

Advanced English: Turning points in the English-language's development and in British History

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Course Objectives

This is a 12-week course about how the English language and the English (and then British) people gradually became what they are today.

The main objectives of this course are:

- to gain more knowledge and understanding of the English language and of British culture.
- to explore and try to account for turning points in English and British history and thought.
- (in terms of language skills) to build breadth and precision of lexicon and awareness of context.

Background

Britain has always had a complex and vexed relationship with Europe, being invaded and conquered numerous times and being transformed by the cultures of its invaders. Yet in more recent centuries, at key points it has deviated radically from what is happening on the continent. Was it ever really European? To what extent can we make sense of all of this?

Similarly, we find that English has a lot in common with French, but it's also very different. How can we understand these differences and make sense of them historically?

Course Description

In each section we'll explore both history and language development:

- Sessions 1 and 2: The Romans arrive in Celtic Britain.
- Sessions 3 and 4: the Angles and Saxons invade and then the Romans leave Britain to "the Dark Ages".
- Sessions 5 and 6: Waves of Vikings invade and leave a considerable linguistic legacy.
- Sessions 7 and 8: The Normans take over Britain and transform its language and politics.
- Sessions 9 and 10: Britain is modernized and becomes the most industrial nation in the world.

- Sessions 11 and 12: British pop-culture in the 20th and 21st century remains highly distinctive and influential.

Organization

The classes will be run as activities and projects with a lot of interactive learning and in-class group work. We will deal with a number of key written (and other) texts, but it won't involve lengthy reading.

In terms of homework, expect 2-3 occasions in the semester where you'll probably need to take 2-3 hours outside of class to prepare a presentation or project.