ENGLISH AT PEMBROKE

Tutorial preparation and workload

The tutorial is at the centre of an Oxford education. It requires all students to have read widely on the topic set for the week and to have produced a piece of work – in the form of an essay, commentary, or oral presentation as set by the tutor concerned -- in advance.

Reading widely and allowing yourself time to think about the topic is important; you should be working, on average, an 8-hour day during term. How you organize that day is up to you. Tutorials are the non-negotiable elements in your timetable. Most –but not all -- lectures are optional, and we strongly advice attendance at c. 5-6 per week (shaping a programme that will best fit the range of topics you and your tutor plan to cover during the term).

Extra-curricular activities must fit around your primary commitments. Make sure you are not taking on more than you can handle, but equally make sure you are doing things that take you away from your desk, keep you healthy, and will give you a sufficiently rich hinterland over the course of your university career.

Writing the tutorial essay:

You should finish your reading of primary and secondary materials in time to plan, as well as to write (and read through), your essay. The first paragraph should identify the subject of the essay in sufficient detail to make it interesting to your reader; it should also isolate the primary problems of interpretation as you see them. Where a prompt question or quotation has been given, the opening paragraph should consider that prompt carefully, cross-examine it, and perhaps challenge its terms. The core of the essay should develop and, where relevant, adjudicate on those problems in clearly differentiated paragraphs.

It is generally a good idea to place the simpler matters near the start of the essay, in order to allow the argument to develop in complexity and interest. The conclusion should not be a straight summary or reiteration of what has been said (as would be valid in many Social Science and Science subjects): it should offer a stylish bringing together of the most important insights in the essay and/or a satisfying twist on the original problem. ‘Stylish’ does not mean ‘rhetorical’: well-argued, logical, informed criticism is greatly preferable to wind-boggery. A good essay is a carefully honed argument, using evidence appropriately to support and develop different aspects of the argument in relation to the question.
The essay should not summarise plot or content, and it should not seek to incorporate everything you have found out. Keep a full set of notes on your week’s reading that will be your reference point for future revision and reference. The essay should concentrate on answering the problem it has set for itself, and make use of the views of critics in so far as they serve that purpose. Only cite a critic when they are saying something you could not say on your own authority, or offering a well-worded insight that you can nuance or that you wish to contest. Critics are often most useful when they seem to you interestingly wrong, or interestingly not-quite-right.

Always attribute material and quotations and make sure that your notes differentiate between your own ideas and comments and those of critics. Plagiarism always incurs penalties, even when this is done unintentionally. Underline titles of books and journals (or put in italics).

Stretch your vocabulary, where relevant: you need to develop sufficient knowledge of technical terms to give an accurate account of language use, genre, prosody, literary theory, and so forth. You also need to develop a sense of where pithy directness of judgement is more effective than technical description. Your style should increasingly feel like (and be) your own. Avoid clichés, undue colloquialism, vague personal appreciation of a piece of literature, and ‘Therefore, it can be seen that …’

There isn’t a rigid answer to the question of length. 4-5 sides of typed A4, double or 1.5 spaced (never single line spacing please) is usually about right (c.2,000 -2,500 words), but your tutor may impose different requirements, so check if you are unsure. Some tutors will request hand-written essays on the grounds that most of you will have to hand-write your examination papers at the end of the first (and the third) year, so there are substantial benefits to ‘keeping your hand in’, in this respect. Please number all pages of the essay, write your name at the top of the page, and leave ample margins for tutor’s comments.

Your essay should conclude with a list of the books you have read. This should be reasonably professional in form, and always include author, title and (at least) date of publication. When you cite a particular work, give the publication details and the page cited in a footnote. Details of how to reference are given in the Undergraduate Handbooks. Go to www.english.ox.ac.uk -> Current Students and Staff (Undergraduates) -> Course Handbooks and Specifications, or see the essential Cite Them Right by Richard Pears and Graham Shield (10th edn, 2016).

Most tutors are happy to have essays emailed to them, though handwritten ones will need to be handed in at the Porter’s Lodge for the attention of the relevant tutor, or (by agreement) scanned.
Most tutors will want to see work before the tutorial but this can vary; some are happy for you to bring the essay to the tutorial. If in doubt, check with the tutor.

**The tutorial itself**

Punctuality is important. Essays must be on time, and you must be on time for your tutorial session (preferably waiting outside the door a few minutes in advance).

Most tutorials are paired (i.e. the tutor meets with two students for an hour), but there may be occasions on which students’ choices of specialist options or the teaching needs of particular individuals make it sensible to see some students in a 3 and others as ‘singletons’ for a week.

The tutorial should be a conversation between tutor and students, in the course of which all participants will develop a deeper understanding of the problems addressed in your written work—with a chance, also, to broaden out and discuss other important aspects of the subject in hand. The quality of the tutorial will be substantially affected by how much work you have done in preparation, and by how much thought you put into your essay. A good tutorial should be invigorating for all those involved.

The tutorial is not the occasion for a mini-lecture by the tutor. Obviously, the tutor will correct errors of fact and misunderstanding, and suggest ways to improve your argument or interpretation. However, tutors will also try to test the strength of your argument by asking you questions not considered in your essay, and moving the discussion in new directions. Much of the conversation is likely to be advanced (on either side) by observations in the form ‘Yes, but …’. The essential thing is to be positively engaged in the process. In most cases, the work you do for tutorials will not form part of your summative assessment (it is not examined, and in the main you will not be given a mark): it is a chance for you to try new methodological approaches, new ideas, new styles, and to receive constructive feedback—which may at times also mean appropriately robust feedback.

**Feedback:**

Tutors employ different methods and styles of teaching: some will mark all written work in advance; others will mark one of the essays for a paired tutorial and ask the other student to read their work aloud. In either model, you can expect to receive feedback on your work in written and oral form on the day of the tutorial or very soon after (certainly within a week, since the feedback should influence how you go about your next piece of work). Read the comments on essays carefully and use them to improve or extend your command of the material or essay technique.
If you are unhappy with the way in which your tutorials are progressing, or with the quality or intelligibility of the feedback you are receiving, it is vital that you try to express this to the tutor in the first instance. If there is ever a serious problem with tutorial quality (we hope there will not be) you can take your concerns to the Academic Office.

Lynda Mugglestone and Ushashi Dasgupta
This document provides the lists of reading to be covered in preparation for your first term(s) in Oxford. We are also attaching a separate introductory explanation of the tutorial teaching system, which outlines what is expected of you.

For English and History students, the first-year course requires **two papers from English** (one of which must be **Paper 1**: Introduction to English Language and Literature) and **two papers from History**. A detailed course outline for the History and English degree, with specific details of the first year, can be found at [http://www.english.ox.ac.uk](http://www.english.ox.ac.uk) (follow the links for ‘Prospective Undergraduates’ > Programme Specifications and click on ‘Joint Schools’). These pages give full information on methods, objectives, and course details.

Pembroke historians in the single honours school cover the period 300-1087 in Michaelmas term. For that reason we have found that it can work best for Joint School students to do the same period on the English side too (**Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature**) since there are some useful points of contact, and it allows students to bring the two halves of the course together in very productive ways. If you wish, however, you could decide not to do Medieval Literature but take **Modern Literature** in Hilary Term instead. Reading lists for all the English papers are attached. Your History tutors will be in touch separately about History reading and course choices. **It would be helpful if you could confirm which literature papers you want to do before term, though we can discuss this in the introductory week (0th week) as well.**

During your first term (Michaelmas), you will be doing some introductory work for Paper 2 (Early Medieval Literature) if you have chosen this option, as well as doing Section A of Paper 1 (Introduction to English Language and Literature) – focussing on English language in different contexts. Paper 1 as a whole is an introduction to critical concepts and problems in both literature and language, and will introduce you to ways of reading and analysis which will be useful in all your subsequent work on literature and language. It has two parts for History and English students: **Section A: English Language; Section B: Interdisciplinary approaches to Literature**. There may be some introductory faculty sessions for the latter in Michaelmas (though most sessions will be in later terms). You will be taught for Section B with the other 1st year History and English students in other colleges; these classes provide a good opportunity for you to get to know the other students on this course. The paper as a whole will be examined by a portfolio in your third term (Trinity). There will also be plenty of time for revision sessions early in that term before the question paper is issued. Teaching for Modern Literature or main section of the Medieval Literature paper (depending on what you have chosen) will take place in Hilary term.

Teaching for the first two terms will take place mainly in college but there will also be a core element – especially for Paper 1 – which takes place in a series of lectures given at the Examination Schools on the High St. Most other lectures for English will take place in the English Faculty on Manor Road, but you should read the Lecture List carefully in case a different location is specified for a particular lecture or lecture series. Lecture lists will be given to you on your arrival in Oxford, as will information about tutorials and classes for the term.
In preparation for your first year, you need to read in advance as many of the primary texts as you can get through from the attached reading lists. Get into the habit now of reading critically and carefully, and of making notes on anything you read, either in the margin of the text, or the end-papers (as long as it’s not a library book!), or on a separate sheet of paper, or electronically. If you are reading electronic texts, use the note-taking function. You will find that reading rigorously and attentively during the vacations makes the teaching term much easier. For print texts, one method is to use the blank pages and inside cover at the front of the edition to keep track of topics. (This has the advantage of keeping everything in the one volume.). You should, for example, have entries for major characters, for the narrator (if there is one), for significant examples of narrative technique (flashback, prolepsis, ellipsis …), and for topics. The texts themselves will to a large extent guide you in this latter category, but here are some standard examples: gender, class, race, death, marriage, servants, money, colonialism, war, pity, anger, elegy, love (of various kinds). So, you will end up with entries which look something like:

servants—51, 65, 72-4, 113. [And marks in the margin on the corresponding page].

You might at this stage find it useful to buy J. A. Cuddon’s *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* or *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* ed. Chris Baldick. If you feel in need of brushing up on the basics of prosody (poetic form and metre), it would be a good idea to read Jeffrey Wainwright, *Poetry: The Basics*, 3rd edn (2015). It will be available freely online via the Bodleian Library once you have your Bodleian card (issued to you at the start of your first term). Malcolm Hebron’s *Mastering the Language of Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) is also a useful purchase, especially in view of the commentary element it contains (this forms part of the number of the papers which you will cover in the first year, as well as later). Ideally, we should like you to at least skim read two books about Literary Studies, Terry Eagleton’s *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983) and *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory* by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle. Both are available in paperback.

You should of course also have a good English dictionary (not a concise one). The complete *Oxford English Dictionary* will be available to you electronically and free of charge once you are at Oxford, together with a wide range of other electronic resources in primary and secondary texts. Do get in touch with us if you have any urgent questions—otherwise we’ll see you in October. In the meantime, we hope you have a good summer.

Best wishes,

Lynda Mugglestone
Professor of the History of English

Ushashi Dasgupta, Departmental Lecturer in English Literature
Reading: Paper 1 Section A

Core texts: Michaelmas Term 2018: these texts** must be read before you arrive in Oxford


Additional background reading:


Prelims Paper 2: Early Medieval Literature 650–1350

Covering a period of some seven centuries, Prelims Paper 2 gives you the opportunity to study the beginnings of English literature from the time at which Christian missionaries introduced technologies of writing to the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Britain in the seventh century. Most of the work for this paper will focus on Old English literature produced during the Anglo-Saxon period (c. 650–c. 1100), but we shall also have the opportunity to look at the literature produced in England in the period after the Norman Conquest in 1066 and consider the effects that the Norman invasion might have had upon the history of English literature.

Work for this paper is divided between classes aimed at developing your appreciation of the language of early medieval texts and tutorials in which we shall consider thematic and contextual aspects of the literature. This structure is replicated in your end of year prelims exam, in which you will be required to write two essays on a range of topics/texts and one critical commentary on the language of an extract from the set texts. For the Old English period there are four set texts, all poems, which we shall be studying in detail over the course of the year: *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Wanderer*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and an extract from the long poem *Beowulf*. Whilst you will need to know these texts particularly well, we shall also be looking at a wider range of early medieval English texts, and you are encouraged to read as widely as possible in the literature of the period covered and to familiarize yourself with the historical contexts from which it originates.
Detailed reading lists for this paper will be provided in Michaelmas Term but it would be helpful to start thinking about the literature of this period now. Below are some starting points which you should explore:

- The most famous work of literature from the period covered by this paper is the Old English poem *Beowulf*. You should read a modern English translation of this poem as soon as possible to get a feel for the style of Old English poetry. There are many published translations (including the recently published one by Pembroke alumnus J. R. R. Tolkien), but I would recommend *Beowulf: A Prose Translation*, trans. E. Talbot Donaldson, ed. Nicholas Howe (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 2002), which contains some excellent background information and some critical perspectives on the poem, which you should certainly also read.

- A short, but valuable, introduction to the history and culture of the earlier period studied for this paper is John Blair’s *The Anglo-Saxon Age: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2000). Two further accessible studies of the literature of this period are Hugh Magennis’ *The Cambridge Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011) and Mark C. Amodio’s *The Anglo-Saxon Literature Handbook* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). It would be very useful if you could look through one or more of these in preparation for this paper. For the post-Conquest period, the best short introduction is Elaine Treharne’s *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

You’ll study the Modern paper (‘Literature in English, 1910 to the Present Day’) during your second term at Oxford, but you may wish to get a flavour of the course in advance – it may be especially useful to get a few of longer works under your belt at an earlier stage. None of the texts for this paper are compulsory, and what follows is a partial list – but if you do wish to write about them this year, we think it best to give you the chance to read ahead!

WH Auden, poems.
Elizabeth Bishop, poems.
EE Cummings, poems.
TS Eliot, poems.
EM Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924).
James Joyce, *Dubliners* (1914), *Ulysses* (1918-20).
Philip Larkin, poems.
Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (1973), *Omeros* (1990), and other poems.
WB Yeats, poems.