

Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages

Examining Conventions (2018-19) for the degree of MSt. and MPhil in Modern Languages

General

- i. Examiners are reminded that although the MSt. is a 'one-year' course and the MPhil. a 'two-year' course, in practice they involve only nine months and eighteen months respectively of full-time study.
- ii. Applicants selected for this course will have shown evidence both of an ability to pursue their studies of literature beyond first-degree level, and of a willingness to acquire new skills. Examiners should, however, avoid making unrealistic demands of the candidates. A pass in the MSt. examination is equivalent to a good second-class performance at first-degree level followed by nine months of successful further study. A pass in the MPhil Examination is equivalent to a good second-class performance at first-degree level followed by eighteen to twenty-one months of successful further study.
- iii. For both degrees an average of 50 is required to pass.
- iv. An average of 66 is required for a merit.
- v. An average of 70 is required for a distinction.
- vi. Both courses are designed to permit a steep learning curve. Supervisors and examiners should therefore not feel obliged to give unduly high marks to portfolio essays, since the candidate's work is likely to improve steadily, and the final mark is based on three course components for the MSt., and four course components for the MPhil. When moderating marks, examiners should take account of the stage in the course at which the work was written.
- vii. Submitted work must demonstrate that candidates have specialist knowledge of the relevant language(s) (e.g. by quoting primary and secondary sources in the original language(s)) in one or more elements of the Masters programme.
- viii. Candidates have been advised to consult the university guidelines on plagiarism at: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism?wssl=1>.

If examiners suspect plagiarism and the material concerned accounts for no more than 10% of the whole piece of work, it is likely that this can be dealt with by the examiners as an instance of poor academic practice (e.g. web sources with no clear authors; incomplete or shoddy referencing). Markers will grade the work on its merits. The board will then use its judgement to deduct up to a maximum of ten points depending on the gravity and extent of the poor academic practice reported to the Chairman of Examiners by the markers in question. If the consequence of the deduction would result in an overall Fail, the case must be referred to the Proctors.

If the material affected concerns more than 10% of the whole piece of work or more than poor academic practice, the Chairman must refer the case to the Proctors, summarizing the extent and seriousness of the plagiarism and including the relevant sources.

Criteria of Assessment and Marking

- i. **Portfolio essays:** For each special subject, candidates submit either a portfolio of essays to total 5,000-7000 words, or, they may submit a single long essay, provided that the total word count of the essay is 5,000-7000 words (the word count includes footnotes, but excludes bibliography). The essays must be typed; they need not be presented in the full scholarly form expected of a dissertation, but they should be followed by a list of primary and secondary literature used. An electronic copy of the essay should be submitted via the Faculty secure WebLearn site. Students must clearly state the word count on the first page of their submission.

The essay submitted as part of the portfolio will have been written in the course of the student's work on the Special Subject, but may also be revised in the light of the supervisor's comments. A general norm might be for the supervisor to comment on a piece of work and for the student to incorporate the revisions into the finished essay without further input.

Whereas for the dissertation examiners will normally expect a combination of intellectual and scholarly skills, the portfolio essays may be more restricted in focus and scope; for example, a close reading of an important text or texts, or a lucid account of historical, theoretical or critical context may be sufficient for any one essay, though a range of skills should normally be displayed across the work submitted.

A passable essay will represent the work of a student of good 2:1 standard at the appropriate level of development; an essay given a Merit mark will show evidence of independent critical thought and research beyond the reproduction of the relevant material; an essay given a Distinction mark will show clear evidence of an ability to analyse complex material, or interpret difficult texts in astute and insightful ways, in a manner that gives signs of potential for doctoral research. When assessing portfolio essays, examiners shall take account of the stage at which each essay was completed.

- ii. **Dissertation:** MSt. and MPhil dissertations should be submitted in a scholarly form, acknowledging primary and secondary sources, making sensible use of the bibliographical resources available in Oxford, and with an appropriate critical apparatus. For the MSt. the length of the dissertation is 10,000-12,000 words and for the MPhil, 20,000-25,000 words. The approach which a candidate adopts will depend upon the subject that has been chosen. A dissertation judged worthy of a Distinction will be expected to display a high level of proficiency in intellectual and scholarly skills which might include some of the following: nuanced close reading of complex literary texts; lucid, detailed accounts of historical and theoretical contexts for the object of enquiry; a readiness to analyse and engage with the views of earlier scholars and critics; a sound grasp of the linguistic, methodological or scholarly tools required for the successful completion of the dissertation. A dissertation judged worthy of merit will show elements of distinction standard work, but strong individual insights might not be followed through or connected; the implications of insights might not be fully grasped or

elaborated, suggesting the candidate does not yet demonstrate potential for doctoral research. A dissertation will normally be of passable standard if, despite showing little aptitude for advanced independent research, it nevertheless represents in the examiners' judgement a suitable level of attainment for a diligent and able student of good second-class standard within one year (or with the MPhil two years) of graduation. An electronic copy of the dissertation should be submitted via the Faculty secure WebLearn site. Students must clearly state the word count on the first page of their submission.

- iii. **Key Questions in Critical Thought:** Candidates are expected to attend the relevant lectures in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms and to participate in the relevant seminars. The essay submitted should be between 5,000 and 7,000 words; it should be typed, and include a bibliography of works consulted. An electronic copy of the essay should be submitted via the Faculty secure WebLearn site. Students must clearly state the word count on the first page of their submission.

To be of passable standard, the essay should show an ability to understand and explicate complex theoretical issues and, where relevant, to compare different theories. To attain a Merit standard, an essay will show a greater control of ideas and their implications. To attain a Distinction standard, candidates will be expected also to draw upon wide independent reading and to adopt distinctive analytical and critical positions in respect of the topics they are discussing. This might entail a detailed reading and critique of the work of one theorist, a well-informed survey of different positions adopted in respect of a given theoretical issue, or a comparison of the work of two or more theorists working in related fields which lucidly accounts for the strengths and weaknesses of their respective views.

- iv. **Comparative Criticism:** Candidates are expected to attend the Comparative Criticism lectures in Michaelmas and Hilary Terms and to participate in the Comparative Criticism seminars. The essay submitted should be between 5,000 and 7,000 words; it should be typed, and include a bibliography of works consulted. An electronic copy of the essay should be submitted via the Faculty secure WebLearn site. Students must clearly state the word count on the first page of their submission.

To be of passable standard, the essay should show an ability to understand and explicate complex theoretical issues that are relevant to an area of comparative criticism discussed during the course. To attain a Merit standard, an essay will show a greater control of ideas and their implications. To attain a Distinction standard, candidates will be expected also to draw upon wide independent reading and to adopt distinctive analytical and critical positions in respect of the topics they are discussing. This might entail a detailed reading and critique of the work of one theorist, a well-informed survey of different positions adopted in respect of a given theoretical issue, or a discussion of approaches which lucidly accounts for their strengths and weaknesses. Candidates may include reference to practical comparative criticism on one or more works, or discuss approaches with reference to specific works of e.g. literature, film or music, but such works should not form the focus of the essay. Quotations in foreign languages should be given in the text in the original language. Translations into English should be provided in footnotes for all quotations in foreign languages. Such translations of quotations provided in footnotes should not be included in the word count of this essay.

- v. **History of Ideas in Germany from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries:** Candidates are expected to attend relevant lectures and to participate in the seminars organised in Michaelmas and Hilary Term. The essay submitted should be between 5,000 and 7,000 words; it should be typed, and include a bibliography of works consulted. An electronic copy of the essay should be submitted via the Faculty secure WebLearn site. Students must clearly state the word count on the first page of their submission.

To be of passable standard, the essay should demonstrate independent reading beyond the texts and authors discussed in the seminars, and it should show an ability to explicate complex theoretical texts and place them in the appropriate historical and intellectual context. To attain a Merit standard, an essay will show a greater control of ideas and their implications. To attain a Distinction standard, candidates are expected also to adopt distinctive analytical and critical positions in relation to the texts they are discussing. This might entail a detailed reading and critique of the text or texts; a well-informed study of the reception or transmission of one or more works in relation to the history of ideas and/or critical practices; an account of how a particular text fits into a long-running critical debate; or a comparison of two or more texts which gives a lucid and critical account of their historical and intellectual framework.

- vi. **History of the Book:** Candidates are expected to attend the History of the Book lectures in Michaelmas Term and to take a course of tutorials in the history of the book covering a range of topics relating to the language (or one of the languages) which they are studying.

The same regulations apply to the preparation and assessment of the portfolio of essays in this subject as for the Special Subject. As with the Special Subject the essays presented may be restricted in scope, and account should be taken of the fact that the history of the book, for most candidates, will be a new venture. To obtain a pass in the examination, candidates should demonstrate that they have studied several aspects of the subject in some detail, and that they are able to do work of a good 2.1 standard at the appropriate level of development. To obtain a merit, candidates will show more command of the material, a growing ability to contextualise insights in a larger context. To obtain a Distinction standard, they must show clear evidence of an ability to analyse complex material, to understand individual bibliographical questions in a broader context, and to discuss issues relating to the history of the book in astute and insightful ways, in a manner which gives signs of research potential.

- vii. **Palaeography:** The same regulations apply to the preparation and assessment of the portfolio of essays in this subject as for the Special Subject.

Marking Guidelines

85 and over: work which displays unusual originality, engages decisively and imaginatively with the problem identified, demonstrates strong analytical and conceptual power, sustains a coherent argument, and deploys evidence skilfully and effectively. Such work should be critically adventurous, clearly and engagingly written and presented in an impeccably lucid, correct and scholarly manner. The assessors should feel confident that work of this level might be published, with only minor revisions, in a good scholarly journal.

80-84: work which demonstrates all the qualities stipulated above, but which contains some relative weakness in one of the areas of coverage, originality, deployment of evidence, presentation or style. Work at this level should be highly professional and show unequivocal potential for doctoral research.

75-79: work which demonstrates outstanding qualities of intellectual engagement with the material, coherence and control of argument, and impressive scope, but may show some relative weakness in coverage, originality, deployment of evidence, presentation or style. Work should suggest strong potential for doctoral research.

70-74: low distinction: work which shows clear evidence of independent thought and research, and a firm command of the subject, with coherence of argument and clarity of presentation, such as to suggest that the candidate has potential for doctoral research.

66-69: merit: work which shows evidence of independent critical thought and research beyond the reproduction of relevant material, a firm command of the subject. Some local deficiencies in knowledge, coverage, coherence or form may be overlooked if the essay as a whole presents a convincing, informed and broadly coherent argument.

60-65: high pass: work which shows clear evidence of independent thought and research, a firm command of the subject. Some local deficiencies in argument or research may be overlooked if the essay as a whole presents a coherent argument and/or individual insights.

50-59: pass: work which shows basic competence in understanding the subject, mounting a broadly coherent argument, and adequate style and presentation, but only slight evidence of independent thought and research.

49 or under: fail: work which shows inadequate knowledge of primary texts; offers an analysis that is seriously flawed, or excessively derivative; shows a meagre knowledge and/or poor understanding of secondary literature; fails to present a coherent argument; or is notably poor in its style and/or presentation.

Examiners should note that the full range of marks may be used, although the award of exceptionally high marks will need a detailed justification.

Marks awarded for the dissertation are counted twice towards the total mark. For the MSt.: of the marks for the two Special Subjects and the Method essay, two will be carried forward to contribute to the total mark. Assuming all three pieces of work achieve a mark of at least 50 (the pass mark for the MSt.), the two highest marks will go forward. In the event of any of the Special Subjects or the Method essay not achieving pass marks, any fail marks will be carried forward. If there is one fail mark, it will be carried forward together with the highest pass mark. If two pieces were to fail, both fail marks would be carried forward. If all three pieces of work were to fail, the two highest fail marks would be carried forward. For the MPhil: of the marks for the three Special Subjects and the Method essay, three will be carried forward to contribute to the total mark. Assuming all four pieces of work achieve a mark of at least 50 (the pass mark for the MPhil), the three highest marks will go forward. In the event of any of the Special Subjects or the Method essay not achieving pass marks, any fail marks will be carried forward. If one piece was to fail, the fail mark would be carried forward with the two highest pass marks. If two pieces were to fail, both fail marks would be carried forward with the highest pass mark. If three pieces were to fail, all three fail marks would be carried forward. If all four pieces of work were to fail, the three highest fail marks would be carried forward.

Resolution of marks

- i. **Portfolio essays:** Special subject portfolios will be jointly marked by the supervisor of the Special Subject and an appointed examiner. They will each fill in a coversheet with comments and an individual mark before arriving at an agreed joint mark. Should there be any substantial disagreement between the two markers that cannot be resolved, the Chairman of Examiners and External Examiner will adjudicate.
- ii. **Dissertations:** Examiners are asked to submit to the Chairman of Examiners in advance of the final meeting a short account of the scope, qualities or defects of each dissertation, and a justification of their mark. This should be between 100 and 150 words. A cover sheet will be provided for this purpose. Examiners should also provide a sheet of agreed feedback to be returned to candidates on this part of the examination.
- iii. Marks must be resolved before the Final Meeting of Examiners. Where resolution cannot be reached, the Chairman of Examiners should be notified well in advance of the Final Meeting and make arrangements for a third reading of the portfolio or dissertation concerned. This third reading should normally be undertaken by the External Examiner. If the External Examiner feels that the disagreement turns on details of scholarship outside his or her field of competence, the Chairman shall have discretion to consult another examiner or assessor.

Role of External Examiner

The role of the External Examiner is not primarily to supply additional expertise in a particular area of scholarship (though such expertise should be drawn on where available), but to ensure that work submitted for the course is judged by consistent standards of coherence, clarity, and presentation. For this purpose, the External Examiner should be asked to sample a range of material from every component of the course, and in particular to read all portfolios and dissertations that are awarded exceptionally high or exceptionally low marks.

Contravening Word-Length Guidelines, Late Submission

- i. There are no direct penalties for going under the word limit. Students going over the limit are allowed a 5 percent margin before incurring penalties. For each additional 5 percent over the word limit students will be penalised 1 mark up to a maximum of 10 marks. Students are required to cite the number of words on the first page of each submission.
- ii. Late submission of work, unless explained by medical or other evidence submitted by the candidate's college to the Proctors, will automatically incur a late-submission fee from the Examination Schools and will normally incur a penalty of up to 5 marks a day for each day the work is late including Saturday and Sunday. Where a candidate fails to submit a piece of work altogether, the candidate will normally be deemed to have achieved a mark of zero in that part of the examination.
- iii. All such penalties should be declared at the start of the Final Meeting of Examiners, and the Chairman should ensure that uniformity of practice has been achieved before any penalty mark is finalised.

Failure in the M.Phil.

A candidate who fails the MPhil. may instead be awarded an MSt. by the examiners at their final meeting. The mechanism for considering an award for the MSt. is as follows:

All scripts should be re-read by internal examiners, grading them as either 'pass' or 'fail' for the MSt. The decision of the internal examiners needs to be ratified by the External Examiner.

Viva Voce Examination (MPhil only)

- i. All M.Phil. Candidates are required to attend for viva voce examination and should bring with them a copy of their dissertation.
- ii. It is expected that the viva be devoted primarily to the dissertation.
- iii. Questions should be targeted on the problem areas of the work submitted (where such areas exist) or (where no such areas exist) on the candidate's major claims and contentions.
- iv. Performance in the viva may result in the raising of a mark for the dissertation by up to two percentage points, but NOT in the lowering of any such mark. When altering the mark of a candidate, examiners will consider only the performance in the viva not the profile of marks. A mark may be raised where performance in the viva suggests a greater command of the material than was evident from the written work, and/or demonstrates the ability cogently to defend a position when questioned by the examiners.
- v. No separate mark for the viva should be awarded.