

Applying to the MA/PhD Program

The MA/PhD Program in Linguistics at the CUNY Graduate Center welcomes your application. Here we provide some tips on how to approach your application to the Graduate Center. To begin, consider your professional goals. For some goals, an MA might be an appropriate degree. CUNY offers both a general linguistics MA degree and a more specialized MA degree in computational linguistics. For other goals, such as a research and teaching career in academia, a PhD is appropriate. Whether you choose an MA degree or a PhD, you will be involved in research at CUNY. MA degrees are usually funded by the student; PhD degrees are funded either in whole or in part by the institution.

The MA is not a necessary stepping stone to a PhD; many students go directly from an undergraduate degree to a PhD program. But if you have not been a student for a long time, or were not a linguistics major, or are simply unsure if linguistics is right for you, application to a PhD program may not be a good first step for you. You may want to consider applying to the MA program or taking courses as a non-matriculated student. It is possible to enroll in a maximum of 2 courses as a non-matriculated student at the CUNY Graduate Center. Advance planning is necessary, so be sure to read the non-degree enrollment requisite provided online carefully by the Program and the Registrar's office.

Having decided whether to apply to the MA or PhD program, you now want to put together a package that shows that you are serious about academic work in linguistics and are likely to do well at it. Because the goal of the program is to provide students with research tools in linguistics, applicants must demonstrate a commitment to research and some evidence that they understand what is involved in making such a commitment. We make use of the following considerations to assess your overall research potential: your statement, your letters of recommendation, your writing sample, your fit with our faculty and students, and the contributions you can make to diversity and inclusion.

- *Statement of interests.* Your statement should emphasize your intellectual background and interests. Discuss issues and concepts in linguistics that interest you; show how you have thought about them, being as specific as possible. If you have performed research, include a description of that research and the conclusions that you drew from it. If you have ideas about what research questions you would like to work on in the future, describe them and explain their importance. Your work in graduate school will include original research projects, so the more information you can provide us about your research interests and experience, the better.
 - Indicate why the CUNY Linguistics Program is attractive to you.
 - Identify by name faculty whom you would be interested in working with, indicate an area of common interest, and, ideally, show some familiarity with their work.
 - If relevant, please indicate ways that you might contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field of linguistics.
 - If there is anything in your background that you think needs explanation, do so briefly in your statement. Proofread your statement to eliminate errors of grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
 - For the MA, a less detailed statement is expected, but be sure to tell us about your intellectual interests in general linguistics or computational linguistics, and indicate how your background is appropriate if you are considering computational linguistics.
- *Letters of recommendation.* Solicit letters from faculty who can write in detail about your academic achievements, the likelihood that you can successfully complete an MA or PhD program, your ability to work in a sustained fashion, and your potential to carry out research projects. Consult our document on [tips to writers of letters of recommendation](#) for more information.
 - Letters from faculty who cannot talk about your scholarly or research potential or ability are usually not helpful. Similarly, letters from friends, family, or coworkers are usually not informative, but for the computational MA program a letter from a supervisor or coworker may be relevant.
 - If you have been out of school for a while, that is a good reason to take one or more courses (see above) and participate actively, so that your instructor will agree to write you a letter and will be able to write you a letter with substance.

- Give your recommenders all the information about yourself that will be helpful.
 - Classes you have taken with the recommender
 - Transcripts
 - Resume or CV, including awards or special achievements
 - Research experience and internships
 - Academic goals
 - If you have carried out research with your recommender, summarize all of your activities and what you learned in the course of the research
 - Remind your recommender about any written work you submitted or any other activities that you think are relevant
- *Writing sample.* For admission to the Program, we require a writing sample, which may be a squib, a paper, or a chapter from a longer document. If a writing sample is not possible, please explain why in your statement. Your writing sample will ideally reveal your knowledge of a topic and your approach to analyzing it. It could, for example, try to resolve a contradiction in the literature, or analyze a linguistic phenomenon, or develop a new approach to solving a linguistic problem, or report on an experiment. An academic writing sample from another field could also be useful.
- *Research experience.* Completing an independent research project or doing independent study is helpful background. Many faculty are willing to sponsor students in projects, depending on the student's interests and the instructor's current projects. If you have the time and the means, working 10-15 hours per week with a faculty member for one or more semesters is an excellent way to get research experience. Research experience will give you a deeper and richer understanding of a particular area in linguistics, provide you with research skills, give you good material to talk about in your statement, and make it more likely that a faculty member will get to know you well. This faculty member can write you a more informed letter of recommendation. Research experience will also allow you to find out how much you like research. Some students discover that they love research, while others learn that research is not for them.
- *Courses in linguistics or related fields.* If your degree is in the natural or social sciences or the humanities, indicate how that background will be suitable for a degree in linguistics. If you plan to specialize in computational linguistics, courses in that field or related areas (such as programming) are highly recommended.
- *TOEFL or IELTS scores.* For applicants from non-English-speaking countries, the Test of English as a Foreign Language, or the International English Language Testing System is required. There is no cutoff.

Please note that the GRE is not required.

The yearly application deadline for the PhD and MA programs is 5 December.