

MFL (French and German) A Level FAQs



What's different to GCSE?

Where the GCSEs are designed to help you communicate about yourself in French or German, the A level is for you to understand about the issues affecting young people in the French- or German- speaking world. The topics are relevant to young people and much weightier than those at GCSE. For example, in French you start by learning about the changing family situation with rainbow families, blended families, cohabitation and how society is adjusting to the changes. In German, your first topic is about climate change and the role of the environment in German society.

You also study two literary works relevant to the culture – we usually do one book / play and one film.

You choose your own Independent Research Project (IRP) for the speaking exam – it is a topic of your choosing but must be firmly set in the culture of the language being studied.

Another key difference is that groups are usually much smaller than for GCSE.

What is the form of the exam?

At A level the 4 skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are not separate and the exam reflects this. You have three exams, one is listening and reading (2hrs) which includes English translation; one is writing (2hr 30) which is two literary essays, one for the book and one for the film which you've studied. The writing paper also includes translation into German. The third paper is the speaking exam (approx. 20 mins with your teacher) which includes a presentation about your independent research project.

Do we get to go on trips or exchanges?

Yes! We want you to visit France or Germany to put your learning into real-life action! We try and create as many opportunities for trips and exchanges as we can. As an A Level languages student we would always take you on any of our trips for the younger year groups as a language leader (usually at much reduced cost or sometimes for free depending if we can find funding) – Y7 Normandy, German Christmas Markets, Rheinland, Paris. We also try to get you abroad as an A Level group, so for German we go to Berlin as one of the topics is German reunification and that can be seen best in Berlin. For French we have a partner school in Brittany where we have various exchange and work experience choices. At the moment obviously there are no trips going, so we have had opportunities for students to take part in online funded opportunities; for example this December and January students have been taking part in online workshops about food and fashion sustainability. These involve working as groups with students from the other country and putting together a presentation.

What are the literary works?

Something that's totally different about the A Level course compared to GCSE is that you get to study two major literary works so they can either be at books or films - we do one book or play and one film. The essays you have to write are similar to the style you write in for English Literature GCSE.

Is A level really hard?

We always get asked this! And the answer is always the same. No A levels are easy, you have to work hard. MFL counts as a "facilitating subject" for universities, which means it has academic rigour. If you're interested and you stay up-to-date you'll be surprised how quickly your language skills develop.

What can I study for my IRP?

As long as your research is about the French / German- speaking world, you can choose any topic which interests you. It's important to find something that you are passionate about as you'll need to do a lot of research and interpretation. For example, past students have chosen:

- The Eurovision Song Contest and its influence on French culture
- The French political system
- The influence of Coco Chanel
- The German car industry
- Functional Illiteracy in modern Germany
- The Bauhaus movement
- Die Bundesliga
- Veganism in Germany
- Role of women in modern Swiss society
- Assisted death in Switzerland
- The popularity of right-wing political parties in former GDR
- Civil partnership as part of French law

What does an A Level in languages go well with?

Because it's a language it goes well with any combination of subjects. There are no right or wrong combinations for languages.

Will it be taught at Plymstock?

We usually take it in turns with French and German been taught between us, Hele's and Coombe Dean but it just depends on timetables and student numbers. Even if it is not taught here, we are here to support you.

If you have any further questions, please contact Ms Kent at rmkent@plymstockschool.org.uk or talk to your MFL teacher.