

Dear students enrolled in FF: CJV_D_A (English for Doctoral Studies),

My name is Joe Lennon, and I'm the administrator for this course, which is not really a course (of course), but simply a way of guaranteeing that doctoral candidates at FF have reached the required level in English speaking and writing.

I hope this introductory letter will give you most of the information you need. It may seem a bit long, but please take a moment and read it all the way through; it's designed to give you some specific tips and guidance so that, hopefully, the whole process can be a pleasure.

Which it usually is! I look forward to meeting with each of you and discussing your studies and interests. It's nice to learn about some of the fascinating work doctoral students are doing, and to get a chance to talk frankly with you about your study programs, your travels, your writing, your language learning, and whatever else we might end up discussing.

That said, I'd like to ask for your patience. There are quite a few of you, and I'd like to give my full attention and support to you all, but please keep in mind that during the semester I'm very busy. I might not always be able to respond to you immediately. If you email me and don't hear back from me for a few days, don't panic; I will reply as soon as I can.

Steps for certification

So that I can keep all your correspondence and materials organized, please follow these steps:

1. First, read the official requirements for the course certification. [Here's the link to the info on IS](#), and I've also copied the text for you here:

There are two parts to the exam - writing and speaking. Every student must pass both parts to receive a passing grade for the subject.

For the writing part of the exam, all students are required to submit a short text which they have written recently (within the past 3 years) in English. This can take the following forms:

A) an extended abstract of around 600-1000 words (not including reference list), describing either the student's dissertation work, or a research project related to their current studies

B) an academic paper written originally in English and meant for publication in an academic journal (this can be something already published, or it can be something which the student hopes to publish in the future)

C) a short excerpt or chapter from a Master's thesis or PhD dissertation written by the student in English

For the speaking part of the exam, all students are required to meet with Dr. Lennon for a brief (30 min max.) conversation about their work. This conversation can take place in person, or online in a video call.

All students are required to meet with Dr. Lennon, but special consideration will be given to students who submit:

A) proof of having given a presentation in English at an international conference within the last 3 years

B) proof of having passed an internationally recognized exam in English on the C1 level within the last 3 years

C) proof of having completed a Master's program in which the primary instruction language was English within the last 5 years

(Note that you are not required to submit any materials for the Speaking part of the exam –you can pass just by meeting with me for the interview. However, if you DO have any of the materials mentioned above, I encourage you to submit them – I will take them into consideration when considering your final grade for the course.)

2. Next, please send me an email, introducing yourself and telling me a bit about your academic / professional background. In this email, please also tell me what kind of text you plan to submit for the Writing part, and what materials (if any) you plan to submit for the Speaking part. Do NOT send me your materials by email.

Please send me this introductory email AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Do not wait until the testing period to introduce yourself to me—that's too late. Please get in touch by the middle of the semester, so that both you and I have time to plan everything.

3. Once you've told me how you would like to fulfill the requirements, I will ask you to upload your materials to the course folder on IS called Odevzdávárny (or Homework Vaults).

When you upload your materials, please write in the file name your SURNAME and a short descriptive phrase to show which materials you are uploading.

(Example: “Lennon – Writing sample”)

Please upload your writing sample in **.doc (Word) format**, so that I can easily comment directly on the file and return it to you with my comments. Do not send it in PDF form, because then I will not be able to return it to you with comments.

4. After you upload your materials, please email me to let me know they are in the folder. At that point, I will schedule a short meeting with you.

This meeting will also be a chance for me to give you feedback on your written materials. In this meeting/interview, I'd like you to be prepared to answer the following questions, in a free-form discussion:

1. What is your academic/professional background? What were you doing before you started studying at MU, and why did you come to study here? What would you like to do after finishing your PhD?
2. How have your PhD studies gone so far? What are your impressions about your department and study program? What courses or projects have been the most interesting and why?
3. How would you summarize your current academic and professional work in a few sentences? What are some possible applications of your research? How does your research respond to, and contribute to, larger questions and issues in your field?
4. What part does English play in your work and studies? Do you plan to publish/present in English in the future?

I will probably ask you other questions besides these, depending on how the conversation develops.

Don't expect a serious, formal exam situation; I'd like to have a natural, informal conversation with you about your work and interests. You don't need to dress up for this; I will probably be wearing jeans and a T-shirt, so you can too ;)

Most students seem to prefer to meet me face-to-face, and I'm happy to do that. However, I am also quite happy to meet online, using Teams, Zoom, or whatever. When you email me to introduce yourself, please tell me how you prefer to meet – face-to-face or online. Either way is fine.

5. Once the above process is over, and if I can verify that you can communicate in English at the required level, I will give you a passing grade for the course.

The standard grades which I give for the course are B and C. The grade of C signifies that you are at the expected level and showing an average ability to communicate in an academic context in English when compared to your peers. The grade of B signifies that you are at the expected level, but showing above-average ability to communicate. I may give other grades in rare cases. If your written materials are mostly acceptable on a language level, but there are serious problems or omissions (for example a lack of citations), then I may ask you to revise and resubmit them.

Further notes and suggestions

Here are some notes on what I expect for the submitted materials, along with some tips and suggestions:

Some notes on the writing part:

For the writing requirement, I need to see that you are capable of writing an academic work in English which could realistically be published (though of course it does not have to be published yet).

Therefore, if you choose to submit an extended abstract or journal article, I would discourage the typical, strict “thesis” structure which is common in Central European academia (which tends to start with a very broad, theoretical literature review, then, only a brief description of the current study (with little or no attention given to explaining WHY this research is important).

Instead, since you are writing in English with (I assume) a view toward international publication, I encourage you to begin your writing sample by “creating a space” for your research – showing immediately why there is a need for it and what its purpose is.

Many students find John Swales’ well-known C.A.R.S. model very useful for writing this type of introduction:

<http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/CARS>

In your writing sample, I would also expect to get a clear idea of the importance / relevance of the research to a wider academic community, including potential applications / implications, and a mention of how your research could be applied to larger questions / issues in your field.

Please be specific! One main problem I see over and over again in students' papers is that they are too vague, using only abstract language. Instead, I'd like to see concrete and specific examples to support the points you are making in your paper. This is good academic writing practice in English, no matter which subject you are writing about.

And of course, I need to see a paper which follows an accepted international citation style. You should include in-text citations of the works you refer to as well as a full list of references.

A note on how I evaluate your writing:

When I evaluate your paper, I will focus more on overall composition, coherence, and clarity – not on minor “micro” grammar issues. I will not penalize you for small language mistakes. With that in mind, I prefer if you send me work which has not been heavily edited or proofread by others, so that I can see what you are capable of producing on your own. Many students in the course submit drafts of their work in progress, and I think this is a great idea. I may be able to give you helpful feedback.

A suggested structure for the extended abstract:

Paragraph 1: Give some interesting background and context for your topic, and show why it is worth studying. Very quickly summarize the previous research that has been done on this topic, and show how it has led to a problem or question that still needs to be addressed.

Paragraph 2: State your specific research questions - what exactly do you want to find out? Show how your research questions address the problem or question you introduced in the first paragraph.

Paragraph 3: Describe the research actions YOU will perform (or have performed already) to try to answer your research questions. What kind of research are you doing? What sources are you using, and how are you using them?

Paragraph 4: Discuss a few of the potential problems or limitations of your study, and say what you have done or will do to try to address these issues.

Paragraph 5: Describe your results (or if it is early in your research, say what kind of results you anticipate). Say what still needs to be done, and show how your results (or anticipated results) might be applied to further research in your field or beyond.

For more advice on abstracts in general (and for a slightly different version of these 5 steps above), I recommend reading my handout “abstract / abstract” posted in the study materials on IS, [here](#).

Self-study resources for writing:

I have posted, in the study materials on IS, a folder called "[Academic writing in English – useful resources.](#)" I HIGHLY recommend that you take a look at these sources for tips/advice on writing in English. The articles by Becker and Lanham are really great if you want to improve your writing style in English.

And of course, I suggest reading a few published introductions or abstracts to English-language papers in your field and borrowing their structure and style.

A note on materials for the Speaking part of the exam:

Again, all students are required to meet with me briefly for a conversation about your work, so that I can confirm your speaking ability. You are not required to submit any materials for the Speaking exam.

However, if you have any of the materials mentioned above, I recommend submitting them – they give me a better picture of your experience and ability with speaking English, and they will also give us something more concrete to discuss when we meet.

If you are submitting proof of Master's degree study in English, I would like to see more than just a copy of your diploma. I would also like to see at least an ABSTRACT of your Master's thesis, and ideally also the INTRODUCTION section of your thesis (in English). I do not need to see the whole thesis, but the abstract and intro sections will help me get a better sense of what you studied and how you wrote about it. PDFs of these texts are fine; or if they are available online, you can send me a link.

If you are submitting proof of a conference presentation, I want to see some materials which show the content and the nature of your presentation. At the very least, I'd like to see the TITLE and an ABSTRACT of your presentation, in connection with some proof of participation. For example, you could provide a link to a conference website with your name on it, or a photocopy of the conference brochure and/or schedule which includes your name. I do not need or want to see your actual presentation materials (e.g. the PowerPoint file).

A note on the overall evaluation:

Finally, I'd like to give you a bit more information about how I evaluate your English.

The official required level for this exam, determined by the faculty and the university (not by me!) is CEFR C1. But you shouldn't focus on the level as a strict standard, because I don't. Here's how I interpret the requirements:

- Your writing materials should show me that you are able to produce professional, publishable work in English which would be understood and accepted by an international academic audience.
- Your speaking ability should be such that if you were to attend an international conference, you could have a natural conversation about your work and research interests with other attendees in English.

In other words, I simply want to see that you can communicate openly and professionally in English.

I hope this letter answers most of your questions about what to expect, but if you need more information, please email me.

Thanks again for your patience, and I look forward to hearing from you all soon.

Best,
Joe