



MML Undergraduate Studies



Frequently asked questions

Choosing your course



Why should I study an MML degree?

Our degree in Modern and Medieval Languages (MML) offers students the possibility to achieve high-level proficiency in at least two foreign languages, through teaching in Cambridge and time on a Year Abroad. We recognise, however, that learning a language is not an isolated activity and must be part of a deep understanding of the culture and history of the places where those languages are spoken. The MML degree, therefore, also gives students opportunities to explore the literature, cinema, history, philosophy, language variation, art and broader cultures of their chosen language areas. As well as focussing on two main languages, our students can also explore other new languages and theoretical linguistics, if they wish to. After the core first year, the many opportunities on the degree allow students to specialise in one area (for example, cinema), if they wish to, or to explore a broad range of areas. After the Year Abroad, some students choose to become specialist in one of their two languages, whilst others maintain their study in both throughout the degree.

Our degree in History and Modern Languages offers the same opportunities to explore the culture and history of the chosen language area, as well as study chosen papers (modules) in European History, World History or Political Thought, taught by the Faculty of History.

Our degree in Linguistics offers students the opportunity to move beyond specific languages and scientifically study human language and languages as a whole. What properties do all languages share? How can and can't they differ, and what does this reveal about the human mind and brain? Where do they come from, and how do languages vary across time, space, and social groups? How are they learned by children and by adults? How are they produced and perceived? How do they relate to other human cognitive faculties such as mathematics and music? To address these questions, linguistics draws on methods and knowledge from a

wide range of disciplines: for example, the study of meaning draws on philosophy, the analysis of the speech signal uses methods from physics and engineering, and the study of language acquisition draws on psychology.

Which degree courses does MMLL offer?

We offer three degrees based in the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Language and Linguistics:

- Modern and Medieval Languages (MML)
- History and Modern Languages (HML)
- Linguistics

All three offer a wide variety of options within them that allow you to explore different aspects of the subject. Our students are well supported and do well, not only on their courses, but also in their future careers.

What careers do those with an MMLL degree go on to?

Students from our Faculty, like those on most Cambridge degree courses, go on to a wide variety of jobs and careers. Some MML, HML and Linguistics students continue to use their languages on a regular basis in business, working abroad or teaching careers; others take up new challenges such as law, management or the charity sector. In addition to these options, many Linguistics students choose careers in speech and language technology (typically at Google, Facebook, or Amazon), speech pathology, editing and book publishing. The confidence and skills that many of our students develop on their courses give them a great advantage in a competitive job market!

Can I combine Modern and Medieval Languages with another subject?

As well as the official Joint Honours course with History (HML), it is also possible to combine one of the MML languages as follows:

- a post-A level, or equivalent, MML language with one of Arabic, Persian or Hebrew (in which case, apply to the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies course, indicating your choice of language combination)
- an MML language, post-A level or from scratch, with Latin or Ancient Greek (in which case, apply to MML, indicating your language combination).

There is no official MML and Linguistics degree, but there are many opportunities to take Linguistics papers as part of your MML course and to specialise in this area, and vice versa. Some students switch from the MML degree to the Linguistics degree, typically at the end of the second year.

Can I study any MML language from scratch?

You can study any of the following from scratch, either as one of your two main languages in an MML degree, or as your language half of an HML degree: German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian or Spanish.

Can I choose any combination of MML languages?

You can study two languages at post-A level standard, or combine one post-A level language with a language from scratch. There are no restrictions on the combination of the two languages.

Does it matter that I am only studying one language at A-level?

No, not at all. Many of our applicants are only able to study one language at A-level in their school or college, and relish the opportunity to take up a new language at Cambridge. This doesn't make you less competitive against other applicants with more than one A-level language.

Do I have to specify which languages I want to study?

Yes, when you apply you will be asked to specify the languages you wish to study. This will ensure that you can be assessed appropriately by colleagues who teach in that language area.

Do I need to have taken History at A-level in order to do an HML degree?

Some Colleges require History at A-level, or equivalent. Check the website of the College that interests you.

Which A-level (or equivalent) subjects are good preparation for an MMLL degree?

Beyond the required subjects for MML and HML, we admit students with a wide range of subject combinations. Helpful subjects for MML and HML include English Literature, English Language, History, Philosophy, but these are not required nor expected.

Helpful subjects for Linguistics include English Language, Maths, any science, any language, Psychology, and Philosophy, but these are neither required nor expected, and many other areas are relevant as well.

Can I choose an MML/HML degree if I am bilingual?

Our courses are open to students who come from a bilingual or native speaker background. However, do be aware that the compulsory language classes may not be appropriate for you and that - depending on your level of cultural immersion - you may need to demonstrate during the application process that the course is the right one for you, since it is aimed at students who do not have high levels of proficiency or cultural knowledge of the language area. Note that essays for scheduled papers are usually written in English. Some colleges discourage bilingual or native speakers from applying to study their language as part of MML or HML; if you think you fall into this category, we therefore advise that you check with the college you are interested in applying to.

Does the Faculty have mature students?

Yes, the Faculty admits mature students to its courses. Mature applicants are welcome to apply to any College but there are some Colleges, which are open only to mature applicants (defined as aged 21+ on entry to the course).

Is it possible to visit the Faculty?

We highly recommend visiting on a Faculty or University Open Day, so that you can meet a range of staff and students. Colleges also run their own Open Days and will also offer the chance to meet staff, students and Admissions Tutors. If you are unable to attend an open day but are visiting Cambridge, you are welcome to walk around the Sidgwick Site, where the MMLL Faculty is based, alongside several other Arts faculties.

Applications

Is there anything that I should be reading / watching / doing in preparation for my application?

It's always a good idea to explore your subject before you apply to study it at degree level, after all you want to be sure that it's a subject that you are intellectually curious about and will enjoy! There are many different ways to explore your subject; reading, watching foreign language films or documentaries, visiting exhibitions, listening to podcasts are just some examples. You can find some suggestions here: [LINK TO RESOURCES](#).

Pre-university students interested in the field of linguistics can find many useful written and video resources at <https://allthingslinguistic.com/post/115887024603/linguistics-resources-for-high-school-teachers> and <https://allthingslinguistic.com/post/35011912698/protocolinguistics-6-ways-to-do-linguistics-in>. Harvard psycholinguist Steven Pinker also has a number of excellent introductory videos online, such as [this presentation on linguistics as a window to understanding the brain](#).

What are the entry requirements for your courses?

For MML, HML and Linguistics the typical offer is A*AA for A-levels. The typical offer for International Baccalaureate is 41 points total, with 7,7,6 in the Higher Level subjects.

Remember that for MML you need to offer at least one language at A-level or equivalent. For HML some Cambridge Colleges require History A-level or equivalent.

There are no required subjects for Linguistics.

How many people apply each year?

MML - approximately 400

HML - approximately 90

Linguistics – approximately 95

How many students start the course each year?

MML - approximately 160

HML - approximately 25

Linguistics - approximately 30-35

How do I apply for a place?

When you apply to Cambridge, you don't apply to the university, but to one of the 29 Colleges that admit undergraduate students; note that three Colleges are for mature students only (aged 21+ when starting the course) and two are only for those who identify as women. Currently, all Colleges admit students for MML and HML. All Colleges except one (St Catharine's) admit students for Linguistics.

Colleges are much more alike than different – they all offer three years of accommodation for their students, have libraries, cafeterias, social spaces and sports facilities and support their students' academic progress and welfare needs. There are many reasons to choose a College and they are based on personal preferences: do you want to be in a larger or smaller College; do you want to be in the hustle and bustle of the city centre or a quieter more peripheral College; what facilities for sports/music/cooking does the College have; what are the accommodation arrangements? You don't have to choose a College, but can make an 'open' application, where you are assigned to an undersubscribed College, which from that point on handles your application as if you had chosen it.

I am an international student. Where can I find out about the application process for me?

For more information on applying from overseas, please see here:
<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/international-students>

Will my choice of College affect my chances of being offered a place?

No. All Colleges participate in the Pool system, which acts as a moderation system and allows strong applicants at oversubscribed colleges to be offered places at undersubscribed Colleges.

Does it matter that there is no Fellow (lecturer) in my language at the College that I'm applying to?

No, not all Colleges have Fellows in all the languages offered in MML or HML, especially the 'smaller' subjects such as Italian, Russian or Portuguese. Similarly, not all Colleges have a Linguistics Fellow. It doesn't matter if there is no Fellow since all colleges will provide the teaching and support required and often have longstanding connections with colleagues at other Colleges to ensure that continuity is provided. As you develop specialist interests, you'll

be taught by the relevant member of staff, meaning that students travel to different supervisors in different Colleges as appropriate.

Will I be at a disadvantage if I decide to take a gap year?

No, there is no disadvantage to taking a gap year. You may be asked at interview about your plans for your gap year and hope that you will be able to use some of your time to keep in contact with academic work and preparation for your chosen degree course. If it's possible to spend some time abroad immersed in a language that you will be studying for MML or HML, this can be really helpful, but we know that it isn't always possible.

If I apply for HML, could I be given an offer to study either History or MML, instead of for HML?

Yes, this is possible. If, after your assessment and interviews, no College is able to make you an offer for HML via the Pool system, you may be made an offer for either History or MML instead.

What should I put in my personal statement?

Your Personal Statement is an important way for you to tell us what interests you in the degree course that you want to study. Roughly 80% of it should be academic related, exploring several different activities that you've explored. Don't just tell us what you've read, or seen, or explored, but reflect on what you've learnt from it and how it relates to what you hope to explore on the degree course. A good starting point is to think back to the "spark" that led you to realise that this is what you want to study - remember that this is a *Personal Statement*, it's all about you! The other 20% of your statement should tell us about other aspects of your life, such as responsibilities you might have (leadership roles or work); achievements in non-academic areas, or how you enjoy your spare time. At Cambridge, we want to know that you're not only doing really well at school, but can manage well your working week and balance commitments, as this is a good sign that you'll cope well with university life. We are not looking for any specific skills or achievements, other than those that are relevant to your chosen degree subject.

What happens in the interview process?

The interviews are an important part of the application process at Cambridge and take place in the colleges. It's important to remember that they are part of a holistic assessment that also includes any written assessments, your UCAS application and, at some colleges,

submitted schoolwork too. The interviews are not designed to 'trick' you, but are an opportunity to show us why you're right for the degree. Most candidates have two interviews, usually for about 20-25 minutes each, with experts in the subject that you've applied for. The interviews may involve preparing some material - usually reading - immediately beforehand, which is then discussed as part of the interview. You may also be asked about some of the academic explorations that you've told us about in your Personal Statement. If applying to study a language that you are currently studying for A-level (or equivalent), you should expect to spend part of the interview talking in the language. For the most part, the interview isn't a 'right-or-wrong' test, but a chance for us to see how you work as an intellectual - how you think and how you use information provided to you as part of an intellectual conversation, much like how we teach you in the Cambridge supervision system.

Teaching

Will I be taught in the Faculty or in my College?

Lectures and language classes are organised by the Faculty and take place there, while supervisions are provided by the Colleges, but in practice supervisions can physically take place in the Faculty or in different Colleges - not just your own College - depending on where the supervisor is based during the working day. Supervisions for Linguistics papers are normally arranged by the paper (module) coordinator in the Linguistics section of the faculty.

How will I be taught?

In MML and HML, teaching is a combination of the following:

- lectures, which are usually 50 minutes long, typically with large groups of students
- language classes, which are usually 50 minutes long, in groups of 10-16 students
- supervisions, which are usually an hour long, usually with two students

In Linguistics teaching is a combination of:

- 50-minute lectures, with an average of 15-20 students
- 50-minute supervisions, with six students in Part I and two students in Parts IIA and IIB

Does teaching usually take place in English or in the foreign language?

Language classes and language supervisions usually take place in the target language and are often taught by native speakers. Lectures, some translation classes and supervisions on literature/film/history etc, are usually taught in English, to ensure that key ideas are understood correctly.

How many hours of teaching and independent study can I expect each week?

It can vary depending on factors such as studying a language from scratch, but in the first year most MML students have around 4 lectures, 4 language classes and 2 or 3 supervisions each week. HML students have fewer language classes as they are studying only one language, but usually have more lectures to attend.

Linguistics students have 4 hours of lecture and 3 hours of supervision per week in Part I, 4 hours of lecture and 2 hours of supervision per week in Part IIA, and 3 hours of lecture and 1.5 hours of supervision per week in Part IIB.

Studying for a degree involves a considerable amount of independent study too; you should expect degree-level study to be like having a full-time job, so 35-40 hours a week during term time.

How far away is the Faculty from the centre of Cambridge?

The Sidgwick site is just a few minutes' walk from the centre of Cambridge. Cambridge is a small city - even the furthest away Colleges are only a 10-15 minutes bike ride. Not all teaching takes place in the Faculty and you will attend supervisions at different Colleges around the city.

What is access like in MMLL for students with disabilities / special access needs?


The Raised Faculty Building and Lecture Block on the Sidgwick Site are fully accessible for students with disabilities or other needs.

Year Abroad

How can I spend my year abroad?

Currently our students have a choice of three options: 1) to study at a university or other Higher Education institution abroad; 2) to find employment abroad (the job has to be approved by the Faculty, so can't be as an 'au pair' or waiter, for example); 3) to take up a British Council placement as an English assistant in a school abroad. Those opting to be English assistants usually spend the year in one place, but those who work or study can choose to spend time in two different countries. Students can study in any part of the world

where the language is spoken; while many students spend their time in Europe, others live in Latin America, Africa or even French-speaking Canada!


 **Will I receive any help or support from the Faculty/University when planning my year abroad or during my time abroad?**

Yes, we have a dedicated Year Abroad Office that helps students preparing for the Year Abroad and while they are away from Cambridge on the Year Abroad itself.

 **Do I have to split my year abroad between two countries?**

No, you don't have to split your time between countries. Currently, students are able to split their time abroad across different countries if they wish to, or spend the required minimum of 8 months in one country.

Offer holders

 **I will be starting a degree in the Faculty of MML in October 2020. Is there any reading that I should do before arriving?**

It's a good idea to undertake some preparation before arriving, if possible, as this will help you settle quickly into your work. MML and HML offer holders should visit <https://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/offer-holders> for up-to-date information on how best to prepare. Suggested preparatory readings for the Linguistics tripos can be found at <https://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/dtal/undergraduates/preliminary-reading>.