

MA Linguistics Offerholder Information Session 2024 – Q&A

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Programme Content

How much background in Linguistics do I need at undergraduate level?

The general (conversion) MA programme is designed to be appropriate for students who have no background in Linguistics, or a limited background in Linguistics. We assume no prior background and start at a foundational level, but we aim to bring students to a high level very quickly so that they are prepared to undertake a dissertation project at a high level. This programme is also appropriate for students who have some background in Linguistics (for example, a few of classes as part of an English degree, Literature degree, Languages degree, etc.). Students in this situation typically find that the first few weeks of classes will review some familiar material, but that the classes quickly move to a level that is more advanced than their prior experience.

The specialisation degree programmes are designed for students who already have an extensive prior background in Linguistics, usually the equivalent of an undergraduate Linguistics degree. These programmes assume that the student already has a broad understanding of foundational linguistics concepts across sub-areas and a fairly advanced understanding of the sub-area of the specialisation. The modules begin at an advanced level and do not cover basic concepts.

If you have an offer for the general conversion MA programme, but think that your prior experience would make one of the specialisation programmes more suitable, then feel free to get in touch with us before or soon after enrolment. We can review your prior background and transcripts and offer advice on whether a transfer to one of the specialisation programmes would be more suitable for you. Transferring to one of the specialisation MA programmes from the general MA programme requires review of your application and approval from the programme director of the specialisation programme.

To what extent can I tailor the general MA programme to focus on a specific sub-area (e.g., syntax, phonology, semantics, etc.)?

The general (conversion) MA programme is designed to give you a broad foundation in all of the core areas of Linguistics through the compulsory core modules. However, you still have the ability to tailor the programme quite strongly to focus on the sub-area that you are most interested in through your option modules and dissertation. You are able to choose two option modules, and you can write your dissertation in the sub-area of your choice. If you choose to do all of your option modules and your dissertation in the same sub-area, this means that you can take up to 120/180 credits in the same sub-area. So, you have the opportunity to specialise quite a bit, even on the general MA programme, if you would like to do so. Alternatively, you can decide to spread your option modules around to get a broad sampling of different sub-areas.

Specialisation programmes

Is the Specialization in Computational Linguistics a new programme?

Yes, this will be starting in the next academic year (2024-25).

How technical are the courses in the Computational Linguistics specialisation programme?

Some basic background in programming is required but it does not require any specific background knowledge in Computational Linguistics. Anyone who has received an offer for this course will be contacted by the Computational Linguistics programme directors, Sebastian Schuster and Andrew Lamont, shortly.

Enrolment

Can I switch from full-time to part-time study?

It is possible to switch the mode of study before the start of the academic year from part-time to full-time or from full-time to part-time as long as you do not have any visa or funding restrictions. Please contact pals.lingteachingoffice@ucl.ac.uk with your student number and details of your request so that we can pass this on to our Admissions Office.

If there are extenuating circumstances, a switch may be possible at a later stage, please contact the programme director to discuss this.

Do you accept part-time students on the MA Linguistics programme?

Yes, you can study the programme on a part-time basis over two calendar years. As a part-time student, you will take fewer modules in each year but please note that teaching does place during the working day.

Is it possible to do the MA Linguistics degree full-time and also work a part-time job?

This is advice from recent MA students:

The full-time MA programme is quite intensive, and will take up much of your time. You may find it difficult to work a job in addition to doing the programme full-time, especially at certain parts of the year (like exam time), though people differ of course. This may be easier to handle if you have a job that is very flexible or if you have a lot of control over the hours that you work.

Preparation for the programme

What advice do you have for preparing for the course before the start of term or at the beginning of term? Is there anything students find helpful to do to prepare?

- It is helpful to do some reading in advance, as the classes are quite fast paced once they begin. Keeping on top of readings, preferably in advance of class, is helpful when classes start. This helps you to take in more during the lectures.
- Check the timetable before the beginning of term so that you have a good idea of how the classes are scheduled during the week.
- Consider joining the UCL writing lab once term starts, as it helps a lot with essay writing. The department also provides support for writing, so take advantage of this.
- Take advantage of extra training sessions offered by UCL and the department, including writing, reading, library skills, career courses, etc.
- How you proceed once the term starts is really important. Make sure to always come to lecture, attend seminars, do the reading, etc., to really stay on top of things.
- Don't be afraid to contact the lecturers of specific modules (even in advance) to ask questions or to get reading lists!

Is there a list of books I can read to get a better idea of the subject?

Reading suggestions can be found at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/linguistics-reading-list>. They are suggestions and students are not expected to have read these before the start of the programme.

Are there any module specific reading lists?

Module specific reading lists are available at

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/library/learning-teaching-support/teaching-learning-services-tls/readinglistsucl> but may be restricted to current students. You may also find reading lists on the

module information sheets linked up at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/linguistics-plin-modules>, though please note that these may be from previous academic years and are therefore subject to change.

Module selection

What help is available for selecting optional and elective modules?

Optional modules allow you to choose a module from a selected range, e.g. choose two out of three modules from a list; elective modules allow a wider choice.

For the general MA Linguistics and the MA Linguistics with specialisation in Computational Linguistics, we will send out detailed module selection information and arrange an information session in early September, just before module selection opens.

For the syntax and phonology specialisation programmes, your programme director will be available to help you tailor your module selection to build in your prior Linguistics studies.

Once you arrive, you have time until early December to make changes to your Term 2 module selection.

Can we take elective modules in Term 1?

For the general MA programme, it is not usually possible to take an elective module in Term 1 as this term is dedicated to giving you a solid background in theoretical linguistics. Further information will be provided in early September, in the documentation and information session arranged with offerholders.

Can we study specific languages?

You cannot normally take a course to learn a language, but data from different languages is used across most modules and you can often use examples from a specific language to support your argument. Students also often study an aspect of a specific language for their dissertation.

Can I take option modules from other departments/schools (languages, computer science, philosophy, speech, etc.)?

From our perspective, we are usually happy for you to take option modules from other departments or other schools. However, the possibility of this varies greatly depending on which modules, and which other departments/schools you are interested in because the other department (and the module leader) has to accept you onto the module. Some modules have very little space for outside students, and some have very specific prerequisites. Many students do end up taking option modules offered by other departments, and we are typically happy to assist you in pursuing this, but it depends on the other department's approval.

Is there an opportunity to study experimental linguistics?

Yes, our department places a strong focus on experimental methods for studying language, in addition to more traditional linguistic analysis. There are modules that focus on experimental linguistics that you can choose, and you can also choose to focus on experimental linguistics for your dissertation.

Is there an opportunity to study corpus linguistics?

It may be possible to study an option module on this topic offered by another department, details are included on our list of option modules. Occasionally, we have seminars in the department that touch on this area, including a recent seminar led by one of our alumni focusing on NLP, but these are not held every year.

I am interested in language and the brain. Can I study this on the MA Linguistics?

Our department very much treats Linguistics as part of the cognitive sciences. This approach is reflected in our teaching and research. We have modules that focus explicitly on language and the brain, such as the Neurolinguistics option module. In addition, we are part of the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences (Faculty of Brain Sciences), and we share a building with the Language and Cognition department, so there is a lot of opportunity to get involved with seminars, modules, and research related to language and the brain in and around our department.

Teaching

How many contact hours are there per week?

Each module typically has one two-hour lecture and one seminar/tutorial per week, so you will spend around 2-4 hours per week in class per module. Full-time students typically take 4 modules per term (term 1 and term 2). Part-time students typically take 2 modules per term.

What do general weeks look like on this course?

In most cases, modules tend to have a larger lecture group with all the students on the module attending the module which is around two hours alongside a smaller tutorial/workshop for one hour. The lecture and tutorial times may vary with modules that may be slightly longer than this. In each term, you will be expected to take four modules. Timetables are usually designed in such a way that one day is free of obligatory classes, but that can't be guaranteed. Classes may be scheduled from Monday 9 am to Friday 6 pm, on occasion an elective module or a tutorial may be taught until 7 pm but other options will then be available. Wednesday afternoons are generally free of teaching. Regarding workload, modules are designed to take approximately 10 hours per week which includes the time spent in lectures and tutorials, reading, studying, working on assignments, etc.

Where is most of the teaching held?

Chandler House is the building where the Linguistics staff, academic staff, teaching office, and Linguistics library is based. You can find a link to a virtual guided tour at <https://youtu.be/4p8RijV7y60>.

There are some lecture and tutorial spaces but the UCL Central Timetabling team assign the classes which means not all classes will be based in Chandler House.

Lectures and Tutorials

People may not always get a chance to ask questions in lectures, but after this you have a tutorial too. These are much smaller groups so you get to know classmates, participate in discussions and groupwork. Therefore, you get a mixed range of interactions with your lecturer and fellow students.

Assessment

What are the assessment methods?

There is a wide variety across the modules. You may be assessed on weekly quizzes, coursework (typically essays), traditional exams, oral presentations, and a long research project (dissertation). We have a webpage with information on Linguistics (or PLIN) modules, which link to assessment and other information: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/linguistics-plin-modules>

Do students receive individual feedback on assessments?

Yes, you will receive individual feedback on your coursework submissions. Students who obtain a fail mark in one of their assessments will in addition receive further advice from one of the teachers on the module.

Dissertation

How do I find a supervisor for my Master project?

There is a lot of support available to help you find a supervisor for your project, including an information session arranged by the MA Dissertation coordinator.

Since this is a conversion programme, we do not expect you to develop specific interests or ideas for a Dissertation topic until the majority of the module teaching is complete.

Students on the conversion programme start approaching supervisors around April. Staff provide information about which topics they can supervise, and information about any specific projects that they have that students can join. There are some projects available that are already designed, but students can also approach staff with their own ideas for projects to work on. When it is time to decide on dissertation projects, students can set up meetings with potential supervisors to figure out whom they would like to have as a supervisor and what project they want to work on. It is acceptable to "shop around" and talk to multiple potential supervisors before making a decision.

For the specialisation programmes, you might be able to decide on your research topic earlier.

Does the research topic have to be related to the research topic of my supervisor?

It will generally be in the area of your supervisor's expertise but does not necessarily have to in their specific research topic. You and your supervisor will agree on the topic, and you can also explain what you are interested in and what you are good at.

Careers

After one year of studying Linguistics, what kind of jobs are available?

The programme is designed as a conversion course which helps facilitate further studies in Linguistics or in other related areas. The programme also does prepare you with a lot of analytical skills that will be valuable in a lot of different careers. For instance, many students have gone into marketing and journalism, media and communication, language teaching, speech and language technology, translating and interpreting, management; other students carry on studying linguistics with a view to working in Linguistics in academia.

Will completing this programme help me get onto an MPhil/PhD programme?

The MA Linguistics is an intensive course which covers all the main areas of theoretical linguistics and also gives you a taste of empirical/experimental work in the field, so it provides essential background and some training in research skills. If you do well in the programme, your chances of being accepted onto an MPhil/PhD programme in theoretical linguistics are good. However, it is unlikely that you could proceed straight after completing the MA Linguistics programme to a PhD due to the very early application deadline for PhD programmes (and especially for funding) - it is usually too early for a student to be able to develop a good research proposal. Most students find that they need to first finish the Master's dissertation, before they are ready to think about an appropriate topic for doctoral research, so there is usually an interim year between the Master's and starting a PhD. However, there may be exceptions to this and it may depend on where you want to go to do your doctoral work.

The recently established MPhil programme may be of interest:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/research/linguistics/study-linguistics/mphil-linguistics>.

Is it recommended (or compulsory) to do a second year of a more specialised degree after the general MA Linguistics in order to go into a PhD programme?

It certainly is not necessary. A number of our general MA students go directly into a PhD programme. Even on the general MA programme, it is possible to go into depth in a specific sub-area (see related question above), and the general MA degree provides students with the background to produce dissertations of a very high quality. If you do well on the programme, you should be in a good position to look directly towards a PhD programme at the completion of your MA degree.

Other opportunities

How does the department help students to get to know each other?

We will set up a Whatsapp group for students studying on the MA Linguistics programme in 2024-25, which offerholders can join to get to know others before arrival.

In Welcome week, there will be some social events where you can meet others, and you will of course also get to know each other in lectures and tutorials.

LingSoc, the Linguistics student society, also provides opportunities to get to know students, including undergraduate and PhD students in Linguistics.

How much interaction is there with other departments?

Generally, dissertation supervisors are assigned internally from the Linguistics department.

However, in special instances it has been possible to be supervised from a different department although this requires various steps and is not the typical case.

Nonetheless, you can learn from other modules beyond the Linguistics department either by taking an elective module or by auditing a module from another department. If the module tutor allows you to audit their course, you will have access to all of the module material and be able to attend the lectures, however, you would not be assessed or receive any credits for this.

Other than coursework, what opportunities do we have to learn about current research and meet researchers in Linguistics and Language Sciences more broadly?

There is [a seminar series within Linguistics](#) which occurs fortnightly during term time where external speakers are invited to give talks on specific areas and discuss papers. This is a great opportunity to network for future research opportunities! Other departments within the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences and beyond offer similar seminars you will be able to attend.

Accommodation

Applications for UCL accommodation will open in March 2024, and current students have found this type of accommodation more convenient and lower in cost than private providers. Further information at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/accommodation/accommodation>.

Contacting Us

For any administrative questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Linguistics Teaching Office (pals.lingteachingoffice@ucl.ac.uk), and for any academic questions, please contact the Programme Directors, Jamie White (j.c.white@ucl.ac.uk) and Wing Yee Chow (wingyee.chow@ucl.ac.uk).