutorial context, and in classes at college and Faculty level. Student essays and presentations must demonstrate the ability to identify issues, and to marshal evidence and analysis in a logical and coherent way. These attributes, allied to the exercise of disciplined imagination, are regarded as essential if students are to comprehend the often disparate and unfamiliar values and expectations of past cultures and their texts. All learning strategies are designed to inculcate these skills of independent thought and expression, although they will be displayed and tested most obviously in college tutorials and classes.

*Assessment:*

The formative assessment provided by classes and tutorials is critical to the development and monitoring of the intellectual skills set out here. In tutorials, students are subjected to regular scrutiny on these skills through presentation and defence of written essay material in front of an established academic literary scholar and one or more of the student's peer group. In classes, presentations to a larger group of peers need to be thorough, professional, appropriately pitched, and critically and textually persuasive.

**ii. Practical skills**

- advanced literacy and communication skills (oral and written) and the ability to apply these for specific audiences and in appropriate contexts;

- the ability to acquire, process, order and deploy large quantities of information (literary, theoretical, contextual and critical);
- active learning;
- critical and self-reflective reasoning;
- research and bibliographic skills, developed through guidance and allowing independent critical working of a high order of reliability and accuracy;
- IT skills such as word-processing, and the ability to access, manipulate and assess electronic data;
- group working and presentation skills through seminar and class participation.

### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

Classes and tutorials require constant verbal and written interaction with peers and tutors in differently constituted audiences. Longer extended essays require fuller documentation than timed examination papers. Guidance is given through Faculty lectures on preparation for such long essays, and Faculty Handbooks and college guidance offer assistance with communication and study skills. There are induction sessions at Faculty and college levels, covering both study skills and IT skills. There are regular opportunities for the development of new skills (e.g. through Faculty and University IT training or the University Language Centre). The Faculty's employment of different modes of assessment, and the imposition of regular long and short term deadlines throughout the course, demand a high level of time management and a commitment to managing personal learning.

### *Assessment*

Formative assessment is offered both through the college tutorial, in which the tutor will give feedback on the weekly essays submitted, and through presentations given regularly in college and Faculty classes. These enable continuous monitoring of the development of practical skills. Timed examinations, two portfolios (of 4,000 and 6,000 words), a 6,000 word extended essay and an 8,000 word dissertation require different strategies of learning and organisation, and encourage the development of a range of writing skills. Termly tutorial reports identify points of excellence and of concern, e.g. the ability to present and defend an argument or thesis convincingly and cogently. More formal assessment through college practice examinations provide opportunities to assess and provide feedback on skills associated with timed written examinations.

### **iii. Transferable skills**

At the end of the programme the student should be able to:

- find information, organise and deploy it;

- draw on such information and, with a trained analytical intelligence, explore complex issues in ways that are imaginative yet sensitive to the integrity of the materials under discussion and the needs of different target audiences;
- formulate opinions and argue these confidently, whilst remaining appropriately responsive to the ideas of others;
- work well independently, with a strong sense of self-direction, but with the ability to work constructively in co-operation with others;
- effectively structure and communicate ideas in a variety of written and oral formats;
- analyse and critically examine different forms of discourse;
- plan and organise the use of time effectively, particularly in relation to the weekly timetable of tutorials and associated essays;
- where relevant, make appropriate use of language and IT skills.

#### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

The programme requires:

- information retrieval and highly competent bibliographic work, including the informed use of IT. (This is integral to all aspects of the programme which, although providing guidance and reading lists, also requires students to exercise their initiative and research skills as active learners to explore available resources);
- the ability to present ideas effectively and to respond to the ideas of others constructively. (Tutorials, classes and lectures each require different forms of engagement with ideas and arguments);
- the ability to produce material within time constraints and against tight deadlines, whether within the framework of the written examination, in submitting the extended essays, or in the programme of tutorials and classes;
- independent work in preparing for tutorials and extended essays, and more collaborative work in classes organised by the Faculty and within colleges;

#### *Assessment*

The transferable skills identified above are essential elements of the programme. As such their presence or absence is the focus of much of the regular comment provided by tutors in their contacts with students; and in the varying modes of formative assessment and formal feedback provided to students throughout the course. They are implicit in timed examination papers and highly relevant to the Faculty's classification criteria.

## 2.4 Course structure

Four compulsory papers in year one.

<b>Year 1</b>			
Paper 1: Introduction to English Language and Literature			
Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature, c. 650 – 1350			
Paper 3: Literature in English 1830 – 1910			
Paper 4: Literature in English 1910 – present day			
<b>Course I</b>		<b>Course II</b>	
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>
Paper 1: Shakespeare		Paper 1: Literature in English 650-1100	Paper 6: Special Options
Paper 2: Literature in English 1350-1550	Paper 6: Special Options	Paper 2: Medieval English and related Literatures 1066-1550	Paper 7: Dissertation
Paper 3: Literature in English 1550-1660	Paper 7: Dissertation	Paper 3: Literature in English 1350-1550	
Paper 4: Literature in English 1660-1760		Paper 4: History of the English Language to c. 1800	
Paper 5: Literature in English 1760-1830		Paper 5: Shakespeare OR The Material Text	

Details concerning Year 2 and Year 3 of the course are contained within the corresponding FHS handbook, and further information regarding teaching staff, lecture timetable and course resources can be found on the Faculty Canvas pages.

## 2.5 Recommended Pattern of Teaching

<b>Paper</b>	<b>English Faculty</b>		<b>College</b>		<b>Comments</b>
	<b>Lectures</b>	<b>Classes</b>	<b>Tutorials</b>	<b>Classes</b>	
Paper 1: Introduction to English Language and Literature	16		4	8	<p><i>This is a guide to the typical pattern of tutorials and classes offered by colleges. The actual number of classes or tutorials may vary between colleges. All papers are supplemented by optional Faculty lectures.</i></p> <p>There is a course of 16 compulsory core lectures which run weekly through</p>

					Michaelmas and Hilary terms. Colleges supplement these by classes and tutorials spread over those two terms.
Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature, c. 650 - 1350			6	12	
Paper 3: Literature in English 1830 – 1910			6	4	
Paper 4: Literature in English 1910 – present day			6	4	

## 2.6 Paper 1: Introduction to English Language and Literature

This paper is intended to introduce you to English language and literature as a discipline, and to a variety of approaches to reading texts. It will introduce you to formal study of the English language, with particular reference to its historical development, its use as a literary medium, and the role of cultural and social factors on its development and use. The paper will also acquaint you with a wide range of theoretical issues and reading skills, but in doing so seeks to encourage you to think for yourself and to exercise critical scrutiny.

The English Faculty Library's Guide to Prelims 1: <http://ox.libguides.com/english-prelims-paper-1> contains direct links to an invaluable range of online and bibliographic resources. Many of these are essential for work on the language section of the paper.

There is a course of 16 core lectures which run weekly through Michaelmas and Hilary terms. The lectures in Michaelmas Term will cover topics relating to literature, and those in Hilary Term will cover language.

Colleges will normally supplement these by eight college classes spread over those two terms, and by four tutorials. This college teaching will give you the opportunity to practise written work for your portfolio examination.

NOTE: College tutors will not necessarily base classes and tutorials on the weekly lecture topics and the further reading that accompanies them. The lectures are designed to introduce topics and to suggest approaches to them. Your college work will supplement and challenge what you have learnt in lectures. You will be expected to make connections between and around the lecture topics, and you will want to think about how studying for this paper informs and enriches your first year work as a whole.

### Assessment

Assessment for this paper will be by portfolio. The examination paper, consisting of a section on language and a section on literature, will be released by the Faculty on Monday of week 4 of Trinity Term. Your portfolio will consist of two pieces of written work of between 1,500 and 2,000 words each (including footnotes but excluding bibliography). The portfolio must be submitted online on Thursday of week 5, Trinity Term.

You are required to choose one question from each of the two sections. Questions in the language section require an answer in the form of a commentary. This commentary is based on texts that you choose for yourself. You should be careful to select textual material that meets the precise terms of the question you have chosen to answer. **Copies of the texts or passages used must be included as an appendix to the portfolio, and the combined length of all texts you have chosen must not exceed 70 lines in total.** Texts or passages should be clearly annotated with line numbers (e.g. every five lines); it is fine to do so by hand. You should also list a line length for each text as well as a total line length for all appended material.

Questions in the literature section require an answer in the form of an essay.

You must avoid duplicating material used in this paper when answering other papers, ie. if writing on a text or extract from a text under this paper, you may not write on the same text under any other Prelims paper. In addition, you are not permitted to duplicate material between the two sections of the portfolio.

Information on presentation and referencing requirements for portfolio essays may be found in sections [3.3](#) and [3.4](#) of this handbook.

## **2.7 Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature, c. 650 - 1350**

This paper introduces literatures characterized by astonishing invention and innovation. In 650 Britain and Ireland comprised numerous competing kingdoms. Christianity, introduced to England in the late sixth century by missionaries from the Roman and Celtic Churches, was assuming a dominant religious and cultural influence. Languages and cultures mingled and clashed, including early English dialects, Irish, Welsh, Pictish, Old Norse, Byzantine, and varieties of Latin. This is the time of the earliest extant English poem ascribed to a named author, Cædmon, yet the seventh century also produced, in Bede, the finest scholar in Europe at the time; in Aldhelm one of the most talented of poets (he wrote in Latin); and at Canterbury the best school in northern Europe, run by an abbot born in North Africa and an archbishop from Tarsus (in what is now south-east Turkey).

By 1350 England was a powerful nation with imperial ambitions, embroiled in wars with Scotland and France, but also ravaged by the Black Death of 1348. King Edward III and his court chroniclers and poets drew upon an extensive cultural and literary heritage, in which history and fiction blended, consciously emulating the legendary King Arthur, holding tournaments and festivals in celebration of court, knighthood and chivalry. And around the middle of the whole period comes the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the subsequent colonization of England and, in time, Wales and parts of Ireland. The Norman castles and cathedrals still prominent in many towns are only one kind of material legacy from 650–1350, in which the development of literacy, manuscript production, the legal system, schools and universities including Oxford gave huge scope for artistic and literary creativity.

The Norman Conquest changed English language and literature profoundly, and helps mark a shift between what we call Old English (to c.1100) and Early Middle English (c.1100 to c.1300 or so). However, it was one of numerous moments of political and demographic change, starting with

Germanic migration before this period begins, and including Viking and Danish raiders, settlers and rulers, religious and mercantile travellers, and a significant community of Jews, who became subject to persecution and were eventually expelled in the late thirteenth century. At the same time, successive attempts to capture and control contested holy sites such as Jerusalem fed the development of religious and racial, including racist, ideologies. Throughout this period, questions of identity and belonging are probed across a vast range of literary forms: lyric and epic; debate and dialogue; riddles; secular and saintly biographies; fable and vision; sermons and sagas; history and romance.

In the 8 hour online, open book examination you will write two essays, and will be able to choose between writing a critical commentary on a passage of either Old or Early Middle English. The passages set will be taken from the following recommended texts.

i. Old English (All in Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English* (Oxford, 2012), 8th edition.)

- *The Dream of the Rood*
- *The Battle of Maldon*
- *The Wanderer*
- an extract from *Beowulf* ('Beowulf's fight with Grendel', lines 702–897)

ii. Early Middle English

- *The Owl and the Nightingale*, an extract (in John Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, *A Book of Middle English*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2005), lines 1–390)
- *Lazamon's Brut*, an extract (in W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg, *Layamon's Arthur* (Exeter, 2001), lines 13971–14297)
- *Havelok*, an extract (in Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, *Four Romances of England* (Kalamazoo, 1999), lines 2512–2855)
- *Ancrene Wisse*, an extract (in Robert Hasenfratz, *Ancrene Wisse* (Kalamazoo, 2000) Part 7, lines 1–194).

(Annotated editions of all of these texts and extracts are available on Canvas)

On the examination paper candidates will be able to choose from a total of four commentary passages each year (two Old English and two Early Middle English). You will be expected to comment on aspects of content and style and to show that you have a good understanding of either Old or Early Middle English as a literary language.

The essay questions will tend to be based on topics rather than individual authors. You can answer them with reference to either Old or Early Middle English literature, or by comparative consideration of the two. You are expected to focus closely on the recommended texts (Old and/or Early Middle English) in your work for this paper as a whole, but there is also scope to read beyond the recommended texts and to work more broadly on some of the major preoccupations of the

literature of the period c. 650–1350. You may write an essay on the text on which you also write a commentary, but if you do so you must not repeat material. You must show substantial knowledge of at least THREE texts across the two essays. You may write on texts in languages other than English (e.g. Latin, Anglo-Norman, Old Norse) for up to one third of this paper (e.g. all of one essay, or a portion of both essays). However, you are required to show substantial knowledge of Old English and/or Early Middle English language in BOTH Section A and Section B of the paper.

## **2.8 Paper 3: Literature in English 1830 – 1910**

This paper examines literature in English from roughly 1830 to 1910, though you are permitted to look at material earlier and later than these boundaries in order to make sense of any particular writer's development. The essay questions in the examination tend to be based on topics, rather than authors. This gives you the opportunity to write across a range of authors, focusing on some of the major preoccupations, both thematic and stylistic, of the period. Alternatively, you may choose to focus each of your examination answers on the work of only one or two authors. Issues that you might choose to cover could include (for example) the development of realism, responses to industrialism, women's writing, concepts of identity and selfhood, guilt and transgression, memory and uses of the past, verbal and metrical experimentation, attitudes towards nation, race and Empire, decadence, the roots of modernism, symbolism, science, religion, class, domesticity, writing for children and the treatment of childhood, romance, popular fiction, melodrama, the social problem play, drama and identity, theatre and performance issues, the relationship between literature and art. These are only some of the possible topics that might legitimately be studied for this paper; there is no set list of texts or topics you are expected to cover.

Among the authors you might consider studying are the following: Arnold, Braddon, the Brontës, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, Carlyle, Carroll, Clough, Wilkie Collins, Conrad, Dickens, Emily Dickinson, Frederick Douglass, George Eliot, Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Gissing, Hardy, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hopkins, Harriet Jacobs, Henry James, Melville, Meredith, John Stuart Mill, Newman, Pater, Patmore, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Poe, Christina Rossetti, Ruskin, Olive Schreiner, Shaw, R. L. Stevenson, Swinburne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Tennyson, Thackeray, Thoreau, Twain, H. G. Wells, Wharton, Whitman, and Oscar Wilde. However, you may also choose to study groups of writers or particular genres, such as spasmodic poetry, Gothic, the dramatic monologue, elegy, and so on.

Candidates are encouraged to read widely within the period. You may discuss any literature written in the English language: there are no exclusions based on the author's citizenship, country of origin, or residence.

### **Structure of the examination**

This paper is examined by an 8 hour online, open book exam. Students will be expected to answer three essay questions, and to show substantial knowledge of the work of at least three authors. Do not repeat material. You should NOT write more than one essay substantially on the same author.

## **2.9 Paper 4: Literature in English 1910 – present day**

This paper examines 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literature. The essay questions in the examination tend to be based on topics, rather than authors. This gives you the opportunity to write across a range of authors, focusing on some of the major thematic and stylistic preoccupations of the period. Alternatively you may choose to focus each of your examination answers on the work of only one or two authors.

Issues that you might choose to cover would include (for example) modernism, post-modernism, ideas of literary language, postcolonialism, literary experimentalism, primitivism, national (and other) identities, popular culture, concepts of literary value, journalism, gender, intertextuality, literature and other art forms, technology, innovations in modern theatre, war literature, and representations of the city.

Among the authors you might consider studying are Achebe, Atwood, Auden, James Baldwin, Djuna Barnes, Beckett, Bishop, Bowen, Kamau Brathwaite, Caryl Churchill, Coetzee, Conrad, DeLillo, Duffy, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Forster, Friel, Greene, Heaney, Hemingway, Hill, Langston Hughes, Ted Hughes, Joyce, Larkin, Lawrence, Lessing, Mamet, Mansfield, Miller, Toni Morrison, Muldoon, Nabokov, Naipaul, Ondaatje, Orwell, Osborne, Pinter, Plath, the poets of the two World Wars, Pound, Roth, Rushdie, Shaw, Soyinka, Stein, Stoppard, Dylan Thomas, Walcott, Waugh, Tennessee Williams, Woolf, and Yeats.

Candidates are encouraged to read widely within the period. You may discuss any literature written in the English language: there are no exclusions based on the author's citizenship, country of origin, or residence.

### **Structure of the examination**

This paper is examined by an 8 hour online, open book exam. Students will be expected to answer three essay questions, and to show substantial knowledge of the work of at least three authors. Do not repeat material. You should NOT write more than one essay substantially on the same author.