**How to prepare for the Written Assessment for History/Modern Languages ab initio applicants**

**NB** applicants for History and Modern Languages studying a post-A level (or equivalent) language should refer to the document ‘How to prepare for the Modern and Medieval Languages Written Assessment (also used for History and Modern Languages applicants for post-A-level languages only)’.

**This document is relevant only to History and Modern Languages applicants studying a language *ab initio* (from scratch).**

**What is the test?** You can expect to take the one hour written assessment for History and Modern Languages (HML) ab initio applicants at the College where you will be interviewed. Remember that it is only one part of our assessment of you as a candidate, alongside the interviews, schoolwork (if your College has requested it), the pre-interview assessment for History, and everything else we get to know about you from your application form.

Take a look at the sample test on the MML website. You’ll see that answers involve writing in English about a text in English (Section A), as well as answering a series of questions about an invented language (Section B).

**What is Section A for?**

Reading a complex text like the one used for the assessment is an activity you’ll find yourself undertaking very often as an undergraduate, whether the text is in English or another language you are studying here. As a student, you’ll be engaging with ideas and putting forward arguments. Don’t worry if you’re not used to writing summaries. Here are a few basic tips:

1) read the text carefully and make sure you understand it;

2) jot down what the main points are;

3) re-write those points in your own words;

4) remember also to tell us that you are writing about a text. Use phrases like *The author suggests…* or *The text states…*. Notice that you’re mostly going to be using the present tense.

5) don’t include your opinion in the summary that you are writing, but save that for the second part of the first question, where you are asked to express whether you agree or disagree with the points made.

While an undergraduate degree in languages does involve developing your writing skills in foreign languages, you’ll also find yourself writing in English about many things such as books, films, history and philosophy, drawing on ideas you’ll read about and hear about in lectures. In this section, the second question allows you to show us your skills in recognising how language is used; although you are writing about English you’ll also find that this is valuable practice for engaging with texts in other languages too.

It’s important to remember that we don’t expect you to know any special literary terms for describing writing styles or rhetorical devices – if you know some and can use them correctly, that’s fine, but if not don’t worry; as you can see from the marking criteria we’re far more interested in seeing whether you can spot how the author of the text writes to persuade the reader to agree with his or her ideas. Some tips:

1) read through the passage again and think about the main points being made by the author. How did you know they were main points? Where did they come in the paragraph/structure of the text? How did the author signal that they were important points?

2) look closely at how the text begins and how the author establishes the text’s theme. If the text includes more than one paragraph, is there a shift in point of view with the new paragraph? How are the paragraphs linked? Does the author pose questions? Does he or she present an idea but then immediately present a counter-argument? Does the author use technical language? Does he or she use emotive language, revealing something of the author’s personal view? These are just some questions to think about, but you will most likely think of others.

The marks for Section A are not only for what you say, but how you communicate your observations to us. So don’t write down a list of observations in the order that they appear in the text, but group together the most common observations you make and talk about them together. Plan your response so that you explain clearly what is most important in the text and why. Keep an eye on the time too to make sure you have time to complete this task and leave time for Section B.

**What is Section B for?**

Section B is a linguistic aptitude test, designed to see how you can think logically through information given about an invented language and then apply that information in understanding and using the language.

We have chosen to create a language, rather than use a real one, to ensure that no candidate has an advantage through familiarity with the language used, or a language very similar to it. However, be assured our invented language will always use the Roman alphabet and its grammatical rules will be regular. You will be given a brief introduction to some of the grammatical rules associated with our made-up language and some sample sentences. This information is all that you will need to be able to answer the questions in Section B – no guesswork is required!

Use the information given to look for repetitions of the same or similar words in the sample sentences. Where words look similar, what are the differences? Might the difference be due to the word being plural or singular, as an example. You are provided with a table at the end of the test paper where you can jot down vocabulary items – do use that to help make sense of your observations.

Do ensure you allow yourself enough time to work through all of Section B, which is worth 16 marks in total, with the value of each question indicated at the appropriate point.

**What other things can I do?** Most important of all is to feel calm and prepared. Make sure you know where your test will take place and what time you need to be there. Use the sample test to practice answering the questions in one hour. Take a look also at resources such as HE+ - <http://www.myheplus.com/subjects/modern-languages> - designed by the University of Cambridge especially for students at your level, to extend their knowledge beyond the classroom.

And remember, the written assessment is just one factor among many that will help us decide whether to offer you a place to study here!