

Linguistics MA and PhD Information

Applying for admission to an MA or PhD in Linguistics

There are two major steps in the application process. One is presenting us with the appropriate information we need to decide whether we will offer to supervise you. The other is the formal application to the university. Applying for admission without first gaining our support will not speed the process since you will not be formally admitted unless we agree to supervise you. Please note that scholarship applications are a separate process. Gaining a scholarship does not guarantee that we will agree to supervise or that you will be formally admitted.

Information on admission is available at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/postgraduate/> for domestic students and <http://www.otago.ac.nz/international/index.php> for international students.

Please note that our MA and PhD are by research only, and require a previous research degree in a relevant field: a BA Honours or Postgraduate Diploma for an MA, or an MA for a PhD. Applicants without a substantial research component to their previous degree face significant hurdles in the formal application process.

The information we need to determine if we will offer to supervise you is a proposal, CV, and contact details of academic referees (one of whom should be your previous thesis supervisor). We may ask to see your previous thesis as a writing sample.

The proposal is 2000-2500 words for an MA and 2500-3000 words for a PhD. The proposal demonstrates your familiarity with the literature and research methodology, your ability to write, and your ability to work independently. It also demonstrates the seriousness of your intent to study with us. We understand that the proposal is preliminary and we expect your research to evolve.

The proposal should include the following sections:

- Introduction (Provide a brief background to the topic and situate it within its field.)
- Research questions (These should be able to be answered by the data.)
- Literature review (Cover relevant recent sources and major past sources.)
- Methodology (Situate your study within the appropriate paradigm. Describe the research design, including data source, collection, and analysis.)
- List of references (preferably in APA format)

The proposal may also include a chapter outline and timeline.

Materials should be sent by email as uncompressed Word attachments to the Postgraduate Coordinator, Dr Anne Feryok, at anne.feryok@otago.ac.nz. You can expect it may take two-three weeks during the academic year and possibly longer between late December and late February before you hear from us. If you do not hear from us within four weeks, please contact us again.

Getting started once you are admitted

You should become familiar with postgraduate study at the University of Otago by exploring the relevant websites at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/postgraduate/> especially <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/masters/index.html> for MA students and <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/index.html> for PhD students. You might also consult <http://www.otago.ac.nz/humanities/postgraduate/index.html> which is the Divisional website for postgraduates. Handbooks are available on the MA and PhD websites.

Upon admission to the programme, MA and PhD students in Linguistics should make an appointment to meet with their supervisor(s) as soon as possible. At that or the next meeting the postgraduate supervision agreement or memorandum of understanding should be discussed and signed, and the timeline discussed for submission by the next meeting. These are important discussions, as misunderstandings between students and supervisors often stem from differing perceptions of expectations.

Although there is no requirement that postgraduate students begin on a particular date, fees are charged for full months. For this reason start dates are usually the first day of the month. Most postgraduates begin on 1 March, roughly the beginning of the academic year, as academic staff often take leave during the period between late December and late February. A number of workshops are held in March, although many of these (including required ones) are also held at other times. Information about the required workshops is included in your admission information pack.

Timetable for MA thesis

The timetable should be discussed as early as possible and submitted to your supervisor shortly after that discussion. The following milestones should be included. This is a guide, not a set of rules, to stimulate discussion between you and your supervisor about when work should be accomplished. It is based on the traditional organization of a thesis; alternative organizations that may better suit your particular topic should be discussed with your supervisor.

- Draft one of literature review
- Draft one of methodology
- Ethical approvals if required
- 6 month review
- Draft one of findings
- Draft one of discussion
- Draft one of conclusion & introduction
- Draft one of complete thesis including list of references and appendices
- Submission of three soft-bound copies or examination

Note that you must be enrolled for the semester in which you submit your thesis for examination. The period of examination cannot be predicted and may take as long as twelve weeks. Remember that examination is not the end of the process. A thesis may pass, require amendments, require revisions, or fail. Most theses require amendments or revisions. This can affect graduation.

The handbook at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/masters/handbook/index.html> has more information.

Timetable for PhD thesis

The timetable should be discussed as early as possible and submitted to your supervisor shortly after that discussion. The following milestones should be included. This is a guide, not a set of rules, to stimulate discussion between you and your supervisor about when work should be accomplished. It is based on the traditional organization of a thesis; alternative organizations that may better suit your particular topic should be discussed with your supervisor.

- Draft one of literature review
- Self-review (at least one week before the six month review)
- 6 month review (scheduled after six months & before report is due)
- Draft one of methodology
- Ethical approvals if required
- Self-review
- 12 month review (scheduled after twelve months & before report is due)
- (collection & analysis of data)
- On-going writing up of findings
- Self-review
- 24 month review (scheduled after twelve months & before report is due)
- Draft one of findings
- Draft one of discussion
- Draft one of conclusion & introduction
- Draft of complete thesis including list of references and appendices
- Submission of three soft-bound copies for examination

Note that you must be enrolled for the semester in which you submit your thesis for examination. The period of examination cannot be predicted and may take as long as twelve weeks. Remember that examination is not the end of the process, A thesis may pass, require amendments, require revisions, or fail. Most theses require amendments or revisions. This can affect graduation.

The handbook at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/handbook/index.html> has more information.

Self-review and progress reports

Self-review is part of the progress report system. It initiates the progress report. This means that you have to write it and distribute it to your supervisors and the progress report convener with sufficient time for them to read it and make any comments to you before the scheduled meeting. Typically the convener informs you of when that is likely to happen. Supervisors and even the convener may advise you on changes to make to the substance or format of your self-review.

There is more information on the self-review in the handbook at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/handbook/reportingprogress.html>.

There is no set format for the self-review and expectations of divisions and departments vary. Despite references in the handbook to attaching draft work, in Linguistics the self-review is expected to be two to five pages, with a timetable for the upcoming reporting period attached, and with an outline of the thesis attached, but without any draft work attached.

The self-review should state what you are working on without giving a lengthy summary of that work. Rather, it should be a personal record of what you have set out to do in the reporting period; it should describe your success and how you are dealing with any lack of success in meeting the tasks set out in your timetable. It should comment on the supervision you have received and how it has impacted your work.

You may arrange to meet with the convener before the progress report meeting with the supervisors. This enables the convener to hear about any issues that you may find difficult to raise yourself so that the convener may raise them at the meeting. The progress report is completed at the meeting. Any concerns, but particularly those related to progress, should be raised at the meeting. Your progress is described in the report through a set of descriptions, which are *Outstanding*, *Very Good*, *Good*, *Fair*, and *Unsatisfactory*. If you have turned in work past set deadlines, or work that is partial, or work that requires a great deal of revision, do not expect more than *Fair*. *Good* means you are on course, doing what you set out to do in the time period in a way that is satisfactory to your supervisors, so it is what you can typically expect to receive.

Confirmation for PhD Students

Many students worry themselves needlessly about confirmation, while a few do not worry enough about it. See the webpage of the handbook available at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/handbook/firstyear.html> for information.

Confirmation typically happens between six months and one year of study. It means that you are deemed to be making adequate progress towards completing your degree in three years. This usually means that you have completed a reasonable draft of the literature review and methodology chapter. In some cases it is possible that rather than working on a draft chapter, a satisfactory research design is in place with a pilot study underway. Confirmation does not guarantee that you will succeed; by the same token, continuing probation does not mean that you will not succeed.

You *should* worry about confirmation if you do not meet deadlines for turning in work, your supervisor expresses serious concern about the draft chapters you turn in, your supervisor expresses serious concern about your research, or your supervisor expresses serious concern about your writing. If you do not turn in drafts, do not accept criticism and advice and act upon it, cannot write effectively in an appropriate style, or do not maintain contact with your supervisor, then you should not be surprised if you are not confirmed.

You should *not* worry if you meet deadlines for turning in work, your supervisor expects substantive content and argument-based revisions to be made to the draft chapters you turn in, your supervisor advises you to make changes to your research, or your supervisor suggests reorganizing or rewriting parts of your draft. If you turn in drafts on time, accept criticism and advice and act on it, can write effectively in an appropriate style, and meet regularly with your supervisor, then your supervisor should let you know in advance of your one-year confirmation what you can expect to happen—and typically that means being confirmed.

There is a six-month confirmation possibility for PhD students. PhD students should not think of this possibility as a sign of success or even progress. It is typical for students to be confirmed towards the end of the first year of study, and it is unusual to be confirmed after only six months of study. Do not expect the possibility of six-month confirmation to be raised unless you have made substantial progress on your literature review *and* methodology *and* have excellent writing skills.

Writing Up Your Work

You are expected to arrive with good to excellent writing skills in academic register.

Despite these skills many students find writing up their research a challenge. There are a number of books on writing a thesis available at the library that deal with this as well as other issues. The university also provides workshops.

It is important to write early, write often, and write repeatedly. When you turn a draft in to your supervisor for comments, it is 'draft one' for the supervisor, not you. That draft should be the result of you rewriting until you are satisfied it is good enough for your supervisor to read.

The role of the supervisor is to provide an experienced, outside perspective, not to do your work for you. The supervisor should be able to focus on the content of what you say because it is effectively enough written to do so. If a draft is poorly written, it forces the supervisor to shift attention away from *what* you have written to *how* you have written it. If you want substantive comments on the content of your draft that will help you revise effectively, then ensure that you have written well. If you turn in a draft that is full of wandering paragraphs, unwieldy sentences, grammatical mistakes, misspellings, confused headings, and partial citations, you can expect it to be returned for extensive revising (with minimal commentary on what to do) or even to be returned unread.

Advice

- Back up or keep copies of everything. Many people keep copies in separate places. There are stories about people who have lost all of their data and abandoned their degree because they did not back up their work.
- Write in academic register. For those doing qualitative studies, be very careful about adopting some of the more 'personal' or 'subjective' styles that have arisen (such as that employed in auto-ethnography). You may face difficulties when it is time for your thesis to be examined or when you try to write for publication. It is wise to remember that a thesis serves two functions: to demonstrate what you have achieved as a student, and to presage what you will achieve as a professional. In matters of presentation and style, charting new territory can be perceived as transgressing boundaries, whereas offering a clear roadmap will be perceived as making a contribution.
- Front matter (title page, table of contents and so on) should conform to university guidelines, as should the entire thesis. These are at http://www.library.otago.ac.nz/pdf/2008_preparation_of_theses.pdf.
- Choose a reference system. Author-date in-text citation systems (as opposed to footnotes or numerical systems) such as APA (American Psychological Association, which we recommend) are probably most common in general and applied linguistics but you may discuss it with your supervisor. Update

your list of references regularly. Turn it in each time you turn in a draft. It is difficult to track down a source if you have not made an accurate record of it.

- Choose a heading system and use it consistently. It is very frustrating and time consuming to 'retrofit' headings to a work.
- Be sure to paginate. Long theses are printed on both sides of the page, making centered page numbers a wise choice.
- Most of the introduction is best left to last. Too many students spend too much time fine-tuning an introduction that is likely to need major revisions after the analysis of the data. The point of research is to learn something—and the point of an introduction to orient the reader. You cannot effectively orient the reader to research that hasn't yet been done. There is one part of an introduction that is vital to begin work on early, however, and that is defining the terms you will be using. This is likely to become an on-going project as you familiarize yourself with the literature, but it certainly should be in place by the time you write the methodology.
- The literature review does not merely summarize everything you have read. It should selectively attend to what is important, relevant, and interesting. It should impose organization and provide critical insight by offering a perspective on the literature that is informed by the theoretical framework in which you are working—although this aspect may arise later in the review or later in your progress through your thesis, necessitating later revision. It primarily cites primary sources. While you might read textbooks, reviews, and state of the art articles to orient yourself to what you need to read, and while you may possibly even cite them to chart major changes in research directions, you rely on the original work to which they point and what you discover through your own library searches.
- The methodology chapter does not merely outline the design of a study. It orients the reader to nature of the research. Much of the way methodology is addressed depends on the choice of method; this means that mixed method studies must not only address the requirements of both methods, but also why it is appropriate and effective to mix methods.
 - The nature of research may be described as its philosophical foundations. Qualitative research typically discusses this in terms of research paradigms. Quantitative research is not automatically absolved from the need to address its foundation, although in practice its foundations are often assumed. You should discuss this with your supervisor.
 - If an established tradition is being drawn on, this is described and the study situated within it. If an alternative to an established tradition is being used, both are described so that the alternative is set against the background of the established tradition. This is as true of quantitative research as qualitative research: you must account for the choices you have made.

- The research questions need to be given. Discuss with your supervisor where to place these.
 - For research design, you need to provide sufficient information for a study to be replicable. This is not only true of quantitative research, but also qualitative: you must provide precise details. If a pilot has been done, its impact on the design of the main study should be thoroughly discussed. In qualitative research, changes to the research questions and design may occur as analysis proceeds, which means these changes need to be discussed and if necessary revisions made when the analysis is complete.
 - Reliability and internal and external validity must be discussed in quantitative studies, and one of the alternative (but functionally equivalent) conceptualizations discussed in qualitative studies.
 - Quantitative and qualitative research differ to some extent in where some procedures are described. Qualitative procedures for analyzing data (eg, the coding) are typically described in the methodology (although specific codes should be presented in relevant sections of the findings), while quantitative procedures (ie, statistical tests) are typically described in the results section. Again, qualitative analysis require revising this part of the methodology chapter after analysis in order to provide a thorough description of the actual procedures used to analyze the data, including examples that are explained.
- Results (typically used in quantitative studies) or findings (typically used in qualitative studies) should be clearly distinguished from discussion, even if you are not using the traditional thesis organization with chapters so titled. It is important to signal, even in qualitative research, where the data ends and your interpretation begins, even if you work within a paradigm that questions whether such distinctions can be clearly made. This means although the findings require a degree of interpretation, it is directly tied to the data, while the discussion will focus on your interpretation with reference to previous research and theory.
 - The reporting of both quantitative research results and qualitative research findings has become more rigorous in recent years.
 - For quantitative research it is expected that complete descriptive statistics will not only be provided but also discussed, that choice of tests will be explained, and that generalizations will be appropriately framed, particularly any claims even remotely suggesting causality. Addressing these effectively requires developing an adequate understanding of the procedures you are using. This means that using a statistician to run your tests and then describe them to you is inadequate. You need to understand and be able to discuss them.
 - The reporting of qualitative research has also become more rigorous. Qualitative research should present sufficient analyzed data to make it believable. Good qualitative research makes its iterative nature visible through systematic analysis of the data, using analyzed extracts to

illustrate the process. Poor qualitative research attempts to do this through lengthy unanalyzed quotations or descriptions.

- Discussion should be grounded in the results or findings and establish links to the themes raised in the literature review.
- The conclusion not only draws conclusions, but also describes limitations, provides implications (both theoretical and pedagogical where appropriate), and suggests future research directions.
- The list of references should be complete and accurate. It only includes the sources you have actually cited in the text.
- Appendices, like charts and tables and any other graphically presented information in the text of the thesis, should be appropriately formatted in accordance with the reference system. Appendices have become increasingly more detailed and now are expected to supply evidence that your work is original and authentic.
 - Include one complete sample of each type of data collection material if they are lengthy or all of them if they are not lengthy. Include all descriptive statistics and test results not previously included in the text. Include at least one complete sample of qualitatively analyzed questionnaires and transcriptions if they are lengthy or all of them if they are not. Some people who use computer software for analysis include sample images in the appendix. (Note that doing this does not absolve you from describing the process in the methodology.)
 - It has become increasingly common to include a CD/DVD of all data collection materials, original data, and analyzed data if they are only partially included in the appendix. It is wise to do so.
 - Include a copy of each type of ethics document.

Publicly Presenting Your Work

MA and PhD students should publicly present their work at departmental seminars once a year. Completed MAs and PhDs in progress can be presented in at a seminar with other students also presenting, each for approximately 20 minutes with 10 minutes for questions. A completed PhD may be presented individually, for approximately 45 minutes with 15 minutes for discussion.

Postgraduates are funded for one national or international conference at which they are presenting a paper. Additional funding may become available for additional conferences. It is wise to 'save' the funding for when you have at least initial results to report. Make use of the relative inexpensiveness of paying your own way for local conferences and symposia to hone your work and presentation skills as well as make yourself known before presenting at an international conference.

It is very tempting to try to publish before completion. Do not let trying to publish distract you from completing your thesis in a timely way. There are bridging grants specifically designed to fund you for writing up your thesis for publication after you have completed it. Typically you are provided with an application form when you submit your thesis.

Submission and Examination of the Thesis

This process is described in detail in the handbooks. Your thesis should be proofread before it is submitted. Do not risk irritating an examiner with sloppy work, as presentation of the thesis is an area on which the thesis is judged.

There are two examiners for an MA and three for a PhD. Some supervisors discuss the selection of examiners with the student; some do not. Although an oral examination is not typical here, it may be requested by any of the parties concerned.

As the handbook points out, submission and examination is not the end of the process, as most theses require some revision.