Prelims French Single Honours ('Sole') Reading List 2026-27

Students taking the French Sole course take French papers I-IV along with other students studying French. In addition, they take the three papers described below. A brief outline is given here, and for each paper your lecturers/seminar tutor will also provide you with topic-specific reading lists and essay titles.

Paper XI Introduction to French Film Studies

Introductory reading:
— Michael Temple and Michael Witt (eds), *The French Cinema Book* (British Film Institute, 2004).
A detailed introduction to French cinema as an industry.
— David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art, An Introduction* (McGraw Hill, various editions).
A very useful introduction explaining all the technical terms that are used to analyse a film.

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth- and twenty-first century French film directors. We discuss the concepts of realism, documentary and avant-garde cinema and introduce the basic tools of film analysis.

In your essay writing you will be able to engage with the directors' ideas and with their particular way of realising them. The films under discussion involve a wide range of themes such as love, power, gender relations and autobiography. Each director has a different style of filmmaking. The focus of the course is the question of how the film medium represents contemporary reality. We will look at the way each of these directors uses devices of storytelling to present a particular point of view upon the world we live in. You will be encouraged to watch more films by each of these directors.

The prescribed films are:

- Jean-Luc Godard: *Pierrot le fou* (1965)
- Maurice Pialat: *À nos amours* (1983)
- Claire Denis: *Beau Travail* (1999)
- Céline Sciamma: *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (2019)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term (first term), with seminars on the prescribed films in weeks 2, 4, 6 and 8. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the films and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. [Normally the three-hour examination in Trinity Term (third term) requires students to answer three questions, each on a different film, with a choice of two questions on each film.] **In 2026-27 this paper will not be formally examined, but instead certified on the basis of the submission of one of the essays written as part of the course.**

In addition to the seminars you must follow the modern languages lecture-series entitled *Introduction to Film Studies* in weeks 1, 3, 5 and 7 in Michaelmas Term. These lectures present basic concepts of film analysis – montage, story, self-reference, and spectatorship – in four lectures devoted to four international films. These films are used simply as illustrations for the lectures and are not treated as set texts for examination purposes. The films are: Sergei Eisenstein: *Potemkin* (1925); Alfred Hitchcock: *39 Steps* (1935); Michelangelo Antonioni (1967): *Blow-up*; Claire Denis: *Beau Travail* (1999).

Please note that in Canvas, to which you will have access when you arrive, there is a reading list for this part of the course which includes links to online access or digitized versions of many of the texts.

Students in the past have sometimes not understood that these links can be used to access the documents.

Paper XII Introduction to French Literary Theory

This paper will introduce you to four twentieth-century literary critics. In your essay writing you will be able to engage with their ideas about literature and with their particular way of expressing them. You will be encouraged to apply these ideas to your own reading of texts.

The prescribed authors (note the recommended editions) are:

- Paul Valéry, 'Questions de poésie' and 'Poésie et pensée abstraite', in *Théorie poétique et esthétique,* part of *Variété: Oeuvres, vol. I* (Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade) [both essays are available electronically on Canvas, accessible via Single Sign-On once you get to Oxford]
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Folio) [Sections I and II only]
- Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Seuil)
- Hélène Cixous, 'Le rire de la Méduse' in *Le rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, ed. by Frédéric Regard (Galilée). [essay available electronically on Canvas, accessible via Single Sign-On]

The teaching for this paper takes place in Hilary Term (second term), in weeks 5-8 and Trinity Term weeks 1-4, in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. **The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different author. There will be a choice of two essay questions on each author.**

Paper XIII Key Texts in French Thought

This paper will introduce you to four thinkers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In both essay and commentary writing you will be able to engage with their ideas and with their particular way of expressing them.

The prescribed texts (note the recommended editions) are:

- René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode,* edited by Laurence Renault (Garnier-Flammarion)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (Folio)
- Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Folio), vol. I, 'Introduction'; 'Mythes'; II, 'La femme mariée'; 'La mère'. (NB Both the French 'Idées' collection and the English translation have sections missing and cannot be relied upon)
- Frantz Fanon, 'Introduction' , 'Le Noir et le langage', and 'Conclusion', in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Points-Essais)

The teaching for this paper takes place in Michaelmas Term weeks 5-8 and Hilary Term weeks 1-4 in a combination of lectures and seminars. You will be required to submit to your seminar tutor an essay or commentary on three of the authors, and to do a seminar presentation on the fourth. Written work should include at least one essay and at least one commentary. **The three-hour examination in Trinity Term requires you to answer three questions, each on a different text, one a commentary, the other two essays. There will be a choice of one commentary passage from each text and one essay question on each text.**