



Frequently Asked Questions

? Why study at AMES?

At AMES we offer a distinctive degree comprising rigorous language tuition and immersive content courses in a range of subjects taught by leading specialists in these fields. We are a small and supportive community based on the central Sidgwick Site, with excellent facilities, including our popular library – all to help you get the best out of yourself and your studies.

? What combination of languages can I take in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies?

Arabic, Hebrew and Persian can be combined with each other or with a modern European language which you have studied to A Level/IB Higher Level or equivalent. Arabic and Hebrew can also be taken as single subjects. Persian must be combined with another Middle Eastern or European language in Years 1 and 2. Students taking one of the Middle Eastern languages will have the option to study Hindi from Year 2 or Sanskrit in Year 4. No more than two languages may be taken by students in any one year. However, there is some flexibility across the years. If beginning with Arabic on its own, for example, you may choose to take up Persian, Hebrew or Hindi in your second year.

? Can I apply to any college to study an AMES subject?

Yes, you can apply to any college to study in our Faculty. There may be advantages to choosing a college that has a Director of Studies (DoS) in AMES, since they will understand the course and be able to offer guided academic support. The Faculty website has a list of Directors of Studies and their colleges:

<https://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/undergraduates/whos-who/directors-studies>. However, your college becomes your home for the four years of your degree programme, so it is also important to consider what else matters to you, such as location and facilities.

? How large are language class sizes in the Faculty?

This will depend on the language. Typically, we have a cohort of between 20-25 students for our largest language subject, Arabic. Classes will therefore be split into groups of no more than 15. Classes for other languages may be much smaller. Classes will further be supplemented by supervisions, most often in groups of two, three or four.

? What type of Arabic will I learn?

If taking Arabic, from your first year you will learn both Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian colloquial Arabic. On your Year Abroad, you may choose to travel either to Egypt or to a part of the Middle East where you will be able to pick up an additional dialect.

? What level of fluency do average students normally reach?

By the end of the degree, you should be able to converse easily in the spoken forms of the primary language/s you have studied since first year, and to be a confident reader and writer of its/their written forms (e.g., a dialect and Modern Standard Arabic in the case of Arabic or Modern and Classical Hebrew).

? Who teaches languages?

We have a number of dedicated language teachers in the Faculty, formed from a mixture of native and non-native speakers, and with many years of experience between them. They will conduct your classes and arrange your supervisions.

? What other subjects may I learn, and who teaches them?

The subjects offered vary from year-to-year, but currently include papers ranging from the Formation of Islam to Anthropology and Semitic Linguistics to Cinema. Lectures, and most often supervisions, too, are delivered by lecturers, specialist in the subject.

? What will I write in a dissertation?

In your second year of study, you will begin thinking about a topic for your dissertation and approaching potential supervisors. On your Year Abroad, you will then be able to undertake some wider preparation. You will then return in your final year to write up your work under the guidance of your supervisor.

? Where can I go on my Year Abroad and what activities can I do?

The Faculty has a number of approved institutions for study across a range of different Middle Eastern countries. The changing political situation of each country is regularly assessed in terms of where students are permitted to travel. Students will formulate plans for their Year Abroad in the second year, in consultation with the Faculty's dedicated Year Abroad Coordinators, who will also be language teachers. Plans can include both study in an approved institution and voluntary or paid work or an internship, whether in an NGO, publishing house or school.

? How many months am I required to be abroad?

The Year Abroad covers a minimum of eight months. There are a further seven months between the end of your second year and the start of your fourth year of study to spend as you wish. If you are studying Full Arabic, you will spend the full eight months of your Year Abroad in the Arabic-speaking country of your choice. If you are combining Arabic and Hebrew you will spend at least four months in an Arabic speaking country and at least three months in Israel. If you are combining Arabic and Persian you will spend at least four months in an Arabic-speaking country and three months in Iran. Occasionally, entry into Iran is impossible, so students then spend time in Tajikistan, or sometimes study Persian elsewhere. If you are combining any Middle Eastern language with a language offered by the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages & Linguistics, you will spend at least eight months in the Middle Eastern country of your choice. You are not required to spend any time in a country relating to your European language.

? Can I apply to study a Middle Eastern language even if I have never studied the language before?

As an ab initio language course, we do not expect students to have any previous experience of studying the relevant language before they arrive. However, it is a good idea to do some research so that you are informed when you apply. Experience of studying another language can also be useful and shows evidence of your interest in language study, but be mindful that the grammar of Middle Eastern languages can be very different to that of European languages.

? I have already studied some Arabic/Hebrew/Persian at A-level, or have acquaintance with it as a first/second language. Can I still apply to study in the Faculty?

For all of our Middle Eastern languages, first year courses are ab initio, and intended for students who do not speak the relevant language as their mother-tongue. If you do have a significant degree of knowledge in one of our languages, the Faculty would encourage you to apply for study of the other languages we teach, which will be supplemented by the rich range of other papers on offer. If combining a Middle Eastern Studies language with one from MMLL, you are expected to know your MMLL language to A-level or equivalent standard.

? What does the Faculty offer beyond my formal studies?

Both the Department of Middle Eastern Studies and the Department of East Asian Studies hold weekly public talks, delivered by specialists across numerous fields. Undergraduate students are greatly encouraged to attend, and, indeed, to offer suggestions for speakers. Beyond the Faculty, students can also get involved in setting up and running their own societies and talks.

? Where do students end up after graduation?

Our graduates have gone on to have varied and illustrious careers in industries including journalism, academia, and international banking.

? What is the Faculty's approach to applications for deferred entry?

Around 6% of students accepted to Cambridge take a gap year before starting their studies. This year out can be a useful time in which to improve skills, earn money, travel and generally gain maturity and self-reliance. You should state on your UCAS application if you wish to defer entry. You'll probably be asked about your plans at interview, so be prepared to talk about your year out, and, if possible, how it might tie in with your broader interest in the course you propose to study.

? Is there any reading that you would recommend me to do before my application?

We look to see that prospective students have pursued their interests in the region through some independent reading, gaining historical awareness and cultural sensibility. We are always interested to see the paths that applicants pursue through their own initiative, and prefer not to be proscriptive.

? Should I continue with four A-levels for both years of study, or drop to three?

Our offers are made on the basis of three A-level subjects, so there is no obligation to continue with four, and your decision should depend on your own personal circumstances and preferences.