

## **How to prepare for the Written Assessment for History/Modern Languages *ab initio* applicants**

**NB** applicants for History and Modern Languages studying a post-A level (or equivalent) language should refer to the document 'How to prepare for the Modern and Medieval Languages Written Assessment (also used for History and Modern Languages applicants for post-A-level languages only)'.

**This document is relevant only to History and Modern Languages applicants studying a language *ab initio* (from scratch)**

**What is the test?** You can expect to take the one hour written assessment for History and Modern Languages (HML) *ab initio* applicants at the College where you will be interviewed. Remember that it is only one part of our assessment of you as a candidate, alongside the interviews, schoolwork (if your College has requested it), the pre-interview assessment for History, and everything else we get to know about you from your application form.

Take a look at the sample test below. You'll see that answers involve writing in English about a text in English (Section A), as well as answering a series of questions about an invented language (Section B).

### **What is Section A for?**

Reading a complex text like the one used for the assessment is an activity you'll find yourself undertaking very often as an undergraduate, whether the text is in English or another language you are studying here. As a student, you'll be engaging with ideas and putting forward arguments. Don't worry if you're not used to writing summaries. Here are a few basic tips:

- 1) read the text carefully and make sure you understand it;
- 2) jot down what the main points are;
- 3) re-write those points in your own words;
- 4) remember also to tell us that you are writing about a text. Use phrases like *The author suggests...* or *The text states...* Notice that you're mostly going to be using the present tense.
- 5) don't include your opinion in the summary that you are writing, but save that for the second part of the first question, where you are asked to express whether you agree or disagree with the points made.

While an undergraduate degree in languages does involve developing your writing skills in foreign languages, you'll also find yourself writing in English about many things such as books, films, history and philosophy, drawing on ideas you'll read about and hear about in lectures. In this section, the second question allows you to show us your skills in recognising how language is used; although you are writing about English you'll also find that this is valuable practice for engaging with texts in other languages too.

It's important to remember that we don't expect you to know any special literary terms for describing writing styles or rhetorical devices – if you know some and can use them correctly, that's fine, but if not don't worry; as you can see from the marking criteria we're far more interested in seeing whether you can spot how the author of the text writes to persuade the reader to agree with his or her ideas. Some tips:

- 1) read through the passage again and think about the main points being made by the author. How did you know they were main points? Where did they come in the paragraph/structure of the text? How did the author signal that they were important points?
- 2) look closely at how the text begins and how the author establishes the text's theme. If the text includes more than one paragraph, is there a shift in point of view with the new paragraph? How are the paragraphs linked? Does the author pose questions? Does he or she present an idea but then immediately present a counter-argument? Does the author use technical language? Does he or she use emotive language, revealing something of the author's personal view? These are just some questions to think about, but you will most likely think of others.

The marks for Section A are not only for what you say, but how you communicate your observations to us. So don't write down a list of observations in the order that they appear in the text, but group together the most common observations you make and talk about them together. Plan your response so that you explain clearly what is most important in the text and why. Keep an eye on the time too to make sure you have time to complete this task and leave time for Section B.

### **What is Section B for?**

Section B is a linguistic aptitude test, designed to see how you can think logically through information given about an invented language and then apply that information in understanding and using the language.

We have chosen to create a language, rather than use a real one, to ensure that no candidate has an advantage through familiarity with the language used, or a language very similar to it. However, be assured our invented language will always use the Roman alphabet and its grammatical rules will be regular. You will be given a brief introduction to some of the grammatical rules associated with our made-up language and some sample sentences. This information is all that you will need to be able to answer the questions in Section B – no guesswork is required!

Use the information given to look for repetitions of the same or similar words in the sample sentences. Where words look similar, what are the differences? Might the difference be due to the word being plural or singular, as an example. You are provided with a table at the end of the test paper where you can jot down vocabulary items – do use that to help make sense of your observations.

Do ensure you allow yourself enough time to work through all of Section B, which is worth 16 marks in total, with the value of each question indicated at the appropriate point.

**What other things can I do?** Most important of all is to feel calm and prepared. Make sure you know where your test will take place and what time you need to be there. Use the sample test to practice answering the questions in one hour. Take a look also at resources such as HE+ - <http://www.myheplus.com/subjects/modern-languages> - designed by the University of Cambridge especially for students at your level, to extend their knowledge beyond the classroom.

And remember, the written assessment is just one factor among many that will help us decide whether to offer you a place to study here!

**History and Modern Languages (applicants for *ab initio*  
language only)**

**ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT specimen paper**

**NB This assessment is for applicants to History and Modern Languages wishing to study a  
language *ab initio* (from scratch)**

## SECTION A

Please read the following passage carefully and answer the questions following it, IN ENGLISH.

You're in a far-flung corner of the globe, it's the early hours of the morning and you've just checked into your hotel after an exhausting flight. The prospect of a seven-thirty business breakfast is fulling you with dread, and you've a nagging feeling you've forgotten to pack your toothbrush. Very little seems right with the world. But then you notice a sign in the corner of the bathroom: 'Please to bathe inside the tub.' Despite your tiredness, you can't help but smile. Yes – you're lost in translation.

All over the world, from Beijing to Buenos Aires, in hotels and restaurants and taxis and zoos (yes, zoos), these priceless nuggets of verbal dottiness lie in wait, ready to brighten the lives of jaded voyagers who happen to chance upon them. They are the reward points on our Travel loyalty card. They are the treats we earn for enduring mislaid luggage, deep-vein thrombosis and stony-faced stewardesses. Never failing to amuse, they put a spring in our step with nothing more complicated than an off-balance vocabulary and some iffy syntax. It's English, Jim, but not as we know it.

Sometimes you can tell what was meant: 'Our wine list leaves you nothing to hope for.' Sometimes you can't: 'Nobody is allowed to sit on both sides of the boat.' Sometimes you're not sure if you can tell or not: the Indian hotel, for instance, that warns 'No spiting on the walls.' Is that 'spitting' or 'writing'? If the former, why only on the walls? Occasionally you're left in doubt as to whether the language is wrong or not. A notice in one Shanghai hotel reads: 'It is forbidden to play the recorder in guest rooms.' Do they really mean 'recorder'? If so, *why*? Has there been an epidemic of people playing that instrument? Do the Chinese take particular offence at it, even more than we do? Is that possible?

The beauty of getting lost in translation is that you never know where you'll end up. Some examples mess with your head: 'If you wish, you may open the window. Do not open the window.' Some are inadvertently beautiful: 'Little grass is smiling slightly, please walk on the pavement.' Some verge on philosophy: 'Danger comes soonest when it's despised.' However, amused as we are by other nations' fumbblings with our language, we should never forget that their English is infinitely better than our Thai/Polish/Vietnamese. Indeed, sometimes it's better than our English, whether from the land of Shakespeare or the Land of the Free.

### QUESTIONS:

1. What are the main points of the author's argument? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
2. How does the writer persuade us of his point of view? Please give examples from the text to support your answer.

***You should spend 30-40 minutes on this section.***

**[32 marks]**

## SECTION B

The following exercises require you to:

- i) translate between English and an invented language, Qazju;
- ii) work out some basic aspects of Qazju's grammar, using the provided English translations to help you.

**Please note the following observations about Qazju:**

- 1) like English, Qazju has a fixed word order (e.g. only "I love John" not "John love I" or "John I love");**
- 2) like English, Qazju has singular ("cat") and plural ("cats") nouns;**
- 3) like English, Qazju differentiates between different ways of expressing the past tense, for example "I ate" and "I have eaten";**
- 4) partly like English, Qazju adds endings to a basic syllable to change its grammar (e.g. "cat" > "cats", "love" > "loved")**
- 5) however, Qazju is different from English in that it does not have words for "the", "a" or "an". There is no way to distinguish between indefinite (e.g. "a cat") and definite ("the cat") nouns.**

You will be given a set of sample sentences in Qazju with their English translation. In order to translate between the two languages, you will need to **examine and compare the sample Qazju sentences and their English translation** in order to work out Qazju's vocabulary and how its words and sentences are put together.

Be very careful when translating that you

- i) put the words in the correct order;
- ii) choose the appropriate verb tense;
- iii) use the correct noun form (i.e. singular or plural).

You may find it helpful to compile a 'vocabulary list' for Qazju as you go along (this will not be assessed) – a grid is provided for you at the end of the test paper.

Total marks available for the test: **16** marks.

***You should spend 20-30 minutes on this section.***

Sample sentences:

**Qazju**

kalama gadzu fadnuk  
nedunu fadnuk zedgen  
felmu kennu qakfuzu  
jefuna zedgenen gadzuzu  
vefama nuzen gidnek  
jefna fadnuk kafqukuk

**English**

*the girl cuddled a goat  
the goat ate the beetle  
the waiter has brought a meal  
the beetles saw the girls  
the bear stole a sandwich  
a goat has seen the children*

Q1. What is the Qazju for:

- (a) girl \_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)
- (b) beetles \_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)
- (c) child \_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)
- (d) meals \_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)
- (e) has stolen \_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)
- (f) waiters \_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)

Q2. Translate into English:

(a) nedunu fadnukuk qakfuzu.

**(3 marks)**

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(b) kalma kennu nuzen.

**(3 marks)**

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Q3. Each item in a sentence has a grammatical role. The following sentences each contain:

- a subject (the 'agent'/participant doing the action)
- a verb
- an object (the 'undergoer'/participant who the action is done to)

In the following Qazju sentences, which word corresponds to the subject, the verb, and the object?  
Give the answer **in Qazju**:

(a) In the sentence **kalma gadzu kennu**, which word is the **verb**?

\_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)

(b) In the sentence **vefama nuzen gidnek**, which word is the **object**?

\_\_\_\_\_ (½ mark)





CANDIDATE.....

TOTAL SCORE (/48)

Section A.

Question 1. What are the main points of the author’s argument? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

Comprehension, summary and response (16 marks)

Subtotal out of 16: \_\_\_\_

	Comprehension	Summary	Organization of ideas	Response to passage
4	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear comprehension of all aspects of the passage	<input type="checkbox"/> Very effective summary of main points	<input type="checkbox"/> Well structured answer	<input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent and cogent response to passage
3	<input type="checkbox"/> Good comprehension of the passage	<input type="checkbox"/> Competent summary of main points	<input type="checkbox"/> Generally clear organization of ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Convincing response to passage
2	<input type="checkbox"/> Gaps in comprehension of passage with some irrelevant material	<input type="checkbox"/> Summary misses some key ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Some attempt to organize ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair but unambitious response to passage
1	<input type="checkbox"/> Significant misunderstandings in comprehension of passage	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited summary showing a number of deficiencies	<input type="checkbox"/> Disorganized	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited response to passage

2. How does the writer persuade us of his point of view? Please give examples from the text to support your answer.

(Total of 16 marks available)

Subtotal out of 16: \_\_\_\_

	Analysis	Evidence	Expression	Organization
4	<input type="checkbox"/> Perceptive analysis of a range of techniques (even if specialized terms are not used)	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly effective and detailed examples indicated	<input type="checkbox"/> Expression is precise, fluent and very persuasive	<input type="checkbox"/> Answer is complete, with ideas organized very effectively
3	<input type="checkbox"/> Competent analysis of a range of techniques (even if specialized terms are not used)	<input type="checkbox"/> A number of effective examples indicated	<input type="checkbox"/> Expression is fairly precise and fluent	<input type="checkbox"/> Answer is reasonably full, with ideas structured coherently



<b>2</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Some techniques identified	<input type="checkbox"/> Some relevant examples indicated	<input type="checkbox"/> Expression is reasonably clear but little or no evidence of more complex vocabulary or syntax	<input type="checkbox"/> Answer is a little sketchy; some evidence of an attempt to organize ideas
<b>1</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Very basic response, demonstrating limited or no awareness of relevant techniques	<input type="checkbox"/> Few or no relevant examples indicated	<input type="checkbox"/> Very basic expression which sometimes hampers the communication of ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Answer is overly brief and/or poorly organized

**Section B.**

<b>Question number</b>	<b>Marks available</b>	<b>Marks awarded</b>
<b>1</b>	3	
<b>2</b>	6	
<b>3</b>	1	
<b>4</b>	3	
<b>5</b>	3	

**Subtotal out of 16: \_\_\_\_\_**