

University of Bristol
Department of Russian & Czech
Suggested Preparatory Reading

Congratulations on your offer to come and study Russian at Bristol!

There will be two aspects to your study on the Russian degree programme:

1. **Russian History and Culture**, taught in what we call 'culture units'. Each year, you will be able to choose which particular units you'd like to take. Over the course of your degree, you'll be able to choose from a range covering everything from literature and art, to political and intellectual history, from periods centuries ago to the present day.
2. **Russian Language**, taught on the mandatory 'language units'.

Below are some recommended reading, browsing and viewing you can get stuck into as you begin this revolutionary new adventure! (None of this is required, just a few suggestions to whet your appetite!)

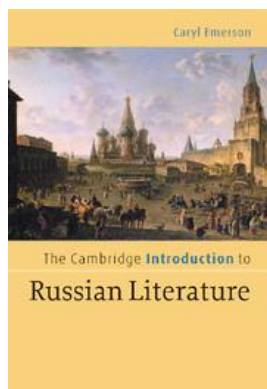
1. Russian History and Culture

We aim to teach you about Russian history and culture in an interdisciplinary way, and incorporate history, literature, film, and visual culture into many of our 'units', or modules.

We lay the foundations in our first-year units 'Understanding Russia: Literature & Visual Culture' in TB1 and 'Understanding Russia: History & Identity' in TB2. You'll most likely do just one of these, though single honours students will do both.

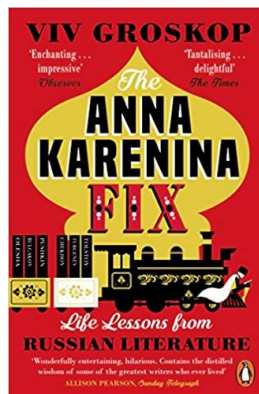
Recommended Non-Fiction Books:

Caryl Emerson, *Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature* (CUP, 2011)



This is the text we'll be using as background reading on the introductory culture unit, **Understanding Russia: Literature & Visual Culture**

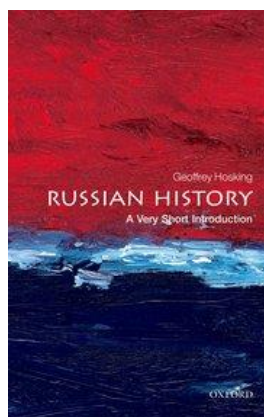
Viv Groskop, *The Anna Karenina Fix* (Penguin, 2018)



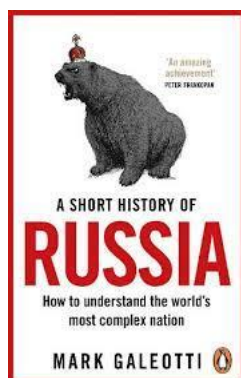
What should I do with my life?
What if my love is not returned?
Why do bad things happen?

The answers to some of life's biggest questions are found not in trite self-help manuals but in the tough-love lessons explored in Russian literature. Here, Viv Groskop delves into the novels of history's deepest thinkers to discover enduring truths about how we should live.

Geoffrey Hosking, *Russian History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

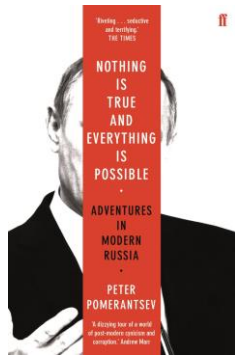


Mark Galeotti, *A Short History of Russia* [there are various subtitles & covers, but it's the same book] (Ebury Press, 2021 OR Penguin, 2022)



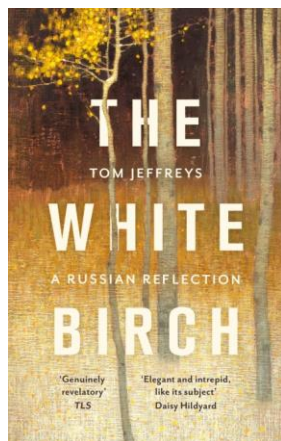
This is the text we'll be using on the introductory culture unit,
Understanding Russia: History and Identity

Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True, and Everything is Possible: Adventures in Modern Russia* (Faber & Faber, 2017).



‘Professional killers with the souls of artists, would-be theatre directors turned Kremlin puppet-masters, suicidal supermodels, Hell’s Angels who hallucinate themselves as holy warriors, and oligarch revolutionaries: welcome to the glittering, surreal heart of twenty-first-century Russia. It is a world erupting with new money and new power, changing so fast it breaks all sense of reality, home to a form of dictatorship—far subtler than twentieth-century strains—that is rapidly rising to challenge the West.’ Faber & Faber.

Tom Jeffreys, *The White Birch* (Hachette, 2021)



This delightful book engages with many themes that we will explore in the first-year culture units. It’s a beautifully written book all about the relationship between ‘Russianness’ and the natural world and is sure to pique your interest!

Recommended Fiction/Literary Books:

If you want to get your teeth into some of “big Russian novels”, we suggest the following:

Fedor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1866)

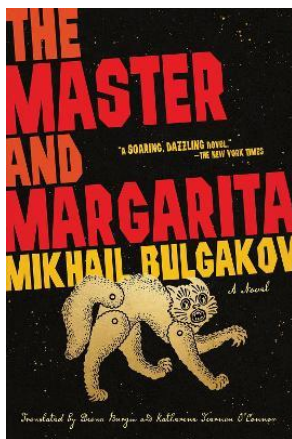
We recommend [Oliver Ready’s translation for Penguin Books](#).



'Raskolnikov, a destitute and desperate former student, wanders alone through the slums of St. Petersburg, deliriously imagining himself above society's laws. But when he commits a random murder, only suffering ensues. Embarking on a dangerous game of cat and mouse with a suspicious police investigator, Raskolnikov finds the noose of his own guilt tightening around his neck. Only Sonya, a downtrodden prostitute, can offer the chance of redemption.' Penguin Books.

Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (1966-67)

We recommend the [translation by Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor](#)



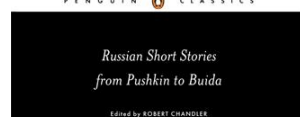
'One hot spring, the devil arrives in Moscow, accompanied by a retinue that includes a beautiful naked witch and an immense talking black cat with a fondness for chess and vodka. The visitors quickly wreak havoc in a city that refuses to believe in either God or Satan. But they also bring peace to two unhappy Muscovites: one is the Master, a writer pilloried for daring to write a novel about Christ and Pontius Pilate; the other is Margarita, who loves the Master so deeply that she is willing to literally go to hell for him. What ensues is a novel of inexhaustible energy, humor, and philosophical depth, a work whose nuances splendidly emerge in Diana Burgin's and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor's superb English translation, with an afterword and extensive commentary by Ellendea Proffer.'

Or try these shorter works:

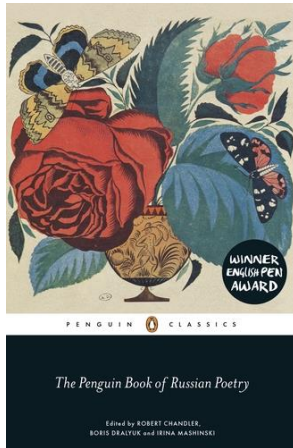
Robert Chandler ed., [Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida](#)



If you would like to read some Russian literature but prefer to dip into some shorter fiction first, try this one! You will find a wonderful selection of works by well-known and as well as more obscure writers.



Robert Chandler, Irina Mashinski and Boris Dralyuk eds., [The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry](#)



For those who would like to read some poetry, this is the one! It contains examples of Russian-language poetry in English translation from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first.

If you are a post-A Level Russianist, you can read the translations alongside the **Russian originals** on the book's [free companion website](#).

Websites:

[The Empire that was Russia: the photographs of Prokudin-Gorskii.](#)

'The photographs of Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii (1863–1944) offer a vivid portrait of a lost world—the Russian Empire on the eve of World War I and the coming revolution. His subjects ranged from the medieval churches and monasteries of old Russia, to the railroads and factories of an emerging industrial power, to the daily life and work of Russia's diverse population.' Library of Congress.

[Seventeen Moments of Soviet History.](#)

An online archive of Soviet primary sources, from diaries and speeches, to Party resolutions and Pravda news articles, and lots of visual sources too, including film clips, propaganda

[Language](#)

Some of you will have an A-level qualifications in Russian, and others will be studying Russian from scratch, or *ab initio*.

Ab initio students:

Your main textbook will be:

Colloquial Russian: The Complete Course for Beginners, **5th edition** (Routledge, 2023)
Svetlana le Fleming and Susan E. Kay, and Mikhail Vodopyanov.

Routledge have set up the exclusive **25% discount** for students.

You can order it on the Routledge website entering the code **SWW24** at the checkout:

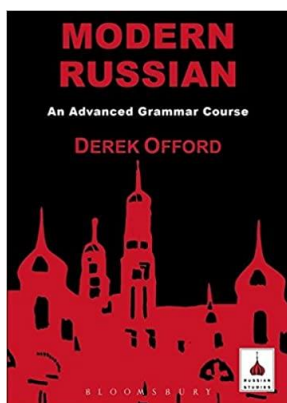
<https://www.routledge.com/Colloquial-Russian-The-Complete-Course-For-Beginners/Fleming-Kay-Vodopyanov/p/book/9781032417486>

You will start using the textbook in class and for self-study at the end of week 1 of the course, but **we don't expect you to know anything** (not even the alphabet) prior to the start of the language course as our intensive Russian language programme is designed for absolute beginners. So please do not feel you need to start working through the book!

Students with A-Level or equivalent:

We use in-house teaching materials. The only textbook that we suggest you get for your independent study is:

Derek Offord, *Modern Russian: An Advanced Grammar Course* (Bristol Classical Press, 1998).



[You can order it here on Amazon.](#)

3. BONUS SECTION! Making the Transition into Higher Education

University study is different from school. In making the journey from being a pupil to being a student you may find it helpful to look at some of the following books and websites about the kind of academic and personal development this transition involves.

Study Skills & Writing:

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

Steven Pinker, *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century* (Penguin, 2014) - the most entertaining and helpful book you'll ever read from a psycholinguist! (Possibly the only one...)

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

You can also follow the links to advice on academic reading and writing that are listed at the [University of Bristol Study Skills webpages](#).

On Modern Languages & Russian Studies:

- Byford, A., Doak, C. and Hutchings, S., 2020. Introduction: *Transnationalizing Russian Studies. Modern Languages Open*, (1), p.3. [Available here](#)
- Katrin Kohl, *Modern Languages: Why It Matters* (2021)

- Katrin Kohl et al, *Creative Multilingualism: A Manifesto* (2020)

On Education and Inclusive Learning:

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Continuum, 2000), especially Chapter 2. This influential analysis explains how education can be an empowering journey for individuals and communities alike.

ENJOY!