

Theoretical and Applied Linguistics

MPhil by Advanced Study

Guidelines 2024-25

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This document, intended as a reference for both students and staff, provides guidance on the *TAL MPhil by Advanced Study*, involving essays, an oral presentation, as well as a dissertation.¹

The *MPhil by Advanced Study* is intended for students who wish to extend and deepen their existing knowledge of the language sciences and their application. It often serves as a bridge between undergraduate study and doctoral research but is also suitable as a self-contained one-year course of study. The structure of the *Advanced Study MPhil* aims to promote breadth of knowledge in linguistics and depth in selected areas.

Some elements of the following Guidelines for the *MPhil by Advanced Study* have the status of formal requirements and/or expectations either specified in the Regulations or agreed by TAL, and these are shown in boxes. The other text provides advice and interpretation. If there is any inconsistency between this document and the Regulations, the latter take precedence.

It is further noted that the University issues a [Code of Practice for Master's Students](#) which sets out the University's guidelines for these courses. Students, Course Directors and Supervisors are encouraged to read/discuss the contents of the Code in addition to the following TAL guidelines.

1. TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

1.1 The overall structure of the course

As a whole, the course is intended to provide a transition from undergraduate learning to independent research, and the modes of teaching and assessment through the year reflect that.

Michaelmas Term:

Students must follow four taught courses. These **should not be**, or not be very similar to, courses they have previously followed. For students who don't have substantial background in linguistics, it is recommended that at least one of the courses be in either (i) Syntax or (ii) Semantics and Pragmatics and at least one in

¹ There is a separate set of Guidelines for the *TAL MPhil by Thesis* which is a different course.

either (i) Phonetics or (ii) Phonology and Morphology. The choices should be discussed with the supervisor at the beginning of the term.

Additionally, all students must follow the Research Methods course, the General Seminar, and a statistics course (see section 1.5 below). Attendance will be monitored.

Assessment: three 2000-word (2k) essays on set topics, and one 4000-word (4k) essay on a topic of the student's choice. For students who attend one or more of the courses in the four core areas mentioned before, at least one 2k essay should be in those areas. The three 2k essays must be in three **distinct areas of linguistics. The 4k essay may either, but need not, be in the area of one of the 2k essays; or it may, but need not, serve as groundwork in the area of the dissertation.**

In Michaelmas Term, lecture courses are available within and beyond TAL and cover a wide range of the linguistic sciences (see the Michaelmas Term timetable and the University Lecture List). This provides a chance to fill in gaps in previous coverage of linguistics, and help students achieve the goal of becoming a more 'rounded' linguist – which may be important when applying for jobs. At the same time, it is important for students to keep an eye out to later stages of the course and ensure that they are prepared for options they expect to take in Lent Term. So, for instance, someone who expects to follow the Experimental Phonetics and Phonology seminar in Lent should follow the Phonetics course and the Phonological Theory course (unless they are already trained to a high level in those areas). The Course Director or area specialist will advise if necessary.

We require attendance at four courses, and students will list these choices on their 'Study Plan'. Naturally it is **possible** to attend further courses, and this is in principle to be encouraged; but students should take care not to become too diffuse at the expense of having time to follow up reading in the courses which will provide preparation for the essays.

The Research Methods course (in Michaelmas and Lent) provides a necessary foundation, both in generic aspects of research and in aspects specific to linguistics. The General Seminar (Michaelmas Term) offers a perspective on theory in linguistics, an opportunity to discuss different views and approaches, and a chance to draw together different strands within the discipline.

In addition, all students are required to attend a statistics course as detailed in Section 1.5.

Lent Term:

Attendance and contributions to two option seminars is obligatory throughout the term. The first option seminar should be relevant to the dissertation topic, and throughout the term some time should be devoted to groundwork for the dissertation. The second option seminar typically functions as a basis for the oral presentation.

Assessment: an oral presentation in the area of the second seminar.

The style of the option seminars will vary between subjects (for instance the Experimental Phonetics and Phonology seminar is usually in part lab-based), but generally an active contribution from students will be expected. Students are also encouraged to continue attending the lecture courses in the areas of their chosen seminars (see Lent Term timetable).

Easter Term:

Full-time research on the dissertation.

Assessment: A dissertation of no more than 20,000 words is submitted in early June.

From the end of Lent Term, and including the Easter vacation, MPhil students become full-time researchers, working on their dissertation project. This requires the ability to plan, to set short- and long-term goals, and, importantly, to allow for contingencies.

1.2 Attendance

Attendance at assigned lectures and seminars is mandatory, and non-attendance will be reported to the Course Director. Absence may have particular implications for students on visas, and those who have received scholarships, as regular attendance is usually required by funding bodies as a condition of any award.

1.3 The nature of the assessed work

1.3.1 Essays

The 2k essays are written to titles set by lecturers – rather like a take-home exam. Here, the main challenge tends to be how to express what needs to be said to answer the question concisely enough (itself a useful ‘transferable skill’). Originality is welcome (for instance a critical assessment of the view being discussed or giving new examples of a phenomenon rather than just quoting those in the literature), but it is accepted that the scope for originality is limited. What is certainly required is that the essay should **focus on the matter indicated by the title**.

Satisfying the requirement of **three distinct areas** for the 2k essays generally follows automatically from the fact that one title is set per course. Where overlap might arise – for instance an essay in syntax and an essay in Italian dialectology which includes syntactic variation – the student should consult the MPhil Director, who will make a common-sense judgment.

The 4k essay topic is chosen by the student and is sometimes (but not necessarily) used as initial exploration for the dissertation. By its nature, it offers plenty of scope for originality.

The main purposes of the essays are:

- to develop the skill of applying acquired knowledge to specific problems
- to develop the skill of constructing arguments in linguistics
- to develop skills involved in independent research
- to develop the skill of concise, cogent academic writing
- to allow monitoring of standards of academic written English

1.3.2 Oral presentation

The oral presentation tests the skill of speaking about linguistics to an audience (staff and fellow students). It should build on some of the material covered in a seminar other than the one primarily underpinning the dissertation research. Usually, the slot for an oral presentation is 15 minutes, with additionally around 4 minutes for questions and discussion. **The presentation should be aimed at a general linguistics audience rather than sub-disciplinary specialists.** The method of presentation should be appropriate; in many cases data projection (e.g. using PowerPoint) is effective but talking through a short handout can also be suitable.

The oral presentation must be in a subject area distinct from that of the dissertation; if in doubt, discuss your proposed topics with the seminar convenors and the MPhil Director.

The main purposes of the oral presentation are:

- to maintain breadth of familiarity with linguistics
- to test knowledge acquired in the relevant seminar
- to provide an opportunity to explore an aspect of the seminar area in more detail
- to serve as an introduction to giving presentations in linguistics
- to give practice answering conference-type questions

1.3.3 Dissertation

The dissertation is normally in the area of one of the two Lent seminars, though it is common for topics to straddle more than one area of linguistics. It requires original research on a topic of the student's choosing, demonstrating scholarship in one or more areas of linguistics.

The main purposes of the dissertation are:

- to develop and test the ability to plan and carry out independent research in an area of linguistics
- to develop and test the ability to execute a substantial piece of academic research writing
- to make an original contribution to learning

1.3.4 Originality

All work has to be the candidate's own, and therefore in one sense original. However, there is a sense of originality which is more demanding than simply expressing the known in one's own words. This involves novelty of thought, and creativity in making connections. It is these which the MPhil hopes to foster, and increasing emphasis is placed on this kind of originality as the course progresses, culminating in the dissertation project.

Originality is notoriously difficult to define, but it can take several forms. A critique of an existing position or theory, or an adjudication between two or more such, can bring new insights to bear. The application of an existing model or theory to new data, new phenomena or a new language is original. The outcome may be mainly a matter of better description and understanding of the data or phenomenon, or a demonstration of limitations in the model or theory. Well-motivated challenges and improvements to existing theories show original thinking. In practice, problems rarely arise in the MPhil over whether work is original; but if in doubt, students should consult their essay advisor or dissertation supervisor.

1.4 Languages

Some students may choose to look at linguistics from the point of view of a specific language or language family. Students who are interested in focusing on a specific language or language family, may discuss it with the relevant member of teaching staff or with the MPhil Course Director.

1.4.1 Supervision

Students have an assigned member of staff as their initial supervisor. Once the dissertation topic has been decided in Lent Term, a subject-specific supervisor will be allocated. For equity, there are norms for the amount of supervision each student can expect to receive. It is expected that a student will be capable of largely independent work.

The following supervision is provided:

- One 30-minute supervision for each 2k essay with an advisor, normally the relevant course lecturer
- One hour of supervision for the 4k essay with a member of staff appropriate to the topic
- Four hours of supervision for the dissertation with the subject-specific supervisor

Supervision for the 4k essay and the dissertation can be taken in half-hour units, as appropriate and agreed with the advisor.

It is the student's responsibility to approach the relevant supervisor and make an appointment.

There is no supervision for the oral presentation, but relevant skills are covered in Research Methods and relevant subject areas in the Lent Term seminars.

For the 2k essays, students are expected to make an outline, or skeletal plan, occupying no more than one side of A4 paper and discuss it with the advisor during the supervision. No drafts of 2k essays are read by advisors.

As with the 2k essay, students are expected to prepare a concrete plan for the 4k essay and discuss it with the advisor. Advisors will normally read only one draft of the 4k essay. Good notice must be given.

Students should approach a potential supervisor with an outline before committing to a dissertation topic. Four hours of supervision are given for the dissertation. This includes planning and feedback on drafts. Feedback is normally given on sections as they are written rather than on the whole work at a late stage when it may be too late to implement more substantial revisions. **Supervisors will normally read only one draft of each section**, and students are then responsible for implementing any changes.

Students with [extensions](#) should note that supervisions will not be held during the extension period, except under truly exceptional circumstances. Students should plan ahead as much as possible and arrange for supervisions to occur at least one week before the **original** submission date.

1.5 Statistics Training

As part of postgraduate students' general education and skills training, it is desirable that all students receive some instruction in quantitative methods. For those intending to use such methods in their research, it is essential that the necessary skills are acquired through appropriate elements of the courses described below.

All MPhil students are required to attend the *Foundations in Applied Statistics* course, or a more advanced statistics course if they are already familiar with basic quantitative methods. The courses are run by [Cambridge Research Methods \(CaRM\)](#) in Michaelmas Term. Before arriving in Cambridge all MPhil students will be asked to fill in an online survey run by CaRM to assess suitability for other courses from which they might benefit (see below).

TAL also offers a course specifically directed at statistics for linguistics projects R and *Quantitative Methods in Analysing Language Data* (R/QMALD, eight weeks in Lent Term). Students who expect to use statistics in their work are strongly advised to attend this course as well.

The courses run by CaRM are not aimed specifically at language research. They also include courses which are more basic and courses which are more advanced. A student new to statistics will benefit from attending 'Foundations in Applied Statistics' and 'Basic Quantitative Analysis' in the Michaelmas Term, while a student with previous experience doing statistics using SPSS may choose to learn 'R' or one of the courses on Linear Regression.

Information on the statistics courses provided by CaRM is available at:
<https://www.researchmethods.group.cam.ac.uk/modules/>

The purpose of the online survey in September is to assess whether a student is at the right level for particular courses, and students should participate in it even if their needs are likely to be met by CaRM courses later in the year rather than in Michaelmas Term.

All students must attend the CaRM online induction lecture. A link will be available towards the end of September, see: <https://www.researchmethods.group.cam.ac.uk/bookings/how-to-book/> for information.

Students may book a number of courses should they wish to (the average is around 3 courses per student), but 6 bookings should not normally be exceeded. Students wishing to take more than 6 courses should ask their supervisor to seek permission from the Course Director.

Students must give a notice period of 2 working days if they wish to cancel a CaRM course booking.

R/QMALD complements the general courses offered by SSRMP and provides an overview of the choice and application of statistical tests appropriate for the analysis of linguistic data. Students intending to write a dissertation in an area of linguistics which involves quantitative analysis, or who are undecided but think they might write such a dissertation, are required to attend the R/QMALD course. Areas of linguistics for which quantitative analysis is likely to be needed include those in which research is often experiment-based, e.g. phonetics, psycholinguistics, language acquisition. There are also experimental approaches to such areas of linguistic analysis as syntax, semantics and pragmatics (but see also Section 1.7 on theoretical research). Quantitative analysis may also be essential in areas in which research requires analysis of count data, e.g. corpus linguistics or any questionnaire-based studies.

1.6 Research skills for theoretical topics

In some areas of linguistics, it is more common to conduct a theoretical analysis that requires little or no use of quantitative methods – for example in theoretical syntax or semantics, history of ideas on language or philosophy of language. Relevant research methods include construction of a logically sound argument (often supported by pertinent examples), rational critical thinking, and conceptual analysis. These are discussed in the Research Methods course and, specifically with the research project in mind, during supervisions for the research essay and the dissertation.

Bear in mind that some theoretical projects may also include a small experimental or data-based component (where data are collected through a questionnaire or corpus research, or from an existing database) and you may need some knowledge of statistics for analysing these. It is often the case that the need for conducting a small experiment or survey as part of a theoretical project only comes to light in the process of researching the topic or in the process of discussing it with the supervisor. So, it is better to be prepared and know how to use quantitative methods even if you don't expect to use them.

1.7 Outline assessment schedule

Please remember that Cambridge teaching weeks start on a Thursday. So, Thursday of week 1 of Michaelmas Term is the first day of lectures. See next page.

Michaelmas Term

Thursday, week 1: Set topics are provided for the 2k essays (one topic per area).

Thursday, week 2: Students return their Michaelmas term choices form.

Thursday, week 3: Students return a form stating which three 2k essays they intend to write.

Thursday, week 5: Students submit one 2k essay (chosen from the three).

Thursday, week 7: Students return a form stating the title of the 4k essay, and an abstract.

Thursday, week 9 Students submit the remaining two 2k essays.

Lent Term

Thursday, week 1: Students submit the 4k essay.

Thursday, week 4: Students submit the provisional dissertation title and summary of the dissertation project.

Thursday, week 4: Students also confirm the area of the oral presentation.

Thursday, week 9: Oral presentations.

Easter Term

Late May: Students submit the final dissertation title. No changes are permitted after this date.

Mid-June: Students submit the dissertation.

Any **vivas** (if needed) take place in late June.

Submission deadlines are at midday (see also Section 2.4 on penalties for late submission).

Exact dates and the full schedule is given in the relevant Key Dates document on [Moodle](#).

1.8 Word limits and deadlines

Word limits are **maxima** and should be adhered to. Each word limit includes footnotes but excludes figures, tables, appendices, abstract, contents page(s), and bibliography.

Where examples are cited in a foreign language, only the examples themselves will be taken into account for the purposes of the word limit: any associated glosses and/or translations will be exempt. In cases where this results in a total which exceeds the word limit, the total number of words (including the exempt material) should still be declared, together with the number of words comprised by the exempt material.

It is not necessary to write up to the limit. Research which results in quantitative output, for instance in the form of graphs and tables, may lend itself to rather concise reporting. However, particularly with the shorter pieces of assessed work, the challenge is usually to express what needs to be said concisely enough to stay within the word limit.

It is legitimate and sensible to relegate material which does not form part of the flow of argument, but which readers may wish to refer to – for instance survey responses, tables with full sets of data, and so on – to

appendices. Examiners, however, take a dim view of attempts to slip in excess main text as appendices or tables.

1.9 Requests for exemptions

There are legitimate reasons for exemptions from the letter of the requirements, but exemptions are not routine.

1.9.1 Extension to word limit

An extension to a **word limit** is normally possible only for the dissertation. A valid reason may be a need to cite substantial amounts of text. Normally this would not be more than 10% over the standard word limit. Translations and glosses of examples are exempt (see above) and do not require an extension. Requests for extensions to the work limit should be made to the Director of the MPhil, *before* work is due. Essays that are over the limit, and dissertations that are over the limit without an approved extension are subject to penalties – see the [Limits Exceeded](#) section.

1.9.2 Extensions to deadlines

Few pieces of written work would not benefit from some extra hours or days of perfectionism. But remember that those marking your work will never judge your essay or dissertation in absolute terms, but **as the best you can produce in the timeframe specified for its completion**. Therefore, in a spirit of fairness to all members of our MPhil cohort, we do not allow a given student flexibility over deadlines. This means planning for the unexpected (the printer breaking, the network crashing, and so on) to allow a safety margin. Because coursework submission deadlines are set some time in advance, you should plan your work so that submission is not delayed by a short-term circumstance such as a minor illness or other short disruption to your study. Extensions are not permitted in these circumstances.

The Faculty will only be able to consider extension requests in exceptional circumstances where students can show that a circumstance has had a significant and disproportionate effect on their ability to submit the coursework by the deadline.

For further information on extensions, and for the application procedure, please see the document entitled 'MPhil by Advanced Study extensions guidance' on Moodle.

1.10 Submission of written work

Electronic (pdf) submission via [Moodle](#) (using [Turnitin](#)) is required, as detailed below.

2k essays	1 pdf file of each essay
4k essay	1 pdf file
Dissertation	1 pdf file

Please see the separate Key Dates document on Moodle for details of submission dates. Please note that submitted work cannot be retracted or amended, so students should be careful to check the correct file is uploaded when submitting.

2. DETAILS OF ASSESSMENT

2.1 Contribution of marks for each examined component

The MPhil by Advanced Study consists of the dissertation component (which contributes 60%) and the essay component (which contributes 40%). The essay component includes the 4 essays and the oral presentation.

The three 2k essays account for 5% each (15% in total), the 4k essay 15%, and the oral presentation 10%.

Candidates must obtain a pass mark (60%) on both components, except where a fail on one component is 'marginal' and redeemed by a safe pass on the other component; for details see Section 2.3.

The dissertation has the highest weighting, as it is the most substantial piece, and also the one which best indicates preparedness for further research. Nonetheless, performance on the essay component can appreciably influence the overall mark. A fail on the essay component may prevent the student from continuing the course.

2.2 Marking scales and criteria

The Faculty uses a criterion marking reference system. The marking scale is numerical, nominally from 0 to 100, but, in line with widespread practice in arts subjects in British universities, marks are not awarded above a particular threshold, in this case 90. The MPhil is a 'distinction/pass/fail' degree and the mark scale is shown below. **The Faculty specifies an overall course mark of distinction, ≥ 75 , as the threshold for continuation to the PhD.**

2.2.1 Marking criteria for written work

The subdivisions of the mark range, and the criteria by which written work is judged, are as follows:

Distinction marks

85-90:

Outstanding work that excels in all the criteria required for a distinction and is of publishable or near-publishable quality. Disagreements or objections that the work may provoke will be of the kind that stimulate academic debate.

75-84:

Work in this range will engage critically with and develop an independent perspective on existing scholarship on the subject. It will display rigorous handling of theoretical, critical, conceptual or contextual issues. Work at the upper end of this category will display particular sophistication in relation to these criteria.

Work in the 75+ range will demonstrate readiness for advanced research.

Pass marks**65-74:**

Work that shows at least three of the following:

- Good knowledge and understanding of the material studied
- Competence in theoretical and conceptual issues
- Capacity for critical analysis
- Arguments supported by detailed reference to the relevant materials
- Arguments well-structured and relevant to the topic

60-64:

Work that shows some competence and knowledge, with satisfactory presentation and documentation, but is characterized by one or more of the following:

- Inaccurate or insufficient detailed reference to materials studied
- Limited understanding of theoretical or conceptual issues
- Limited critical analysis
- Arguments not always well constructed or presented or relevant to the topic

Fail marks**58-59:**

Work showing any one of the following (in practice, these shortcomings tend to co-occur and are not easily separated):

- Lack of knowledge or understanding of the material studied
- Lack of knowledge or understanding of relevant theoretical or conceptual issues
- Incompetence in methods of analysis and procedures that are routinely applied to the kind of material under discussion
- Inability to construct and present an argument

less than 58:

Work that reveals serious confusion and/or which is significantly unscholarly in its method, argument, or presentation.

2.2.2 Marking criteria for the oral presentation

Given the distinct nature of the oral presentation, rather different criteria are used. One examiner will judge content, and the other presentation skills. The marks are then averaged.

Mark	Criteria for content	Criteria for presentation skills
85-90	<i>Content that is outstanding within the scope of the task</i>	<i>A wholly professional presentation worthy of the best established and admired academic presenters</i>
75-84	<i>Excellent content showing impressive insight and an advanced level of understanding and scholarship</i>	<i>A presentation showing excellent mastery of presentational skills and powerful engagement with the audience</i>
65-74	<i>Good content showing clear thinking and a secure level of understanding and scholarship</i>	<i>A presentation showing good mastery of presentational skills</i>
60-64	<i>Satisfactory content showing an adequate level of understanding and scholarship</i>	<i>An adequately clear and coherent presentation</i>
58-59	<i>Content which reveals some confusion and/or lack of scholarship</i>	<i>A presentation somewhat lacking in coherence, continuity, or preparation</i>
<58	<i>Content which reveals serious confusion and/or lack of scholarship</i>	<i>A presentation seriously lacking in coherence, continuity, or preparation</i>

2.3 Guidelines for 'marginal fails'

Provision is made for 'near miss' performances, though of course it is better not to explore this region of the mark scale.

- A fail on the essay component is 'marginal' (for the purposes of these guidelines) if the mean is at least 58% *and* not more than one piece of assessed work (written or oral) is below 60%.
- A 'marginal fail' on the essay component can be redeemed by a dissertation at 61% or above.
- A 'marginal fail' on the dissertation is one with a mark of 58% or 59%.
- A 'marginal fail' on the dissertation can be redeemed by an overall weighted average for both components of at least 60%.
- There is no overall 'marginal fail' for the course: **an overall course average below 60% is a fail.**

If after the four essays a candidate's performance is in the 'marginal fail' or 'fail' category, the External Examiner, in consultation with the Examinations Board and with reference to the 'Guidelines for marginal fails', recommends whether or not the candidate should continue.

2.4 Misdemeanours, felonies, and penalties

It is necessary to enforce penalties in certain circumstances to ensure fairness to other students.

Poor presentation

Where the standard of presentation falls significantly short of what is acceptable in scholarly writing, up to 5% may be deducted from the mark which the content would otherwise have merited.

Limits exceeded

Work that exceeds the word limit without permission will be penalised.

For the 2k and 4k essays, up to 5 marks may be deducted for each 5% by which the work exceeds the word limit (100 words for 2k essays, 200 words for 4k essays). Violations of less than 5% may be penalised pro rata.

For the dissertation, up to 5 marks per 500 words (2.5%) may be deducted for work which exceeds the word limit without permission. Violations of less than 2.5% may be penalised pro rata.

The equivalent excess in the oral presentation is overrunning the time slot, and this will be reflected in the mark for presentation skills.

Late submission

Out of fairness to the great majority of students who do meet deadlines, work which is submitted late will be penalised if no extension has been granted. Any late submission will incur an automatic three-point penalty for work submitted after the deadline but within one day of the deadline. Following this, one further mark for each further day or part thereof will be deducted.

Academic misconduct

Substantive duplication of work in different assignments will be penalised, as will any form of academic misconduct. See <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/definition> for information on what constitutes academic misconduct. Students must read the full information on this webpage and click on each of the links on the left hand-side of the page for more detail.

Students who use proofreading services should ensure they are aware of the University guidelines on this: <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/what-plagiarism/collusion>

At the very least, academic misconduct is likely to result in loss of marks. Serious cases may result in a student being withdrawn from the University and the degree sought.

A type of academic misconduct is [plagiarism](#): using someone else's ideas, words, data, or other material produced by them without acknowledgement. Therefore copying out someone else's work without due indication and acknowledgement (quotation marks and source:page citation) is plagiarism. So is rewording someone else's work in order to present it as original without acknowledging the intellectual debt. So, too, is presenting any 'writing' by artificially intelligent agents as one's own (see [Plagiarism - AI](#)). Candidates must avoid (the appearance of) plagiarism by carefully acknowledging sources.

[Plagiarism](#) is unethical and corrodes the principles of scholarship. It is not tolerated at any level in the University.

Collaboration

Collaborative preparation of assessed work is not permitted.

Occasionally, it may be appropriate to make use of something done by another student, such as a short recording or a software script, but this must be acknowledged as the work of that person. **If in doubt, consult your supervisor.**

Notwithstanding the need for assessed work to be the product of individual endeavour, we warmly encourage interaction between MPhil students: discussion, brainstorming, problem solving, mutual morale boosting, and general social interaction. **Students are also encouraged to attend meetings of the Cambridge Linguistics Society and Cambridge Linguistics Forum.**

3. CONDUCT OF THE EXAMINATIONS

3.1 Assessors

Primary assessment is undertaken by staff members in TAL and other experts within the University. Occasionally, where particular expertise is required, individuals from outside the University may be asked to examine.

3.2 Role of the external examiner

The MPhil always has an External Examiner from another institution. The usual role of the External Examiner is to act in a moderating capacity (and also sometimes in an adjudicating capacity). They also provide an independent assessment of academic standards. The reports of External Examiners contribute to the University's monitoring and quality assurance activities each year.

External Examiners do not carry out marking of assessed work. Rather, they are involved in assessing whether internal marking has been appropriately and consistently applied. External Examiners are entitled to see all work that contributes to the assessment and subsequent classification. More usually however, External Examiners will review a sample of work to ensure that internal marking is accurate and consistent and that classifications are of an appropriate standard. External Examiners are expected to advise on the borderlines between classes and between passing and failing.

The sample of work to be referred to the External Examiner will include work from the top, middle and bottom of the range, borderline candidates. Reports from the assessors will be referred with work. External Examiners should discuss with the Senior Examiner the number of essays/dissertations to be referred.

In circumstances where the External Examiner raises a legitimate concern regarding marks, it is generally not be appropriate to adjust the marks of a limited number of students whose work has been sampled. Under such circumstances, adjustments to marks should be made with reference to the entire cohort.

Internal examiners should attempt to agree marks where possible. The External Examiner should be in a position to report on the soundness of the procedures used to reach a final agreed mark, by obtaining information on the method used to reconcile divergent marks. In exceptional circumstances, where marks cannot be reconciled, the External Examiner may be asked to provide their view.

3.3 Essays

Each 2000-word essay is marked by one assessor and a sample of the essays is moderated by the External Examiner.

Each 4000-word essay is marked by a first assessor, and then will undergo an internal moderation process by a second assessor. A sample of essays is also moderated by the External Examiner, and he or she also adjudicates if necessary in cases where the examiners disagreed.

3.4 Oral presentation

The oral presentation is assessed by two examiners, one of whom judges content and the other presentation skills.

The External Examiner may choose to attend any presentation.

3.5 Dissertation

The research presented in the 20,000 word dissertation is evaluated independently by two assessors on the basis of the written dissertation. Where it is felt further information is needed, a *viva voce* examination of the candidate will be held. A minimum of one assessor is normally a staff member in TAL. The dissertation supervisor cannot examine the dissertation.

After reading the dissertation, each assessor submits an independent report, normally including a specific recommendation as to whether or not the dissertation meets the requirements of the MPhil (cf. the *Guide for Examiners and Assessors*), a provisional mark, and an indication of the criteria motivating the mark range (e.g. 'pass' or 'distinction') into which it is deemed to fall. An examiner may instead request that a *viva* (oral examination) be held, before he or she makes a definite recommendation.

On the basis of the dissertation and, where applicable, the candidate's performance in the viva, the examiners agree a mark. If the examiners differed appreciably in their independent reports, and/or if a subsequent viva has added new information, then the examiners should provide a brief joint written report justifying the agreed mark.

3.6 Viva

A viva voce examination following submission of the dissertation, but not of the essays, may be held at the discretion of the examiners. The purpose of this viva is to give the examiners additional information, if needed, to agree a mark. A viva must also be held if academic misconduct is suspected.

Candidates should not jump to negative conclusions from being asked to a viva.

Any viva is chaired by either the Director of the MPhil or a substitute appointed by him or her. The Chair does not normally ask questions during the examination. In addition to chairing the meeting, their role is to ensure that the examination process conforms to the regulations. The viva is expected to last approximately 30 minutes.

The External Examiner may choose to attend any viva and ask questions.

The viva will normally focus on the dissertation, though in principle candidates can be asked about other aspects of their assessed work.

3.7 Moderation of marks and adjudication

At each stage of the assessment, the External Examiner will be invited to read, for calibration, a selection of written work from the top, middle and bottom of the range. Additionally, those with a borderline pass, and any work achieving a fail mark will be standardly referred. The External Examiner may also choose to read any other work.

Where the two assessors have been unable to agree, or where their marks diverge by 8 or more points, they will be asked to submit separate reports. In such cases, the External Examiner will normally be asked to give their view, which will be subject to the approval of the Examiners' Meeting. The proposed mark will normally be expected to fall within the boundaries of the original two assessors' marks.

3.8 Final examiners' meetings

All marks approved by the External Examiner are confirmed by a meeting of the Director of the MPhil and a minimum of three further examiners who are staff members in the Linguistics Section. The External Examiner also takes part in this meeting. These Examiners approve the marksheet. Marks agreed at the final meeting with the External Examiner cannot normally be altered at any later stage of the examining process.

Course marks and the approved marksheet are considered by the Degree Committee before the degree is awarded.

3.9 Degree approval and graduation

The Postgraduate Office will email students once their final result is available. Those who have not been granted any extension on the dissertation submission deadline will normally be eligible to apply for a graduation ceremony to be held in July (although there may be exceptional circumstances in which the examining process may not be completed in time). All other successful candidates will normally be eligible to apply to attend a graduation ceremony at a later date. Dates of graduation ceremonies are available [here](#), and students should contact their College for any queries on reserving a place. See [Degree Approval and Conferment](#) for further information.

3.10 Feedback on assessed work

When marks for assessed work are finalised, they are made available individually to students. In the case of the dissertation and the overall MPhil result, this will occur once the Degree Committee has approved the Examiners' recommendations.

Examiners' reports are released, and constitute the primary feedback on work. Students may also contact the Director of the MPhil if they have specific queries about their progress.

4. MITIGATION

For issues relating to assessment, a student's College Tutor will be able to discuss with them a number of existing mechanisms of support for the examination period.

[Examination allowances](#) can be applied for where students feel their exams were affected by medical or grave cause.

[Examination Reviews](#) may be requested in rare cases where students feel a procedural irregularity has occurred during the examination, or there is a perception of bias or withdrawal of academic provision that affected a student's examination outcome.

5. TIPS ON PREPARING ASSESSED WORK

5.1 Sections, table of contents, and abstract

Labelled sections, even in the shortest of the assessment work, may make the reader's task easier, and may help the writer stick to the point. However, avoid excessive subdivision – your advisor will give guidance. **Make sure that all pages are numbered.**

It is now standard for academic articles in most areas to have an abstract at the start: 100 words or so summarising the content. It may help you focus on what is important, and certainly aid a potential reader to decide whether your work is of relevance.

A 'table of contents' adds an air of professionalism to the dissertation. If you've cracked automatic sectioning (worth doing), it's easy to insert one (it will need, in Word at least, a nudge from you to update itself if you change the sections, but when nudged it recomputes the page references).

An abstract and contents page(s) are deemed **not** to count towards the word limit.

5.2 Title page / cover sheet

Please display the following information at the very top of your title page:

[Candidate Number: xxx]

[Submission Date: xxx]

[2k essay / 4k essay / Dissertation]

[MPhil in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics By Advanced Study]

Lower down the page, please display the **coursework title**.

At the bottom of the page, please note your **word count**.

Additionally, for the dissertation, you should include the following wording on your title page:

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

Students will be emailed by the Postgraduate Office regarding their Candidate Number. This number should be used on final essay/dissertation submissions in place of student names.

Please see the separate guidance document available on Moodle entitled 'anonymising your submission'. This explains how you can remove metadata from your document before uploading it.

5.3 Use of English

All essays and dissertations should be written in English. The quality and comprehensibility of English in essays and dissertations will be taken into account by assessors. Supervisors will be concentrating on content and will not have time to correct all grammatical and stylistic mistakes. Non-native English speakers should pay particular attention to this and perhaps ask a non-specialist friend to read through work before submission.

It is important that students, supervisors, examiners and proofreaders understand what is and is not acceptable when checking text. The University has issued [Guidance on proofreading](#) which can help to define the roles and responsibilities of students and proofreaders.

International students may wish to make use of the Language Centre's [Academic Development and Training for International Students \(ADTIS\)](#), to assist them in reaching their potential by focusing on the communication and language proficiencies essential in academic work. Colleges may also be able to offer study skills support.

5.4 Style and relevance

Coursework must be typed or word-processed, in a sans-serif font (e.g. Helvetica, Avant Garde, Arial, Geneva), and be double-spaced with adequate margins. These style guidelines are an accessibility / inclusivity requirement for readers with a range of impairments.

It is a virtue to get straight to the point; no elegant introductions to the matter in hand are required. For example, if one of your 2k essays aims to discuss whether phonemes are relevant to a current phonological theory, one of the many suitable first sentences is: "This essay will show that the concept of the phoneme is irrelevant in Optimality Theory." One of the many unsuitable sentences is: "Language is one of the most remarkable capacities of the human being, and its analysis has exercised the best minds over thousands of years." **Your answer must focus clearly on the issues raised by the title right from the start.**

5.5 When to refer to the work of others

Citing others' work appropriately is an essential part of academic writing. It is usual to cite the originator of a theoretical device, generalization, or source of information on first mention. For example, if you refer to the Head Movement Constraint in syntax, cite Lisa Travis' dissertation; if you mention faithfulness constraints in phonology, cite McCarthy & Prince (1995), and so on. If you do not cite appropriately, this can be construed as either (1) you do not know the literature well enough or (2) you are trying to claim credit for someone else's work.

Generally, cite only published or publicly available sources. Manuscripts may sometimes be cited, but not handouts or word-of-mouth statements (e.g. "As Chomsky once told me over a beer, there is no syntax.").

Be careful about sources found on the web. Make sure the source is authoritative: e.g. that a paper is peer-reviewed. If you really need to cite a source that is not authoritative, then note that fact in the text. Web references should give the full address, and the date on which you last accessed it. If there is a doi (Digital Object Identifier number), some journals like you to cite it, so it may be a habit worth acquiring.

5.6 The form of citations in the text

Works should be cited accurately, using a clear and consistent format. A common format that we recommend is as follows: **surname (date[:page[-page]])**

e.g. Chomsky (1957), McCarthy & Prince (1995)
 Chomsky (1957:12), McCarthy & Prince (1995:23)
 Chomsky (1957:12-18), McCarthy & Prince (1995:23-24)

- Use the name and date each time; *ibid* and *op. cit.* are not used in the name-date system.
- If the whole work is being cited, omit the pages part: e.g. "Chomsky (1981) is turgidly written." Otherwise, include page numbers wherever possible.
- If it is more appropriate, cite the chapter: e.g. Chomsky (1957:ch.2).
- If more than one work by the same author is being cited, use the format: **surname (date1, date2,...)**, as in Chomsky (1965, 1972).
- If more than one work by the same author *from the same year* is being cited, they are distinguished as follows: Chomsky (1972a, 1972b). Make sure that the a,b,c, etc. match the order of the works in the References section (see below) and that the references are distinguished by a,b,c there too.
- Initials are used to disambiguate authors with the same surname: e.g. "A. Prince (1985) disagrees with E. Prince (1992)."
- Double-authored words are referred to thus: Chomsky and Halle (1968).
- Longer author lists may be abbreviated after their first (full) citation, e.g. instead of "Alderete, Beckman, Benua, Gnanadesikan, McCarthy, and Urbanczyk (1999)" you can refer to "Alderete et al. (1999)".

Both direct quotations and careful paraphrases have their place but watch the grammar and implicit meaning of how you write about them. For example, avoid saying that a theory claims something (theories do not

claim), and attribute an idea or theory to a *work*, not to a *person*, unless it is clear that the person still holds that idea. Eschew loose writing like this: “As Durand rightly says, phonetics has nothing to do with linguistics.” Even if the reader is telepathic enough to know that Durand (1990) is intended, and patient enough to read through to p. 41, it turns out that Durand holds no such view. (To save you rushing off to look at Durand (1990:41), what he says is “Some researchers see phonetics as a non-linguistic subject dealing directly with properties of the speech signal. The position taken here is that phonetic properties which are not mechanically determined and can come under linguistic control are part of a linguistic description.”)

5.7 List of references

An alphabetically organized section headed ‘References’, at the end of your document should give **full** details of all works cited in the text. Bear this in mind when you consult a work—doing so may save you a frantic trip back to the library on deadline day to find some vital detail missing from your notes. **Only works cited in the text should be listed.**

Every publisher has a different format for references. A common format is given below, and you are encouraged to use it. However, you may use any **standard** format, as long as it is used consistently.

for books:

Durand, J. (1990) *Generative and non-linear phonology*. London: Longman.

for journals:

Liberman, A.M, Cooper, F.S., Shankweiler, D.P. and Studdert-Kennedy, M. (1967) Perception of the speech code. *Psychological Review* 74, 431-461.

for book chapters or book parts:

Clements, G.N. and Hume, E. (1995). The internal organization of speech sounds. In J. Goldsmith (ed.) *The Handbook of Phonological Theory*. London: Blackwell, 245-306.

for manuscripts:

McCarthy, J. and Prince, A. (1986) Prosodic Morphology. ms. Brandeis University and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

for resources on the web:

Koontz-Garboden, A. (2003) Tiberian Hebrew spirantization and related phenomena in Stratal OT. Rutgers Optimality Archive #607, <http://roa.rutgers.edu>. <date you accessed the website>

If you intend to continue with academic work, it is worth getting an automatic reference system, such as EndNote (not to be confused with endnotes, which are to be avoided at all costs. See Section 4.6).

5.8 Footnotes

Footnotes should be used sparsely or not at all, depending on the nature of the project. Usually, if something is worth saying, it is worth saying in the text. However, on some occasions putting information in a footnote may be advisable in order not to obscure the flow of an argument.

Do NOT use endnotes – these exasperate the reader. Remember that (foot/end) notes are counted for the purpose of word limits.

5.9 Length

Remember that you may be penalized for exceeding the word limit. If the word limit poses a problem due to, for example, a particularly large number of examples with transliterations and translations, try to put larger chunks of data in the appendix wherever this does not obfuscate the clarity of your discussion. Do not, however, include an appendix unless it is absolutely necessary.

5.10 Independence of work and plagiarism

Copying out someone else's work without due indication and acknowledgement (quotation marks and source:page citation) is plagiarism. So is rewording someone else's work in order to present it as your own without acknowledging your intellectual debt. Avoid (the appearance of) plagiarism by carefully acknowledging your sources. See Section 2.4 for this and for the need to be explicit about any collaborative work included in submissions.

5.11 Dissertations involving statistical analysis

In general, MPhil dissertations in experiment-based areas of research should include formal statistical analysis (e.g. significance testing, correlation analysis, curve fitting, etc.) as appropriate to the data being analysed, to complement graphical presentation and verbal discussion of the findings. Dissertations on topics involving count data may or may not require a formal statistical analysis – the supervisor will advise.

5.11.1 Planning the study design

Students planning to include statistical analyses in their dissertations should read up on and plan the format of the analysis, seeking confirmation from the supervisor **before** collecting the data. Statistical tests generally have minimum requirements for the format of the data, so it is important that students are aware of these requirements from the outset. For example, significance tests generally require a minimum of five subjects (speakers/listeners/informants) and a minimum of five observations per cell. It is recommended that students have a look at R before collecting the data, with a view to running the kind of test they have in mind and possibly run a practice test with made-up data.

5.11.2 Computer packages

R and R Studio are recommended for the analysis and visualization of statistical data, although basic calculation and visualization can also be performed with Excel.

5.11.3 Textbooks

There are a large number of books on statistical data analysis that are accessible to linguists and other social scientists. The three particularly useful books are listed below in increasing order of difficulty. All of them are held by the MMLL Library [Field et al.: classmark Z1.D.13; Levshina: classmark Z1.D.21; Baayen: classmark Baayen: L14.B.3].

Field, A., Miles, J., & Field, Z. (2012). *Discovering statistics using R*. London: Sage Publications.

Levshina, N. (2015). *How to do linguistics with R: Data exploration and statistical analysis*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Baayen, R. H. (2008). *Analyzing linguistic data: A practical introduction to statistics using R*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5.11.4 Striking a balance: not all dissertations need statistics

Statistical analysis can be a helpful tool for highlighting and drawing out patterns in a dataset, but it is not necessary to undertake such analyses in all types of research. Inappropriately conducted or superfluous statistical analyses should not be included in an attempt to give the work a 'spurious veneer' of rigour.

In other cases, despite careful planning and a well-balanced design, the vagaries of human subjects mean a dataset will end up being too small or patchy to enable the desired statistical analyses to be conducted. In this situation, rather than carrying out an inappropriate statistical test, it is better to provide graphical and verbal analyses of the existing data, describe the limitations of the dataset, and explain what statistical analyses would be desirable with a larger dataset. The supervisor or other advisor will advise on when statistics should be included.

5.12 Word-processing and data projection

Where. Colleges should have computing facilities, and MMLL has a well-equipped Postgraduate Studies Centre on the top floor of the RFB at the MMLL library end.

In the interests of legibility, all work should be word processed unless discussed first with your supervisor. Scans of hand-drawn figures are acceptable, however, if they are clear.

Greyscale vs colour. Use colour only when it is necessary, e.g. for the clarity of graphs and pictures. It is wise to get into the habit of using different line types and shading instead of different colours: in the short term, they are better for when colour printing is unavailable; looking ahead, most publishers still charge huge amounts for colour reproductions, but nothing for greyscale.

Special fonts. Special language fonts are now commonly available with most text editing systems. Phonetic fonts may have to be added to your machine but adding them is easy (if you have administrator rights).

The IPA page: <https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/content/ipa-fonts> links to a number of sites that provide phonetic and special language fonts, usually as freeware.

Recommended *phonetic fonts* are the Unicode fonts **Doulos SIL** and **Charis SIL**, available free from the SIL International link on the above IPA page. (Do not confuse these with *SIL Doulos* and *SIL Charis* which do not conform to Unicode standards.) Make sure that you create pdfs for submission on the machine where you know the fonts render correctly. If you cannot get a font you need, ask your supervisor/advisor for guidance.

5.13 Miscellaneous research-related matters

5.13.1 Ethical approval

Any research involving animate participants requires ethical approval. Ethical approval ought to be sought as early as possible, aiming at having it in place before relevant research is commenced. Obtaining this is mostly routine, for instance when sound recordings are being made of adults, but any student intending to use participants should download the information from the '[Research Ethics](#)' section of the Linguistics site on the Moodle VLE and consult their supervisor *before* embarking on such research. Any work which involves children, the elderly, or other subjects considered 'vulnerable', imposes unusual stress on subjects, or uses invasive procedures, will require early consideration of ethical matters and approval may take time. **It is the student's responsibility to establish whether ethical approval is required for a particular project.**

5.13.2 Help with research expenses

Limited financial assistance (up to £100) can be claimed by MPhil students for expenses relating specifically to their dissertation, such as payment for experimental subjects. Please read information on MPhil research expenses from the 'Research Allowance' section on [Moodle](#) *before* committing to any expenditure.

5.13.3 Research study participation and participant recruitment

The Section of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics runs a SONA Participant Recruitment page at <https://camlinguistics.sona-systems.com/>. Here, we advertise web-based and lab-based linguistic experiments to a Cambridge-based pool of volunteers. You are encouraged to sign up as a participant - after filling in a short demographic questionnaire, you will be able to see studies that you are eligible to participate in. Should you wish to post your own experiment or questionnaire on SONA for participant recruitment purposes, please contact the Research Laboratory Manager (mk2143@cam.ac.uk) to request a Researcher Account.

5.13.4 Retaining work

The Section will retain copies of dissertations and essays and may make them available to future candidates (subject to them receiving a mark of distinction or above) unless the student makes a written request to the contrary to postgraduatestudies@mml.cam.ac.uk.

5.13.5 Insurance and working away

If a student's research for the MPhil requires travel abroad, it may be possible to obtain travel cover under the [University's insurance policy](#).

In order to qualify for travel insurance, ALL trips outside the UK must be risk assessed, and [Risk Assessment Forms](#) can be found on Moodle under the 'Working Away' heading. For trips of 2 weeks or more, students must apply via their CamSis Self-Service for permission to '[Work Away](#) from Cambridge'. For trips of less than 2 weeks, the Risk Assessment form should be sent to your Supervisor for approval. In both instances, the form should be emailed to the Postgraduate Office on postgraduatestudies@mml.cam.ac.uk. Students are responsible for evaluating any risks to themselves, seeking appropriate advice, and giving personal safety due priority.

For overseas trips, it is essential that students check [government advice](#) on foreign travel frequently (when planning their trip, on the day of travel), and remain vigilant of any updates whilst away.

5.13.6 Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

Students using AI tools and websites must consider the [guiding principles](#) laid out by the University (see Section entitled 'Guidance for Students').

5.13.7

5.13.8 Risk

Commonly in the MPhil the notion of risk is relevant in the academic domain. Part of planning research consists in trying to foresee what could go wrong. An experiment could fail to produce interpretable results, a historical manuscript or a corpus could become unexpectedly unavailable, or a community of potential language informants could decide not to cooperate, and so on. If such a risk has more than a negligible probability, it is wise to think of a 'plan B' for completing the work.

The commonest risks, however, subsist in the temperament of our technological infrastructure. We cannot rely on our computers, disk drives, and printers having the same cool, logical, and robust approach to life we humans have. They are especially prone to crises at times of stress, even if treated with sympathy and understanding. Always, therefore, anticipate such crises, which, because predictable, are not grounds for a deadline extension. In particular:

Always keep complete and up-to-date backups of your work.

**Set yourself your own deadline a week before the official deadline.
This will give you leeway in case there is a last-minute problem.**

Good luck and enjoy the course!