Modern and Medieval Languages

Modern and Medieval Languages (MML) at Cambridge offers students the possibility of combining advanced language learning of two languages with the study of a wide range of literary, linguistic and cultural options.

The course is extremely flexible and allows final-year students the additional option of reading papers in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic; Classics; English; History; Philosophy; Human, Social and Political Sciences; and Theology. In their third year, MML students spend a year aboard studying, working or volunteering before returning to Cambridge for their fourth and final year.

Peterhouse admits students for any two of French, German, Italian, Russian, Portuguese or Spanish. Alternatively, one of these languages can be combined with Classical Latin and Classical Greek, or with a Middle-Eastern language, such as Arabic. One of the two languages can be learnt from scratch ("ab initio"), with the exceptions of French and Latin. Detailed information for each language can be found under the Subject heading of the website of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages.

Modern and Medieval Languages at Peterhouse

Peterhouse has two Professors in French (Prof Michael Moriarty and Prof Mari Jones), a College Lecturer in Spanish and External Teaching Officers in German, Russian and Italian, and seeks to provide its students with the best possible tuition whatever their choice of language. The College employs a French lecteur/lectrice every year from the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris who is responsible for teaching conversation classes and is available to provide help with all aspects of language work.

Students’ views

‘I loved every minute of studying MML at Peterhouse – my cohort was really small, which helped me to settle in quickly, and all the lecturers & supervisors in College were infectiously enthusiastic about their subjects. Plus, the termly MML meetings in College introduced me to people I’d never have met otherwise!’

Jenni, Modern Languages graduate 2016, now third year PhD student at Peterhouse
‘Peterhouse is a wonderfully friendly community in which to study Modern and Medieval Languages. I have benefitted hugely from the excellent levels of individual support, as well as the fantastic resources that are on offer, not least the library. The Cambridge MML course is very broad and diverse, allowing you to explore not only the language and literature, but also the culture, philosophy, and history of your chosen language(s). There is a very active MML Society at Peterhouse, where 4th years have the chance to present exciting aspects of their studies and research to younger years. With beautiful surroundings and architecture, you cannot but be inspired to aim high.’

Ben, Modern Languages finalist 2020

Course requirements

Applicants are expected to be studying at least one of the languages they wish to study to A level or equivalent. One or two subjects from English Literature, English Literature & Language, History or additional modern or classical language are advantageous. Please note it is not possible to study Modern and Medieval Languages as an affiliated student at Peterhouse, nor is it possible to study French as an ab initio subject. Detailed information on application requirements can be found on the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages website.

The application process

We ask our MML applicants to send us two representative examples of recent essays. Candidates intending to read two post-A level (i.e. not ab initio) languages at Cambridge should submit one essay in each target language. Candidates intending to read one post-A level language and one ab initio language should submit two essays in the A level language to be read at Cambridge. Where particular difficulties exist, we are always able to suggest other kinds of work which may help us in our assessment.

Whilst in Cambridge for their interviews, candidates will be asked to sit a written assessment. The same format of assessment will be used across all Colleges and more information can be found on the University website. You can expect either two or three interviews, depending on your choice of languages. As we want everyone to be interviewed by a specialist in each of his/her chosen languages, you may find that one of your interviewers is from another Cambridge College.

You will be interviewed about your choice of languages, whether you intend to take these on from school or begin ab initio. The interview will take place in English for the most part, but you should expect some of the interview to be conducted in the foreign languages you are applying for if you have already studied them to GCSE level or beyond (the standard expected will, of course, be adjusted according to your level
of study and the opportunities you have had to travel to countries where the language is spoken).

The interviews for the A level language or languages you want to read at Cambridge will contain questions about a short piece of prose in each language, which will be given to you shortly before your interview - time is allowed to read over the piece privately before the interview. This exercise will be designed to reveal your ability to comprehend and think about a text, beyond the purely literal meaning. If you will be taking one of your languages at Cambridge ab initio, the interview for this language will be intended to judge your motivation and suitability to read this language. No preparation or prior knowledge will be necessary, but some prior investigation into the relevant culture(s) associated with the language and a very basic knowledge of some of the challenges of the language in question will go a long way towards showing your motivation and enthusiasm for the ab initio language.

We would generally expect candidates who are native speakers of one of the languages offered to apply to study two additional languages.

Your interviewers will be looking to assess your potential as well as your achievements and they will be seeking to establish what you can do with what you have learnt. They will be looking for intelligence (an ability to think for yourself, to think analytically, critically and on the spot); linguistic knowledge and aptitude (a general interest in language issues, fluency and accuracy in your chosen languages); good powers of expression in both English and your chosen languages; motivation; and suitability for the course.

Typical conditional offers

Our typical conditional offer for MML is A*AA at A level. IB offers are usually for a minimum of 40-42 points, to include 776 or 777 at Higher level in relevant subjects. Offers are designed to be realistic, taking into account individual circumstances, and to reflect potential and likely levels of achievement. Most of those who receive offers will attain the grades required.