

# Things to read and watch before starting a postgraduate degree in Modern Languages

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**MA Translation Studies** student Luke provides some recommendations to help you prepare for postgraduate Modern Languages course.

Before starting my postgraduate degree at the University of Birmingham I found myself questioning how to prepare for the course. Looking at sample reading lists from previous years was rather intimidating – fortunately I’ve had plenty of time to work through them during the degree programme.

The best preparation I did was to keep up my language skills and ensure that I still enjoyed working

with them (and as it happens, some professional bodies for language professionals count activities such as watching foreign films as part of your Continuing Professional Development!), and to do some light reading as an introduction to my course before dealing with the heavier reading once classes started. In this blog I will explore some of the resources I used to prepare myself for this course, including books, films, and YouTube channels.



## Literature

Literature is a great resource for maintaining your language and academic skills: it keeps you occupied for a few days, you can see any words you don't understand and look them up, and it keeps you in the habit of reading after your last undergraduate assignments have been handed in. Reading also doesn't have to be heavy duty- I thoroughly enjoyed reading classics such as *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (Dumas, 'The Three Musketeers'), *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (Remarque, 'All Quiet on the Western Front'), and *Don Quijote* (Cervantes- a much more taxing novel than the others), but also loved delving into *Les Aventures de Tintin* (Hergé, 'The Adventures of Tintin'), the world-famous 'bandes dessinées' about Belgium's intrepid journalist and his faithful dog.

I also found English-language books that served as a light introduction to my course. David Bellos' *Is That a Fish in Your Ear* explores the importance of translation in the modern world, while George

Orwell and Ernest Hemingway have written a range of fiction and non-fiction books that recount their experiences of the Spanish civil war.

## TV and Film

One of the advantages of the recent streaming boom is the greater availability of foreign films and television programmes. I have been hooked on Netflix's *Lupin* (French) since it premiered in 2021, while high school drama *Elite* (Spain) is great for learning new slang and for seeing how English is slowly creeping into Spanish. Films and TV can also be great as an introduction for a particular topic you may want to explore- *La Trinchera Infinita* (Netflix, Spanish 'The Endless Trench') tells the story of a man hiding from Franco's forces during the Spanish dictatorship who ends up living in a secret room for three decades.

As a fan of cinema and a translation student, I found several YouTube channels useful to explore how films differ across languages. One such channel is *The Hyperbase*, which publishes videos of *Star Wars* scenes, showing how dialogue changes depending on the language.

## Other activities

Of course, one of the best ways of maintaining your language skills is by speaking to natives. Over the summer I travelled to Spain to celebrate my graduation and to practise my Spanish in Andalucía. Of course, this was a short-term solution, so I also found a range of apps to enhance my skills. Duolingo is a classic example for learning languages, while chat-room apps such as *Tandem* allowed me to speak to native speakers of any language I wanted to on a daily basis.

