

Introductory Reading and Learning for the French Programmes

Dear Soon-To-Be Bristol Students,

Welcome to the School of Modern Languages – and to the Department of French – at the University of Bristol! We're delighted to be working with you all over the coming years. Because we want to help you make the very best of your degree choice, members of the Department have put together a list of materials that you can explore before you begin your studies with us here in Bristol. It covers the many different cultural and contextual aspects that make up degree-level study in French, as well as listing useful books and audio-visual material.

Details on how your degree programme is structured are available in the University's Programme Catalogue:

<https://www.bris.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue/AboutProgrammes.jsa?ayrCode=24%2F25>

Most of you will take both of the main cultural courses we offer (one in each of the two teaching blocks/semesters) alongside your core language-learning unit in French.

The information below is designed to serve as an accessible starting point for you as you begin to study the cultures and histories in which the French language has developed across the world. By sampling this exploratory reading, listening, and viewing, you will broaden your knowledge base before your first term. We certainly *don't* expect you to look at everything we have set out here, but we hope it will inspire you to pursue your current interests and to find out more about new areas of study.

We're looking forward to meeting you all in the autumn!

The French Department

Making the Transition into Higher Education

University is different from school. In making the journey from being a pupil in secondary education to being a student in higher education, you may find it helpful to look at some of the following about the kind of academic and personal development that this transition involves.

Study Skills and Personal Development

Cottrell, Stella, *The Study Skills Handbook*, 5th edition (Palgrave, 2019) – especially the first couple of chapters.

Greetham, Bryan, *How to Write Better Essays* (Macmillan, 2018)

Moran, Joe, *First You Write a Sentence: The Elements of Reading, Writing ... and Life* (Penguin, 2019)

Thompson, Dominique, *Resourcefulness at University* (Welbeck, 2019)

You can also follow the links to the tutorials available on the University's Study Skills pages (<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/students/study/skills-development/study-skills/>) on a range of areas, from academic reading and writing to time management and wellbeing.

On Education and Inclusive Learning

Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum, 2000), especially Chapter 2 – this influential analysis explains how education can empower individuals and communities alike:

[https://libcom.org/files/Paulo%20Freire,%20Myra%20Bergman%20Ramos,%20Donaldo%20Macedo%20-%20Pedagogy%20of%20the%20Oppressed,%2030th%20Anniversary%20Edition%20\(2000,%20Bloomsbury%20Academic\).pdf](https://libcom.org/files/Paulo%20Freire,%20Myra%20Bergman%20Ramos,%20Donaldo%20Macedo%20-%20Pedagogy%20of%20the%20Oppressed,%2030th%20Anniversary%20Edition%20(2000,%20Bloomsbury%20Academic).pdf)

hooks, bell, *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994) – a powerful discussion of how to address sexism and racism in the classroom and beyond, drawing on the author’s personal experience in the American South and her friendship with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire:

<https://academictrap.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/bell-hooks-teaching-to-transgress.pdf>

Studying French and Francophone Cultures

Many of the items we suggest are available cheaply online (e.g. Kindle editions or second-hand paperbacks) or for free (e.g. sample chapters).

Oxford University Press has an excellent ‘**Very Short Introductions**’ series on a variety of topics related to France and the French-speaking world to help you get started, including:

Andrew, Dudley, *French Cinema* (2023)

Gaukroger, Stephen, and Knox Peden, *French Philosophy* (2020)

Goldstone, Jack A., *Revolutions* (2023) – see especially Chapters 5-6 (from the Renaissance through the French and Haitian Revolutions in 1789/1791 to 1848) and Chapter 10 (Tunisia and the Arab Spring)

Lyons, John D., *French Literature* (2010)

Maher, John C., *Multilingualism* (2017)

Parker, John, *African History* (2007)

Schwartz, Vanessa, *Modern France* (2011)

Wright, Donald, *Canada* (2020)

We also recommend the following as ways of framing the courses in French cultural studies that you will be taking:

Jenkins, Cecil, *A Brief History of France: An Introduction to the People, History, and Culture* (Robinson, 2017)

Walter, Henriette, *Le français dans tous les sens* (Robert Laffont, 2014 [1988])

‘French Cultures in Context’ (taught in Teaching Block 1)

This course introduces you to the key cultural debates and socio-political issues which have defined French and Francophone identities over history. Drawing on an expansive range of materials (print, digital, audio-visual, and curatorial), we focus on figures and places to explore the network of often competing ideas and values that have shaped what ‘Frenchness’ is

perceived to be today. In so doing, the course lays the foundation for your study of culture, history, and politics in the French-speaking world, as well as developing your understanding of the importance of language to these areas. You can find a full description of the course here: <https://www.bris.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue/UnitDetails.jsa?unitCode=FREN10030>.

The following provide especially helpful entry points:

- Achille, Étienne, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno (eds.), *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France* (Liverpool University Press, 2020)
- Bergin, Joseph, *A History of France* (Macmillan, 2015)
- Boittin, Jennifer, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Feminism and Anti-Imperialism in Interwar Paris* (University of Nebraska Press, 2010)
- Chabal, Émile, *France* (Polity, 2020)
- Evans, Martin, and Emmanuel Godin, *France, 1815-2003: Modern History for Modern Languages* (Arnold, 2014)
- Fenby, Jonathan, *The History of Modern France* (Simon & Schuster, 2015)
- Hazareesingh, Sudhir, *How the French Think* (Penguin, 2015)
- Jones, Colin, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of France* (Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Price, Roger, *A Concise History of France* (Cambridge University Press, 2014)
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995)
- Vergès, Françoise, *A Decolonial Feminism* (Pluto, 2021)

For a very important study that challenges traditional approaches to French history and ‘Frenchness’ – and that acts as a bridge into the second teaching block – see:

- McDonald, Christie, and Susan Rubin Suleiman (eds.), *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History* (Columbia University Press, 2010) – the book’s introduction is especially helpful in developing fresh and more inclusive ways of thinking about the global (rather than just national) contexts of writing in French from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century.

French Global is also important for the ‘Global French’ course in Teaching Block 2 for those of you taking Single Honours French (the course will also be available as an option on some Joint Honours programmes – check your degree structure in the Programme Catalogue). It thinks about the relationship between language and culture in a transnational framework:

<https://www.bris.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue/UnitDetails.jsa?ayrCode=24%2F25&unitCode=FREN10011>

‘Representations of Francophone Cultures’ (taught in Teaching Block 2)

In this rich and varied course, you will work on a selection of literary and visual materials from the Middle Ages to the present and will learn about – and practise – methods of analysis for these different kinds of cultural objects. Thinking about culture as something that we can ‘read’ (and ‘write’), we will analyse a range of different forms so that you are prepared for the variety of study options and materials available in your second and fourth years. A full description of the course can be found at:

<https://www.bris.ac.uk/unit-programme-catalogue/UnitDetails.jsa?unitCode=FREN10013>

Primary material: fiction, poetry, theatre, and film

- *La Châtelaine de Vergy* (both the 1558 Renaissance version by Marguerite de Navarre & the anonymous 1288 medieval version)
- Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies* (1864-74)
- Jean Racine, *Phèdre* (1677)
- *Atlantique*, or *Atlantics* (dir. Mati Diop, 2019) – available to stream with English subtitles on Netflix.

Secondary material ('critical reading'): you may like to explore some of the following by searching for them online or by clicking on the link provided.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd edition (Routledge, 2005)

Bakshi, Sandeep, Suhraiya Jivraj and Silvia Posocco (eds.), *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions* (Counterpress, 2016), Fair Access: <https://counterpress.org.uk/publications/decolonizing-sexualities/>

Barker, Chris, and Emma A. Jane, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 5th edition (Sage, 2016)

Finch, Alison, *French Literature: A Cultural History* (Polity, 2010)

Finch-Race, Daniel A., and Stephanie Posthumus (eds.), *French Ecocriticism: From the Early Modern Period to the Twenty-First Century* (Peter Lang, 2017) https://www.peterlang.com/view/9783631713242/part07_chapter01.xhtml

Forsdick, Charles, and David Murphy (eds.), *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London, 2003)

Forsdick, Charles, 'Beyond Francophone postcolonial studies: exploring the ends of comparison', *Modern Languages Open*, 2015, pp. 1-24 <https://www.modernlanguagesopen.org/articles/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.56/>

Kay, Sarah, Terence Cave, and Malcolm Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2006)

Thompson, Hannah, 'French and Francophone Disability Studies', *French Studies*, Volume 71, Issue 2 (2017), pp. 243–251

In addition, we would recommend exploring some of the audio-visual resources below (all of which are readily accessible online):

Radio-Based Podcasts

The radio stations France Culture, France Inter, and France Info all have a wealth of material to offer. The list below is from France Culture: <https://www.franceculture.fr/>

- *Le Journal* (there are several news bulletins throughout the day covering domestic and international affairs)
- *Les Pieds sur Terre* (a long running series of 30-min documentaries featuring people talking about some kind of personal experience, without any journalistic comment)
- *La Fabrique de l'histoire* (documentaries and *tables rondes* with French historians)
- *Du Grain à moudre* (a deep dive into current events)
- *Concordance des temps*

Independent Podcasts on Identity in the Modern Francophone World:

- *La Poudre* (feminist discussion): <https://www.nouvellesecoutes.fr/la-poudre/>
- *Quoi de meuf* (feminist conversation): <https://www.nouvellesecoutes.fr/quoi-de-meuf/>
- *Les Couilles sur la table* (men and masculinities; Twitter handle: @LesCouillesSLT): <https://www.binge.audio/podcast/les-couilles-sur-la-table>
- *Kiffe ta race* (discussion of racial issues in Republican France): <https://www.binge.audio/category/kiffetarace/>
- *Cinéma-Louisiane* (Cinema podcast in French by Graduate Students at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette): <https://cinemalouisiane.podbean.com/>
- *Un Podcast à Soi* (explores topics on gender, sexuality, LGBTQ rights): <https://www.arteradio.com/flux/profils>

Other Recommendations:

- INA's (Inathèque at the Bibliothèque nationale française) website is a gold mine: <https://www.ina.fr/>
- Musée du Louvre : <https://www.louvre.fr/en>

You can also keep up to date with current affairs in the news relating to French and Francophone cultures, including the recent Olympics. See, for example, the following media articles on what the Games have meant to how France is shaping its self-image in the 21st century as a former colonial power:

- Auclair, Philippe, 'Paris Olympics is not just sport: it is about presenting a new French identity to the world', *The Guardian*, 29 July 2024. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/29/paris-olympics-france-olympic-games-antoine-dupont>
- Li, David K. and Karine Dessale, 'A bitterly divided France comes together for the Paris Olympics', *NBC News*, 5 August 2024. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/sports/olympics/bitterly-divided-france-comes-together-paris-olympics-rcna164985>