

## Foreign Language Proficiency and Placement

Welcome to Kenyon College, and greetings from the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and the Department of Classics. We hope this letter will answer your questions about the foreign language proficiency requirement and introduce you to the programs within our departments.

Kenyon is rare among colleges of its size in being able to offer a wide range of language courses. We offer courses in seven modern languages (we are currently offering an eighth, Arabic, on an experimental basis) and two ancient languages (Latin and Greek). Although many of you will choose to continue learning the language you studied in high school, you should seriously consider studying one of the less commonly taught languages (such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, or Russian, so important in an increasingly interdependent world). College offers a wonderful opportunity to explore subjects not offered in most high schools.

Among the recommendations for success in college, Richard Light, professor of education at Harvard, gives special attention to foreign language courses. According to a review of his book, *Making the Most of College*, which appeared in the Education Life supplement of the New York Times (April 8, 2001), language courses were most commonly mentioned among favorite classes: “57 percent of those interviewed again after leaving college recommended not testing out [of a foreign language requirement]. Why? Classes are small, instructors insist on participation, students work in groups, and assignments include lots of written work and frequent quizzes, allowing for repeated midcourse corrections. In short, foreign language courses combine all the elements that lead to more learning and more engagement.” Plan to take advantage of these opportunities.

### **Q: Why is there a language requirement?**

A: The reasons for a language requirement are many.

- Language study forms part of the traditional foundation to the liberal arts because it leads to the rigorous study of texts in the original across many disciplines.
- Language study increases understanding of one’s native language and of language in general.
- Language study provides insight into other cultures and cultural differences.
- Language study enables students to function in a global context.
- Knowledge of a foreign language increases one’s desirability as a job candidate, particularly for leadership positions.
- Foreign language study requires structured learning and can therefore improve study skills.

**In short, language study can open doors.**

**Q: What level of language proficiency is required?**

A: Kenyon's foreign language requirement is modest. The College requires that the student demonstrate a level of proficiency equivalent to the first-year sequence of a modern or ancient language at Kenyon. Proficiency is normally demonstrated by completing a one-year language course at Kenyon or by achieving an appropriate score on a proficiency/placement exam.

**Q: Who needs to take the exam?**

A: If you have studied French, German, Latin, or Spanish in high school and wish to demonstrate proficiency in one of those languages, you should plan to take the proficiency/placement exam on the second day of Orientation. If you plan to begin the study of a language you have not studied before, you should enroll directly in the first-year sequence of that language. It is a good idea, however, to take the exam if you have already studied French, German, Latin, or Spanish, even though you plan to begin the study of a different language in college.

**If you have received a score of 3, 4, or 5 on an AP foreign language or literature exam**, in either Latin or a modern language, you need not take the Kenyon placement exam. In addition, **if you have received an SAT II score of 540 or above in French, German, or Spanish**, you will have satisfied the language requirement.

If you have already studied Arabic, Chinese, Ancient Greek, Italian, Japanese, or Russian in high school, you should consult with the chairperson of the Department of Classics or of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures to determine your proficiency and placement.

There are other options for satisfying the language requirement (such as study abroad); but if you choose to satisfy the requirement in a way other than by achieving an appropriate score on the placement exam or by successfully completing a Kenyon language course, please plan early! If you wish to pursue other options, you will be responsible for providing the documentation that establishes your level of proficiency.

**Q: What is the exam like, and when will it take place?**

A: For French, German, and Spanish, the placement exam is a computer-adaptive, multiple-choice test. The exam will normally take from fifteen to twenty minutes. All four placement exams, including the one for Latin, will be scheduled during the second day of Orientation. Please consult your Orientation packet upon arrival at Kenyon for times. Students wishing to demonstrate proficiency in Arabic, Chinese, Ancient Greek, Italian, Japanese, or Russian should consult the chair of either the Department of Classics or the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. In those languages for which the computer-adaptive test is not available, either a written test or an oral interview, or a combination of both, may be used to determine the student's level of proficiency. Please note that the exam in French, German, and Spanish is a placement exam as well as a proficiency exam. For more advanced students, the exam results will provide a recommended placement for your continued study beyond the first year. Please note, too, that while you should try to do your best, the exam should not be a cause for undue anxiety. Some review of what you have already learned may be helpful, but there is no point in cramming for the exam.

**Q: What else can I do with foreign language study?**

A: Here are a few of the possibilities:

- The Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and the Department of Classics offer a variety of courses that focus on the rich literary tradition of their respective languages, on the cultures represented by the speakers of those languages, and on advanced language skills. In a typical year, you will find courses on cinema, gender, mythology, special topics on an individual author, a theater workshop, a course on literature and popular culture, and more. Please consult the Course of Study for a listing of this year's courses.
- Foreign language study is an excellent, and usually necessary, foundation for study abroad. While language skills usually develop quickly in the culture in which the language is spoken, prior study allows you to derive maximal benefit from a semester or year abroad.
- Most languages taught at Kenyon offer language tables in the dining hall at least once a week. Over a friendly meal with professors, fellow students, and native speakers, you can improve your skills through informal conversation. Check Newscope or your e-mail for information about language tables, or ask your instructor for more information.
- Advanced language students in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and in the Department of Classics have the opportunity of becoming Apprentice Teachers (ATs) for the intensive first-year language program. The Apprentice Teacher position is a paying campus job which gives you valuable experience as a peer teacher leading small groups in drills and conversation activities. This, again, is a rare opportunity for undergraduate students at any size institution (a number of seniors have won Fulbright Fellowships largely as a result of their experience as ATs). Training workshops are held in the fall and spring. For more information, please contact Pamela Sheasby, administrative assistant for the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, or your instructor.

We wish you the best of success in fulfilling the language requirement and in your continued language study!

The Department of Modern Languages and Literatures  
The Department of Classics