

# Theoretical and Applied Linguistics (TAL) MPhil by Thesis Guidelines 2022-23

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This document, intended as a reference for both students and staff, provides guidance on the TAL *MPhil by Thesis*, involving assessment on the basis of a 30,000 word thesis.<sup>1</sup> The *MPhil by Thesis* is for students whose knowledge of linguistics is already substantial, and who already know the area they wish to research for their thesis.

Some elements of the following Guidelines for the *MPhil by Thesis* have the status of **formal requirements** 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 Research Students](#) which sets out the University's guidelines for those courses examined by scrutiny of an extended research thesis and an oral examination only. Students, Course Directors and Supervisors are encouraged to read/discuss the contents of the Code in addition to the following TAL guidelines.

## 1 TRAINING AND ASSESSMENTS

### 1.1 The overall structure of the course

The *MPhil by Thesis* allows students who already have breadth and depth in their knowledge of linguistics to pursue research on a chosen topic with the kind of focus expected in doctoral research. Formal assessment is by the thesis submitted at the end of the year, but students also have to fulfil certain training requirements, and to submit work through the year so that the progress of their research can be monitored.

#### **Michaelmas Term:**

All *MPhil by Thesis* students must follow the Research Methods course, the General Seminar, and a statistics course (or courses if relevant – see Section 1.4 below).

The supervisor may also require attendance at taught courses relevant to the research topic.

#### **Monitoring:**

A detailed plan of the research to be carried out, including the research questions, proposed methodology, and outline plan of the thesis, must be submitted by Thursday of week 5, Michaelmas Term.

A document of approximately 5,000 words (e.g. an introductory and/or background chapter) forming part of the thesis must be submitted by Thursday of week 1, Lent Full Term (i.e. just after the end of the Christmas vacation).

**Students will receive feedback directly from the Supervisor on the detailed plan of the research. For the 5,000 word document, the Postgraduate Office will ask Supervisors to complete a feedback form. The form will be passed to the Course Director for approval before feedback is released to students via the Office.**

**The Supervisor will normally comment only on one draft of each piece of work (see also Section 1.3).**

Please refer to the TAL MPhil By Thesis 2022-23 Key Dates for exact dates. For lecture courses, please consult the TAL Michaelmas Term timetable and Lent Term timetable, as well as the University Lecture List. The Research Methods course provides a necessary foundation,

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<sup>1</sup> There is a separate set of Guidelines for the *TAL MPhil by Advanced Study* which is a different course.

both in generic aspects of research and in aspects specific to linguistics. The General Seminar 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.

**Lent Term:**

Students must attend at least two research forums, which might be PhD seminars, MPhil option seminars, or other appropriate research seminars or courses in TAL or elsewhere in the University, as advised and approved by the supervisor.

**Monitoring:**

Students give an unassessed 15-minute conference-style presentation on their research progress at the end of Lent Term in front of their peers and members of staff.

**Easter Term:**

Full-time research on the thesis.

Assessment: A thesis of no more than 30,000-words is submitted in early June.

**The Supervisor will normally comment only on one draft of each piece of work (see also Section 1.3).**

Throughout the year, MPhil students following the *MPhil by Thesis* are as much full-time researchers as are PhD students, and primarily work on their thesis project. This requires the ability to plan, to set short- and long-term goals, to overcome obstacles, and, importantly, to allow for contingencies.

## 1.2 The thesis

The thesis requires original research on a topic of the student's choosing, demonstrating scholarship in one or more areas of linguistics, and on a scale commensurate with a full eight-month period of focused research.

The main purposes of the thesis are:

- to develop and test the ability to plan and carry out, on a larger scale than in the *MPhil by Advanced Study*, 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.

There is no simple definition of originality. The thesis, self-evidently, has to be written by the candidate, and is therefore in a trivial 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, so that new intellectual ground is broken. It is these research skills which the TAL MPhil hopes to foster, and the *MPhil by Thesis* allows full scope for new intellectual discoveries, and for professional reporting of the research.

## 1.3 Supervision

Students following the *MPhil by Thesis* will normally have discussed their proposed research in advance with a staff member in TAL specialising in the relevant subject area, and this person or an equivalent will be appointed as supervisor throughout the year. 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.

Seven hours of supervision are provided throughout the course.

Supervision for the thesis can be taken in half-hour units, as appropriate and as agreed with the supervisor.

To make best use of supervisions, students should prepare carefully, for instance by making an outline plan of their thesis which can be discussed, or a list of questions on matters where the supervisor's advice is needed.

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 prior to the week preceeding the **original** submission date.

#### 1.4 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 course *Foundations in Applied Statistics* or a more advanced statistics course if they are already familiar with basic quantitative methods. The courses are run by the [Social Sciences' Research Methods Programme \(SSRMP\)](#) in Michaelmas Term. Before arriving in Cambridge all MPhil students will be asked to fill in an online survey run by the SSRMP 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, *Quantitative Methods in Analysing Language Data* (QMALD, four 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 the SSRMP are not aimed specifically at language research. They also include courses that are more basic and courses that 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 the software 'R' or do one of the courses on Linear Regression.

Information on the statistics courses provided by the SSRMP is available at: <https://www.ssrmp.group.cam.ac.uk/Modules> (click on the left-hand link for the Core Modules List)

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 SSRMP courses later in the year rather than in Michaelmas Term.

All students must attend the SSRMP induction lecture. A link will be available towards the end of September, see: <https://www.ssrmp.group.cam.ac.uk/Key-Information/SSRMP-induction> for information. This year, due to the pandemic, the SSRMP will be hosting a pre-recorded

lecture version. Watching this lecture is **compulsory** for all students intending to take any module offered by the SSRMP.

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. It combines lecture-style teaching and practical work, with practical sessions conducted in the Phonetics Lab, where individual workstations are available. Students intending to write a thesis in an area of linguistics which involves quantitative analysis are required to attend the QMALD course. Areas of linguistics for which quantitative analysis is likely to be required 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 1.5 on theoretical research). Quantitative analyses may also be needed in areas in which research requires analysis of count data, e.g. corpus linguistics, questionnaire-based studies.

### **1.5 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 thesis.

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.

### **1.6 Outline 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.

**Michaelmas Term**

**Thursday, week 5:** Detailed plan of research and outline of thesis.

**Lent Term**

**Thursday, week 1:** Submission of 5,000-word document forming part of the thesis.

**Thursday, week 5:** Submission of the final title and summary of the thesis.

**Thursday, week 5:** Submission of the title of the oral presentation.

**Thursday, week 9:** Oral presentation.

**Easter Term**

**Early June:** Submission of the thesis.

**Vivas** take place in mid-late June.

**Submission deadlines are at midday.**

**Exact dates are given in the TAL MPhil By Thesis Key Dates document, which is available on [Moodle](#).**

**1.7 Word limit and deadline**

The 30,000-word limit for the thesis is a **maximum** and must be adhered to. It 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.

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.

The deadline for submission of the thesis is **not flexible**.

There are few pieces of written work that would not benefit from a few more hours or days of perfectionism. Therefore, in a spirit of equity, 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.

## 1.8 Deadlines and Extensions

Few pieces of written work would not benefit from some extra hours or days of perfectionism. But remember: those marking your work will never judge your thesis 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, submitted before the deadline, **where students can show that a circumstance has had a significant and disproportionate effect on their ability to submit the coursework by the deadline**. If the circumstance does not have a significant impact, or if students are unable to provide the evidence which would normally be expected in support, they should not apply for an extension.

### Application procedure

All students wishing to apply for an extension should complete the Extension Request Form, available via [Moodle](#). Students should email the form to their College for approval before returning to the Postgraduate Office on [postgraduatestudies@mml.cam.ac.uk](mailto:postgraduatestudies@mml.cam.ac.uk). Requests will be reviewed by the Faculty and will be treated confidentially and sympathetically, whatever the eventual outcome. Please also see the Section entitled '[Application via CamSIS](#)'.

### Extension requests of up to one week

The provision of supporting medical evidence is not required when requesting an extension of this length, but you will need a supporting note from your College Tutor via the Extension Request Form.

### Longer extensions for medical reasons

For extension requests of 8 days or more due to medical reasons, medical evidence is required in addition to a supporting note from your College Tutor via the Extension Request Form.

Students must provide sufficiently detailed contemporary evidence from a medically qualified practitioner, for example a doctor's report. Where appropriate, evidence from an accredited counsellor may also be considered. The University is not able to cover the cost of medical documents submitted in support of an application. The evidence:

- should provide a clear diagnosis which includes the nature and severity of the illness;
- should state when and how the condition is likely to have affected the candidate's ability to submit their thesis by their deadline;
- should be precise and self-explanatory. The amount of evidence required will vary from case to case. For example, hospital admission will need a shorter explanation than will a less obvious or less serious condition where background information and details of the candidate's medical history may be required;
- must be in English. If the documents are not originally in English, they must be translated by a professional translating service. In some cases, it is acceptable for documents to be translated by a member of the student's College;
- should be on headed paper which includes full address and role title of the practitioner, dated and signed by the practitioner (or other appropriate professional).

### Longer extensions for non-medical reasons

Students may not be required to provide evidence if their extension request relates to an ongoing circumstance for which they have previously submitted evidence (such as a flare-up of an existing condition). If a bereavement is suffered following the death of a close relative or friend, evidence is not normally required. If a student is a victim of crime which significantly disrupts their work, evidence such as a police incident report should be provided or, if this is not available, the student should contact their College Tutor for advice.

A supporting note from your College Tutor is required via the Extension Request Form.

### Length of extensions

Only in the most severe cases will an extension be granted for more than seven days.

Students who find themselves unable to study for a prolonged period because of medical reasons or family emergencies should normally apply for intermission. For this reason, applications for extensions based on medical grounds or grave cause are limited to one month.

### Impact of extensions

Students should weigh the benefits of an extension against the risk of it impacting their ongoing studies.

Students with extensions should note that the timings for supervisions cannot normally be extended (see section [1.3](#) for information).

Students who are granted an extension on their thesis submission may not be able to receive their results in time to graduate in July; and would normally need to wait until a later degree ceremony.

### When to apply

Extension requests must be submitted as early as possible, and no later than 24 hours before the deadline. The only exceptions to the rule would be in case of emergency or accident. Students should work to their current due date until a decision has been communicated.

### Uncertainty

Students who are unsure whether or not an extension is needed should discuss the situation with their College Tutor, Supervisor or Course Director **as soon as they can**, even if at that stage it is not clear how the situation will develop. If appropriate, a request for an extension can then be made once the situation is clear (as long as this is ahead of the deadline). The discussion could be used as support for students requesting a coursework extension, and could help in identifying alternative options to requesting an extension.

### Outcomes

Students will receive an email from the Faculty either approving the requested extension, approving a different due date to the one requested, or declining the request for an extension.

### Application via CamSiS

If any extension request is approved, then all MPhil By Thesis students will **also** be asked to make a request via CamSiS for '[Extending your submission date](#)'. This is because **the Student Registry will also need to approve** the request and update the student record accordingly. For this reason it is important to apply as early as possible to allow time for the approval processes.



## Extensions for students with a disability

The University makes special arrangements for students with a disability, including those with a long-term ongoing condition. If this affects you, you should speak to your College Tutor, and where appropriate with the [Disability Resource Centre](#), in order to establish what appropriate adjustments should be made to your MPhil studies. Further, the MMLL Faculty has two Disability Officers, and you can find out more regarding their roles and how to contact them via the [Student welfare and wellbeing at MMLL webpage](#).

## 1.9 Submission of written work

Electronic (pdf) submission is required, as detailed below.

5,000 word thesis sample	1 pdf file submitted via Moodle
Thesis	1 pdf file submitted via Moodle

The thesis must:

- be written in English, apart from quotations and recognised technical formulae
- be in A4 portrait format
- 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.
- include any photographs or other illustrations scanned into the text

Examiners are not expected to edit work. They will deal with errors of fact and typographical errors that affect the meaning of your work, as well as larger structural issues. The extent to which the text has or has not been properly prepared may influence their recommendation concerning award of the degree. You are therefore advised to check your thesis thoroughly prior to submission to ensure clear, formal English has been used throughout and that there are minimal typing and/or spelling mistakes.

As part of your thesis document there must be:

- a title page containing:
  - the thesis title;
  - your name as it appears on your passport;
  - your College;
  - the date of submission (month and year);
  - a Declaration stating: **This thesis is submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy.**
- a declaration page in the Preface stating: **This thesis 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.**
- a Statement of Length stating that the thesis does not exceed the word limit of 30,000.

Research Impact Statement: In recognition that COVID-19 and/or the situation in Ukraine may have impacted on your research, you are invited to submit a [Research Impact Statement](#) with your thesis, if felt required.

Postgraduate students must keep a minimum number of [terms of research and terms of residence](#) before they can submit their thesis.

There is no requirement for a final hard bound copy for deposit in the University Library.

## 2 DETAILS OF ASSESSMENT

### 2.1 The basis of the assessment

The *MPhil by Thesis* is assessed on the basis of the 30,000 word thesis and a *viva voce* examination on its contents. To fulfil the criteria for the degree, students must also fulfil attendance and monitoring requirements specified above.

### 2.2 Criteria for the award of the MPhil by Thesis

The 30k thesis and the oral performance in the viva are judged against expectations for what can be achieved in eight months of full-time research. The MPhil by Thesis is assessed on principles analogous to those applying to other research degrees such as the PhD. No numerical mark is awarded to the thesis, and as a result the course outcome is pass/fail. Candidates wanting to proceed to a PhD at Cambridge are required to pass and thereby demonstrate readiness as a condition of acceptance.

The subject of a candidate's research is approved by the Degree Committee in the light of what it is reasonable to expect a candidate to complete within the minimum requirement of terms for the degree. The limitations are intended to apply to the scale and scope of work presented for examination, rather than its quality.

The MPhil by Thesis degree is awarded to those who have demonstrated all of the criteria below:

1. provides evidence of a useful contribution to the field of study that demonstrates readiness for doctoral research;
2. understanding of knowledge and critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights in the field of study;
3. includes critical evaluation of current methodologies and wider research in the area of study;
4. provides evidence of an understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry;
5. submission of work of a quality and quantity expected for 8 months of full-time postgraduate research and study.

### 2.3 Good Practice in Research and academic misconduct

The University's policy on Good Practice in Research can be found at: <https://www.research-integrity.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-integrity/good-research-practice>

#### 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 the following page: <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/what-plagiarism/collusion>

Serious cases of academic misconduct 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. 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.

Further information on plagiarism can be found at <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/>

### 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

Thesis Examination is normally carried out by one staff member in TAL or elsewhere within the University and one external examiner.

The research presented in the 30,000 word thesis is evaluated independently by two examiners, at least one of whom is external to the University, on the basis of the written thesis and a *viva voce* examination. The thesis supervisor cannot examine the thesis.

After reading the thesis, each examiner submits an independent signed report normally including a specific recommendation as to whether or not the thesis meets the requirements of the MPhil (cf. the Guide for Examiners for the Degree of PhD, EdD, MSc, MLitt and MPhil by Thesis). The report should provide the Degree Committee with full information about the scope and content of the thesis and its strengths and weaknesses, and indication as to whether the thesis shows readiness for doctoral research.

On the basis of the thesis and the candidate's performance in the viva, the examiners complete a joint report. If the examiners differed appreciably in their independent reports, then the examiners should make their joint report appropriately explicit. The joint report will specify a recommendation of the result (see 3.3).

### 3.1 Viva

A viva (oral examination) is held for all MPhil By Thesis students. It is attended by the two thesis examiners and the student. In the unlikely scenario where both examiners are external to the University, the viva is chaired by an independent Chair. The Chair does not normally ask questions during the examination. In addition to chairing the meeting, his/her role is to ensure that the examination process conforms to the regulations. The viva is expected to last between 30 and 45 minutes. The purpose of the examination is to allow:

- the candidate to defend his or her thesis and clarify any matters raised by the Examiners;
- the Examiners to probe the candidate's knowledge in the general field;
- the Examiners to assure themselves that the work presented is the candidate's own and to clarify matters of any collaboration; and
- the Examiners to come to a definite conclusion about the outcome of the examination.

Special arrangements:

Upon request, [special arrangements](#) can be made in particular cases for candidates on the grounds of disability. These may include rest breaks or candidates bringing food and drink into the examination room. Examiners will be informed of any such arrangements.

### 3.2 Outcome of the examination

The following outcomes are available: approval, revision, or failure. Each outcome may have one or more options, as detailed below:

#### Approval

1. The thesis is satisfactory for the award of the Degree **without correction**.
2. The thesis is satisfactory for the award of the Degree sought subject to **minor or straightforward corrections**. Such corrections would be factual, typographic, limited in extent, and could be completed immediately or shortly after the oral examination. Candidates have a maximum of **three weeks** in which to complete corrections and submit a corrected and approved version of their thesis. These deadlines run from the date the student receives their viva report and list of corrections.
3. The thesis is satisfactory for the award of the Degree sought subject to **more substantial, or less straightforward, corrections**. Such corrections may be extensive but should not require major reworking or reinterpretation of the intellectual content of the thesis. Candidates have a maximum of **six weeks** in which to complete corrections and submit a corrected and approved version of their thesis. These deadlines run from the date the student receives their viva report and list of corrections.

#### Revision

The thesis requires revision such that the Degree Committee are unable to recommend the awarding of the degree without a fresh examination of a revised thesis. Candidates have a maximum of **10 weeks to revise and resubmit** their thesis. These deadlines run from the date the student receives their viva report and list of corrections.

## Failure

The candidate's work is irremediable for the degree – outright failure.

### 3.3 Managing corrections, degree approval and timeline for graduation

If corrections or revision is to be carried out after the oral examination, your examiner will indicate what is required and append a list to your joint report. The joint recommendation should also specify which examiner, or whether both examiners, will check that the corrections/revisions have been completed satisfactorily. You will be asked to supply the corrected thesis in an electronic format with any corrections **highlighted** on it.

If corrections are straightforward and relatively few in number, it may be possible for these to be completed at or immediately after the oral examination.

In most cases, Examiners' recommendations should be released informally so that students may immediately start working on corrections/revisions, but students should note that outcomes are subject to final approval at the final Degree Committee meeting.

At the Degree Committee meeting in early July, final outcomes are approved.

- Where no corrections are required, the Postgraduate Office will then make the necessary administrative arrangements for the award of the MPhil degree.
- Where corrections/revisions are required: once Examiners are satisfied that the corrections/revisions have been completed to their satisfaction, they should confirm this to the Postgraduate Office, who will then make the necessary administrative arrangements for the award of the MPhil degree.

Candidates with no corrections 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 able 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.

### 3.4 Mitigation

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

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

MPhil By Thesis students may also use the Examination Review Procedure to review examination results where "serious illness or other grave cause which has clearly impacted upon the examination itself and of which, for sufficient reason, the Examining Body were not aware".

## 4 TIPS ON PREPARING THE THESIS

### 4.1 Sections, table of contents, and abstract

Labelled sections 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: 250 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 thesis is of relevance.

A 'table of contents' adds an air of professionalism to the thesis. 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.

## 4.2 Style and relevance

Simplicity of style is a virtue, and in an era of information overload there is no merit in obfuscation or prolixity. Get to the point and stick to it – then move on to the next one.

## 4.3 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' thesis; 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.

## 4.4 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 works 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.”)

#### 4.5 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:*

Lieberman, 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 cost, see Section 4.6).

#### 4.6 Footnotes

Footnotes should be used sparingly 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.

#### 4.7 Length

Remember that you are not permitted to exceed 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.

#### 4.8 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 2.3 for this and for the need to be explicit about any collaborative work included in submissions.

#### 4.9 Thesis involving statistical analysis

In general, MPhil theses 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. Theses on topics involving count data may or may not require a formal statistical analysis – the supervisor will advise.

##### 4.9.1 Planning the study design

Students planning to include statistical analyses in their thesis 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 SPSS (or R, if they have been trained in its use) 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.

##### 4.9.2 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.

##### 4.9.3 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.

#### **4.9.4 Striking a balance: not all theses 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.

#### **4.10 Word-processing and data projection**

*Where.* Colleges should have computing facilities, and MMLL has a well-equipped Graduate Centre on the top floor, north wing of the RFB.

In the interests of legibility, all work for monitoring and of course the thesis 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.

*Data projection.* Presentations using PowerPoint or similar software may not 'port' reliably between platforms. Normally the computers being used for the Oral Presentation will be made available beforehand, and it is advisable to check the presentation on the relevant machine.

#### **4.11 Miscellaneous research-related matters**

##### **4.11.1 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 [Moodle](#) 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.**

#### 4.11.2 Help with research expenses

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

#### 4.11.3 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. 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 and emailed to the Postgraduate Office on [postgraduatestudies@mml.cam.ac.uk](mailto:postgraduatestudies@mml.cam.ac.uk)

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.

#### 4.11.4 Risk

The notion of risk is worth considering when embarking on an MPhil project. Very occasionally, the nature of MPhil research may indicate engagement in areas of potential danger, whether outside or indeed within the UK. Students are responsible for evaluating any risks to themselves, seeking appropriate advice, and giving personal safety due priority.

More 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 emotions and 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!

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Prof Kasia Jaszczolt  
Director of the MPhil in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics

1 October 2022