

Frequently Asked Questions

A. Questions from Applicants and Non-matriculated Students

[1] How do I go about becoming a graduate non-matriculated student?

You can go to the following site for information.

http://www.outreach.washington.edu/nondegree/register/steps_gnm.asp

[2] How competitive is the graduate admission process?

We normally can accept only about 25-30% of the applicants. For example, a couple of years ago, we had about 60 applicants and accepted about 15. Usually applicants are admitted to the MA program with the possibility of continuing to the PhD if admitted to that program (see below).

[3] What are some of the admission criteria?

Here are some of the criteria that we take to be important when we make admission decisions:

- (a) linguistics coursework successfully completed - the more the better
- (b) "glowing" recommendations from linguistics instructors
- (c) good grades and GRE scores
- (d) a Statement of Purpose that describes the applicant's motivation for graduate study, as well as possible areas of research. The more specific, the better.
- (e) written work dealing with linguistic research and/or presentations at linguistic conferences

Note that they are just general guidelines, and we have no fixed set of criteria that are applied to evaluate applicants.

B. Questions that are relevant to both MA and PhD degrees

[1] How do I register for thesis or independent study credits?

Through a staff person. Please ask the office manager or administrator. You will need to have permission of the instructor, which you can have sent to the office manager by email (phoneme@UW) so she knows it's okay to register you.

[2] Can an independent study course with a professor fulfill a specific course requirement?

The answer is no, unless there is no way that the requirement can be satisfied with regular classes. There is no written rule about this, but try to use the existing regular courses to fulfill requirements whenever possible, and this ought to be possible under normal circumstances. Let the GPC know if such a situation arises.

In general, independent study classes are registered for the credit/non-credit option. You can petition to the graduate school to change it to a numerical grade if you wish. If you would like to use an independent course toward your degree, you should do this first. Then you should talk to the GPC and your advisor to show why this is needed.

[3] Can I start taking thesis credits even if I am not finished with my course work?

Yes you can, but you must obtain your advisor's approval.

[4] Can lower level seminars (Ling 480) be used to satisfy MA or PhD requirements?

It depends on the content of the course, but we see no reason to exclude lower level seminars categorically. The student should be able to make an argument why she wants to take it and why it should count toward her degree, though.

[5] Can I take a semantics (or semantics-related) course offered in a different department to satisfy the semantics requirement?

You are expected to take Ling 442 (Semantics I) for your MA degree and Ling 479 (Semantics II) for your PhD degree. (When their graduate-level "withers" Ling 542 (Semantic Theory I) and Ling 579 (Semantic Theory II) are implemented, you will need to take these.) Sometimes, courses about lexical semantics are offered in our department or elsewhere, but students are expected to take the above two courses first.

[6] What is the department's policy on on-leaves?

1. Leave will not normally be granted for more than one consecutive academic year (3 quarters plus a summer). During the entire MA-PhD program, leave will not be granted for more than 9 quarters (not including summers) Students entering the PhD program with an MA from elsewhere may not accrue more than 6 quarters (plus summers) of on-leave status.

2. Students must consult with their MA or PhD supervisory committee before going on-leave. With this committee, they will form a written plan for making progress toward the degree (a calendar for writing or completing a set of readings while on-leave, a plan for attending colloquia. etc.), including an agreement to meet with the supervisor while on-leave (by email if they are not in the area); the time when they will return; and the coursework and/or written work they will be prepared to complete when they return. The plan should contain an overall goal for completing all degree requirements. At that time, the student will sign a contract stating that they understand that leave is generally not granted beyond the number of quarters specified in (1) above.

3. The graduate program coordinator cannot approve on-leave petitions until the above requirements have been met and the plan and contract presented in writing, Last-minute petitions cannot be granted except in case of unforeseeable emergency.

[7] How do I make sure that I am (or will be) taking the right courses, making progress, etc.?

Keep in touch with your supervisor and other members of your (MA or PhD) committee. Regarding requirements, you should fill out the worksheet and show it to GPC to make sure that some specific degree requirements are (or will be) met.

C. Questions about MA degree requirements

[1] How many quarters do I have to complete the MA?

You may take no more than 6 quarters, not counting summer.

[2] What is the minimum of thesis credits (Ling 700) required to graduate?

9 credits. You can distribute the 9 credits over several quarters.

[3] I have had enough credits of Ling 700. Can I still take some Ling 700 credits if I get my advisor's permission?

Yes. There is no set maximum number of Ling 700 credits that you are allowed to take. Make sure that your advisor agrees with your plan before you go over 9 credits of thesis credits (Ling 700).

[4] I am an MA student and would like to graduate this quarter. Do I need to be registered this quarter to graduate? Do I need to be registered for some thesis credits this quarter even if I have already taken enough (i.e. 9 or more) credits of Ling 700?

You need to be registered for SOME credits in the quarter in that case. However, the credits do not have to be thesis credits provided that you have had enough thesis credits (9 or more) previously.

[5] Do I have to take the 507-509 series (Syntactic Theory) to satisfy the syntax requirement? Or could I take 461 and 462 (Syntax 1 and 2) instead?

You must take 507 and 508. As a graduate student, you are expected to know the materials taught in the 507-509 series. Syntax I and II are designed for undergraduate students. The Syntactic Theory series is specifically designed for graduate students.

[6] To satisfy the two phonetics/phonology courses requirement, can I take two phonetics courses?

Yes.

[7] (This concerns Romance linguistics MA only.) What does “3 courses in syntax and phonology/phonetics” mean?

This means that you have two options: (i) take two syntax courses and one phonetics/phonology course; (ii) take one syntax course and two courses in the phonetics/phonology area.

[8] How do I satisfy the foreign language requirement for the MA?

You have to pass a translation test. The idea is to make sure that you know the language well enough to read the (relevant) linguistics literature in it. This exam should be taken at the latest during the quarter before the student plans to finish the MA.

(i) A faculty member familiar with the area of the student's specialization (e.g. phonology) and the chosen language chooses an appropriate passage (e.g. a part of a paper; a part of a book) in the target language. If the faculty in question so wishes, s/he can be the evaluator as well. Otherwise, some other faculty member who is familiar with this language will be the evaluator.

(ii) A faculty member (usually the one who chooses the passage or the GPC) administers the exam. The student and this faculty member agree on the time and the date of the exam, and the student can spend up to 2 hours translating the passage into English. Use of dictionaries is permitted.

(iii) The evaluator examines the translation and then decides whether the student passes the test or not.

D. Questions about PhD degree requirements

[1] What are the admission criteria for the PhD program?

If you wish to continue with a PhD in Linguistics, it is important to understand that completing your MA degree here does not guarantee your admission to the PhD program. The job market for PhDs in Linguistics has historically always been very tight, and the faculty feels it is not doing anyone a service by admitting them to the PhD program if they are not really cut out for it. This mainly means that one has to be an independent, internally-motivated worker, with not only a strong talent for the field but also that fairly rare ability to generate novel research ideas and carry them out in a reasonable amount of time. Thus, performance on the MA thesis is an important criterion. The Graduate Program Coordinator will ask your MA thesis supervisor to advise the faculty on how you did as an independent researcher. Other faculty will also chime in about your performance in their classes, in research, as a TA, etc.

It is also necessary for you to get strong support from your supervisor-to-be. That is, you should talk to the faculty member that you want to work with before you complete your MA degree, and

express your desire to pursue a PhD degree so that your intention is known. If this faculty member supports your case, then your chances of getting into the PhD program are very good. On the other hand, if you cannot find a faculty member who agrees to be your supervisor, your case is unlikely to be considered.

[2] Is there a formal procedure for forming a PhD committee?

A PhD student should form a PhD committee (three members) by the end of the first quarter after completing the MA thesis (or after being admitted as a PhD student if s/he comes from a different institution). Again, the student should inform GPC and the administrator. Unlike an MA committee, a PhD committee has an official status in the graduate school.

[3] Is a "generals" committee the same as a PhD committee?

Formally, there is no such thing as a “generals committee”. The official documentation says this: “The student’s PhD committee will administer a General Examination.” But you can change its members if this becomes necessary. A PhD committee consists of at least three members who actually evaluate your work (referred to as the Reading Committee in the on-line documentation) and a GSR (Graduate School Representative). So there is a difference between a Reading Committee and a PhD committee. The formula is this: PhD Committee = Reading Committee + GSR [+any additional non-reading members]. The GSR must now be selected by the committee. (The Graduate School recently changed the rule.)

[4] How soon should I take general exams?

It is assumed that you will take general exams within 12 quarters of beginning the MA (or 6 of beginning the PhD), not counting summer.

[5] What type of publication fulfills the “publication/presentation” requirement for the PhD?

Part of the PhD degree requirement is that you deliver two papers. This can be done at a conference elsewhere or as a colloquium here at UW.

The dissertation is expected to be “publishable”. The idea is that some revisions will turn it into a book or articles.

[6] Who can enroll for 2 credits in linguistics seminars?

The two credit option for seminars is for those who have completed the course requirements for their degree and want to concentrate upon thesis/dissertation writing. So, basically, if you still have courses that you must take, then you cannot use the two-credit option.

[7] Can the 30 additional credits requirement for a PhD (after the MA) be satisfied by seminar courses taken for the 2 credit option?

No. No course fulfilling any specific requirement can be taken for the 2-credit (no paper) option.

This follows from the question/answer that immediately precedes this Q/A.

[8] Can non-language instruction courses in a language area fulfill the major or minor requirement?

Yes. Courses such as “The structure of Turkish”, “The phonology of Russian”, “Historical Chinese Phonology”, “Syntax of Japanese”, “History of English”, “History of the Germanic Languages”, and the like are non-language instruction courses and can be used to satisfy major or minor requirements, as long as they are relevant. Needless to say, literature or culture courses (e.g., History of Russia) do not count. Courses that involve actual language instruction (e.g., Beginning Chinese) do not count either.

[9] Can I take Ling 800 (dissertation) before the general exam?

Yes. But talk to your advisor before you do so because this would mean that you are taking Ling 800 rather than a “regular” class.

[10] The departmental requirement for a PhD includes “30 additional credits of coursework” (beyond an MA degree). Could they be satisfied by Ling 800 (dissertation)? How about Ling 600 (independent study classes)?

According to the graduate school "quick reference" page, a PhD student is required to complete at least 60 credits as a PhD student at UW. Since at least 27 dissertation credits must be completed at UW, this means that at least 33 non-dissertation credits must be completed as a PhD student at UW. Thus, the 30 additional credits requirement is subsumed under the graduate requirement. The 30 credits could be basically anything, including independent study classes (Ling 600).

See <http://www.grad.washington.edu/stsv/quickref.htm> in particular the following requirements (see the web page for details):

90 total credits (30 credits could be from a MA degree at UW or elsewhere)

60 credits while being a UW PhD student

18 credits of UW course work at 500 or above while being a UW PhD student before general exam

18 numerically graded 400/500 courses while being a UW PhD student before general exam

30 credits before general exam while being a UW PhD student

[11] Regarding the breadth language requirement for the PhD, is it possible to take a relevant language class S/NS (satisfactory/non-satisfactory) in order to fulfill the

requirement? Also, does the exotic language count towards 30 additional coursework credits (especially if it's taken S/NS)?

It is okay to take it S/NS. The language course credits DO NOT count toward the 30 credits.

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