UNDERGRADUATE FAQ

WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?

The short answer is that linguistics is the study of language, not to be confused with the study of individual languages. Linguists are interested in issues such as what one has to know to be able to speak a language, what kinds of "rules" for creating language exist in our minds and in what form, and why it is that all human languages are similar to such a large extent. You can also read the long answer.

I’M PLANNING TO TRANSFER TO UW TO MAJOR IN LINGUISTICS. WHAT COURSES SHOULD I BE TAKING NOW SO THAT I CAN DECLARE THE MAJOR WHEN I GET TO UW?

The transfer planning worksheet for Linguistics (once you click on the link, scroll down to “Linguistics”) outlines the admissions requirements for our major and also provides information about general education requirements in the College of Arts and Sciences at UW.

I’M NOT A CURRENT UW STUDENT, BUT I’D LIKE TO TAKE SOME LINGUISTICS COURSES. IS THAT POSSIBLE?

Yes. Registration for UW courses is not restricted to UW students during summer quarter. See UW Summer-Only Registration for more information.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENERAL LINGUISTICS AND ROMANCE LINGUISTICS?

General Linguistics majors are required to demonstrate proficiency in two different languages, at least one of which must belong to a family of languages different from the student’s native language. (See the Language Requirements page for more information.) Romance Linguistics majors are instead required to complete 15 credits at the 300 level or higher in one Romance language. Romance Linguistics majors complete one less core course than General Linguistics majors, but are required to write a senior essay on a Romance Linguistics topic. (See the Romance Linguistics major requirements page for more information.)

CAN I DECLARE THE LINGUISTICS MAJOR WHILE I AM STILL WORKING ON MAJOR ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS?

No. Because we require minimum grades in your admissions courses, your grades for those courses must be posted before you can officially declare the Linguistics major. (See the Linguistics major admissions requirements or the Romance Linguistics major admissions requirements for more information.)

HOW MANY LOWER-DIVISION COURSES SHOULD I TAKE BEFORE REGISTERING FOR UPPER-DIVISION LINGUISTICS COURSES?

Our introductory Linguistics course (either LING 200 or 400) is the prerequisite for most of our upper-division courses. Unless otherwise noted in the prerequisites, it is not expected that you will have taken more than one lower division course before enrolling in 300- or 400-level Linguistics courses, and if you are planning to major in Linguistics, most lower-division courses will not count towards your Linguistics electives requirement.
I'VE JUST TAKEN LINGUISTICS 200 OR 400. WHAT COURSE DO I TAKE NEXT?

After Linguistics 200 or 400, there are many possibilities open to you. You can consult our list of linguistics and linguistics-related courses organized by topic, or you can get personalized advice from our undergraduate adviser. It may help you to look at the courses required for majoring in Linguistics or Romance Linguistics.

CAN I TAKE LINGUISTICS CORE COURSES BEFORE I DECLARE THE LINGUISTICS MAJOR?

To give our declared majors first priority for registration, many of our core courses are coded up as "Majors Only." These courses do often fill up with students who have already declared the major. If you haven't declared the major yet, the best course of action is often to either take those core courses in Summer quarter (when the "Majors Only" restriction is lifted earlier) or to work on other requirements for the major (linguistics electives and your foreign language coursework) until you've completed admissions requirements. You should consult Linguistics Advising for help putting together a degree plan for the Linguistics or Romance Linguistics major.

CAN I COUNT EXTRA FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES (ABOVE THE TWO YEARS REQUIRED FOR THE LINGUISTICS MAJOR) TOWARDS THE 20 REQUIRED CREDITS OF LINGUISTICS ELECTIVES?

No. While language courses can count towards the foreign language requirement for the major, they do not count as Linguistics electives. However, there are some linguistics courses taught by foreign language departments that we accept as electives for our majors (See the list of approved electives taught by other departments).

DOES AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL) COUNT AS A NON-INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGE?

Yes. You can find a list of languages offered at UW that indicates which of those languages are non-Indo-European on the Linguistics Advising website.

CAN I TAKE SOME OF MY CORE LINGUISTICS COURSES ABROAD?

Most of our core courses are sequential and closely linked to other courses in our department. It is therefore generally unlikely that a course taken abroad will be accepted as a substitute for a Linguistics major core course. However, students are often able to complete some of their foreign language coursework or electives for the Linguistics major while abroad. Students wishing to have a course taken abroad evaluated for Linguistics credit must bring a credit evaluation sheet from the Study Abroad Office and materials from the course when they meet with Linguistics advising for credit evaluation. These materials typically include a syllabus, papers written for the course, and a reading list or textbook.

HOW DO I WRITE A LINGUISTICS PAPER?

Read Prof. Fritz Newmeyer's article entitled "Some Guidelines for Writing Linguistics Papers."

I'M STRUGGLING IN ONE OF MY LINGUISTICS COURSES. HOW CAN I GET HELP?

The first step if you are struggling in one of your Linguistics courses is to go to your instructor's office hours to get help - this provides you with one-on-one assistance from an expert in the material that you are learning. Another way to get help is to set up a study group for the course - this can often be done through a class mailing list or website. Students taking LING 200 can get help at the Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment (CLUE), and students taking any of our courses who need assistance with writing can get help from tutors at CLUE or the Odegaard Writing and Research Center (OWRC). CLUE additionally offers tutoring for many foreign languages taught at UW. Finally, if you are looking for one-on-one for-pay tutoring, you can contact the linguistics adviser to inquire about hiring a graduate student tutor.
WHAT WILL THE COST OF TUITION BE?

Estimates can be found at the following page: "Tuition and Fees."

WHAT KINDS OF JOBS ARE AVAILABLE FOR LINGUISTICS MAJORS?

Visit the Ideas for Careers page.

See also the Linguistic Society of America's (LSA) website "Why Major in Linguistics" for a detailed response to this question.