

TIPS ON THE NEW (2004) PART I EXAM, FOR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

1. These notes are written for undergraduates at Caius currently (2003) in their first year who are beginning to make plans for their second year of the English course; they are by way of an indication of significant changes to the Part I English Tripos examination and courses of study leading up to it, permanent alterations which will come into effect for the first time in 2004. These changes will not affect candidates for 2003 under the old arrangements, but will affect all candidates for Part I 2004 and in succeeding years. Arrangements for Part II of the English Tripos are not affected, and none of the more general advice in these documents ('Tips on for Students of English'), concerning methods and resources for those studying for a degree in English, will cease to apply.
2. The changes have finally been brought into effect, after prolonged review and discussion of the Part I examination process, because over the years the division of the chronological sequence of English literature into periods for managed study has become progressively unwieldy and unbalanced: chiefly because the most recent period running up into modern times has become distended by the very passage of years which has seen a term like 'modern' become itself part of history, but also because of pressure from new aspects of study claiming a place within the foundation course.
3. What follows in these notes is a brief summary overview and no more. Further detail will be communicated in due course to those who will need such information, and nothing that is set down in this document is to be regarded as either exhaustive or authoritative. It is more than possible that, in practice, these changes will not change very much.
4. As a result of these adjustments, many of the papers in Part I of the Tripos are being renamed and/or renumbered. The historical-period papers (Papers 1-4) which have hitherto been entitled 'English Literature and its Background' will from 2004 be newly titled as 'English Literature and its Contexts'. If you may think that this sounds thrilling news, there are further excitements ahead. Previous Paper 7 ('Foreign Language and Literature') is renamed 'European Languages and Literatures', and Spanish and Mediaeval Latin have been dropped from the languages offered, accompanied by some quite drastic internal reconstruction; likewise, previous Paper 13, 'Varieties of English', is renamed 'English Language for Literature, 1300 to the Present' and renumbered as Paper 8, again with some internal reconstruction. Certain aspects of this renaming seem not much more than cosmetic: in the Supplementary Regulations for these newly-labelled period papers the old formula ('questions shall be set both on the literature and on the life and thought of the period') remains just as before. The dropping of the Spanish option from Paper 7 is surely and regrettably a loss.
5. The realignment of period divisions has been devised to introduce overlap in the period of coverage between each paper and the one coming before and/or after it, so as to mitigate the cut-off effect of arbitrary but sharply defined chronological boundaries. Paper 1 (*aka* the 'Medieval Paper')

has not been further changed; but the subsequent period papers have been internally divided into three sub-periods, which sub-periods will *not* overlap; candidates shall be required to shew substantial knowledge of work from at least *two* of these sub-periods. The sub-period divisions will thus allow (but not require) candidates to concentrate their exam answers in less than the entire period covered by the paper as a whole, though it seems likely that supervision work for these papers will attempt a balanced overview of the whole span. For the main schedule of principal options within the full array of papers the new divisions will come to look like this:

Paper 1: English Literature and its Contexts, 1300-1550
No Sub-periods

Paper 2: English Literature and its Contexts, 1500-1700
Sub-period 1: 1500-1579
Sub-period 2: 1579-1642
Sub-period 3: 1642-1700

Paper 3: English Literature and its Contexts, 1688-1847
Sub-period 1: 1688-1744
Sub-period 2: 1744-1789
Sub-period 3: 1789-1847

Paper 4: English Literature and its Contexts, 1830 to the present
Sub-period 1: 1830-1895
Sub-period 2: 1895-1945
Sub-period 3: 1945-present

6. For each of these sub-periods two 'core texts' will be prescribed. It is said that 'these texts are intended as "gateways" into the work for the paper, introducing the study of broader issues.' Whether these gates shall be traditionally five-barred, and how lame dogs may be helped over adjoining stiles, shall be discovered in due course. The core texts for Part I 2004 have already been announced, and details will be circulated appropriately; those curious can find them listed in the Faculty's published booklet of Part I regulations, 'Faculty of English, English Tripos Part I 2004' (FE.2002.39), available from your Director of Studies or on the Faculty website at <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/local>. There will be a system of asterisked questions associated with each core text, within each sub-period section of each period paper (*not*, of course, including Paper 1), with rules about the minimum and maximum of such asterisked questions allowed/required to be answered. All of these devices will no doubt become clearer with the passage of time and practical experience.

7. Paper 1, re-titled English Literature and its Contexts, 1300-1550, will not be divided into sub-periods and there will not be new-style 'core texts'. Instead there will continue as before to be a list of prescribed texts (or parts of texts) for detailed study, and also as before a short list of pre-announced optional topics together with recommended reading; the examination paper will contain passages from the prescribed texts requiring translation into modern English and explanatory comment, and will also contain optional questions on the topics. Also as before, there is no option to substitute a dissertation or a portfolio for this paper, so that the citadel survives intact. All

this is indeed traditional and unaltered as ever was; full details of the current set texts and topics can be found in the Faculty Reading List for this paper.

8. One further substantial innovation is the option to submit *either* a dissertation in the previous way, as substituted for any one of papers 2-4, *or instead* (but not in addition) to submit an 'open dissertation', defined as 'Paper 9: English Literature and its Contexts, 1300 to the Present (Open Dissertation)'. This new kind of dissertation will be governed by all the previous rules concerning length, format etc., but the scope of its topic is different, as implied by its name. The topic of an 'open dissertation' must fall within the scope of papers 1-5 overall but may selectively include and address material from anywhere within the full range of subject-matters covered by those papers; including material from a period paper that is also to be offered, so long as no material is used more than once anywhere within the examination as a whole; but not including any material from any part of a period in substitution for which a portfolio is also being offered. The open dissertation thus permits wide-ranging comparative treatment; but it also does not preclude very tightly focussed topics, with no pretensions to a grand horizon. This option may not be so attractive as it sounds, however, because no combination of which it is permitted to form a part will exempt the candidate from offering also the full range of historical period papers, 1-4 inclusive, except for substitution of a portfolio for one of papers 2-4, or in rare off-beat schedules borrowing papers from the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos.

9. The regulations governing the option to submit a portfolio have also been internally modified. The rules for including a portfolio option within an overall scheme remain unaltered: candidates may submit an old-style dissertation plus a portfolio (in substitution for different period papers from amongst papers 2-4), *or* either one without the other; *or* in the new arrangements a candidate may submit an open dissertation plus a portfolio, so long as the materials used in such a combination do not overlap. But internally the rules for the contents of a portfolio have been modified: at least one essay shall be required to make substantial reference to at least one of the core texts specified within the paper as a whole for which the portfolio is substituted, and the portfolio as a whole shall be required to shew knowledge of at least two of the sub-periods specified for that paper.

10. Other elements in the previous arrangements for Part I are in broad outline substantially unchanged: Paper 5 (Shakespeare), Paper 6 (Literary Criticism); also the specialist and early medieval papers including those borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic Tripos. All candidates will as before be required to offer seven elements in all, including Paper 1 and Paper 5 as compulsory, and there are new regulations governing permitted combinations and individual schemes of work. The timetable for selecting options, choosing and notifying topics, and deadlines for submission, remain as before.

11. In connection with these changes, to come into effect for the first time for the exams in 2004, mildly revised reading lists for the Part I period papers, within their new period boundaries, have been produced and can be inspected on and/or downloaded from the English Faculty website

(<http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/local/part1/index.htm>), and also new-style specimen or sample exam papers, apart from Papers 7 and 8 (<http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/local/part1/exams>), to allow the inquisitive to see how these new arrangements might look in real life ('real life' may be something of an exaggeration here). Samples of new-style Papers 7 and 8 can be had from the English Faculty Library, or the English Faculty Office. Remember that if you consult past exam papers (prior to 2004) you will find questions very much in the general mode of Part I as it will continue in these new formats; but the instructions to candidates ('rubrics') printed at the head of the paper and giving information about division into sections, requirements in choice of questions, etc., will be out-of-date and will not provide any guidance about the form of such instructions in the future.

12. Do not allow this summary overview of changes to disconcert you unduly. The underlying scope and purpose of the Part I Cambridge English course remain constant. The alterations are mainly presentational, to permit less straitened contexts for methods and approaches to study and to rebalance the exam format. The 'core texts' look somewhat like a return to A-level style 'set books' but those unthrilled by pre-nominated gateways will doubtless also leap a few wilder or tougher hedges in the heat of the chase. And if some of these details at first inspection look rather finicky, most of them will quite likely come out in the wash (what chase, what wash, *quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga?*).

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