

Carleton Language Requirement FAQ

Why does Carleton have a language requirement?

Learning a second language is an essential component of a liberal education, the goal of which is “to liberate individuals from the constraints imposed by ignorance or complacency.” Language study broadens students’ perceptions of the world, while providing a valuable practical tool for negotiating a multi-lingual world.

How do I fulfill the language requirement?

You may meet the language requirement in four different ways:

1. by testing out with an appropriate score in the CEEB Advanced Placement, Achievement examination, International Baccalaureate examination, or in another standardized examination selected by the faculty of a particular language in consultation with the Associate Dean of the College; or
2. by satisfactory completion (grade of S, C- or better) of a language course numbered 204 (205 in the case of Japanese and Chinese); or
3. by passing a proficiency examination designed or selected by the faculty of the particular language in consultation with the Associate Dean of the College; or
4. in the case of fluent speakers of languages not taught at Carleton, by passing a special examination prepared by an expert. Arrangements are made by the Associate Dean of the College, Elizabeth Ciner.

What languages are offered at Carleton?

Currently Carleton offers instruction in ten languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Japanese, Latin, Russian, and Spanish. Norwegian can be taken through special arrangement with St. Olaf College.

What language should I take?

If you have already achieved some degree of proficiency in a language and are excited about continuing, take the placement test (see above) and plan to enroll in the appropriate course. If you are not excited about continuing the language you studied in high school, consider starting a new language; many Carleton students fulfill the requirement in a language they have not previously studied. This is especially true for languages not commonly taught in high schools, including Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Hebrew and Ancient Greek. For more help with this question, see the New Student Website.

When should I start language study at Carleton?

Whether you are continuing a language you studied in high school or are starting a new language, we encourage you to register for language in the first year. Beginning Hebrew and Latin are offered in the winter. All other languages begin in the fall only.

How do I know what level to register for?

Take the placement test!

Can I major in a language?

Regular majors are available in French: Literature, French: Cultural Studies, Greek, German, Latin, Russian and Spanish. Special majors in Chinese, Japanese or Romance Languages are available by petition. Majors are also available in Classical Languages, Classical Studies, French and Francophone Studies and Latin American Studies.

Can I minor in a language?

Students who fulfill requirements for advanced coursework beyond the language requirement receive a “Certificate of Advanced Study,” which is comparable to a minor at most other institutions.

I've placed out of the language requirement. Now what?

Keep going! Some courses numbered in the 200s offer advanced work in conversation and composition; others introduce literature organized around a particular theme. Except where noted, these courses are open to first-year students with the necessary background.

What opportunities will I have to practice my language outside of the classroom?

All language departments offer a variety of extra-curricular activities, including language tables, film screenings and special events. Parish House is a dorm open to upper class students interested in practicing their languages and participating in international programming. Each year, Carleton hosts 6-7 "language associates," native speakers of various languages who live in Parish House, coordinate extra-curricular activities and assist the language faculty.

I'm bad at learning languages. What do I do?

Whether a result of variable experiences in high school or natural talents, all students have academic strengths and weaknesses. Free one-on-one tutoring is available for all levels of language study.

Students who have a documented learning disability that interferes with their ability to learn a language should consult with the Wellness Center at 507/222-4464 about possible accommodation or exemption.

What are the benefits of language proficiency?

Career goals

Some jobs require knowledge of a foreign language, but many more present additional opportunities to multilingual applicants. Carleton graduates have used their language skills in a number of careers, including social work, medicine, law, international business, community organizing, foreign service, journalism, hospitality, education, the military, volunteer service, law enforcement and many others.

Travel

Study or travel in a foreign country can be an incredibly rewarding and enriching experience. Off-campus seminars led by Carleton faculty are available in Chinese, French, German, Russian and Spanish. Carleton students may also enroll in programs offered by other institutions or by consortia of which Carleton is a member. A number of competitive Carleton fellowships provide additional opportunities for internships, research or service learning abroad.

Interest in the literature, history, politics, or culture

Obviously, advanced study of the literature, history, politics or culture of a particular country or region requires proficiency in a language. Students are often surprised to learn that many graduate programs, especially in the humanities, require a reading knowledge of French, German or other languages, no matter what their area of specialization.

Local immigrant populations

Nearly 1 in 5 Americans speaks a language other than English at home. Spanish is the most common, followed by Chinese, French, German, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Italian, Korean, Russian and Polish. [Source: 2000 Census] Knowing another language can give you access to the cultural riches of immigrant communities, while opening up opportunities in business and volunteer service.

Family background

Learning the language of your forebears can open lines of communication with non-English-speaking relatives, while deepening your understanding of your family's roots.

Sharpening intellectual skills

Learning a second language helps improve memory, critical thinking and study skills. Many students find that the discipline and sustained effort required to learn a language help them succeed in other academic endeavors.

Still confused? The language faculty have prepared a set of questions to help you think through your motivations for choosing to study a particular language—or particular languages—at Carleton.

Questions to Consider:

- What language(s) have I already studied?

- How far along am I (barely started, intermediate, fluent, etc.)? What are my placement test results? Do I want to continue?
- Do I want to try something new in college? Do I want to acquire a second foreign language in college, in addition to what I have already studied in high school?
- What is my family background? Does anyone in my family speak another language? Am I intrigued by the sounds of the language? Would I like to learn a heritage language?
- Have I traveled abroad or met someone from another country or otherwise become interested in learning the language and culture of a particular country? Is there some area of the world I would like to visit and, if so, should I study the language spoken there in preparation for travel?
- What international study programs am I considering? What language will I need for study abroad?
- Would I like to learn a less commonly taught language, thus gaining an unusual skill (Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Hebrew, or a classical language like Latin or Greek)?
- What are the languages in my home region or in a region where I would like to live? Am I considering a career in the health professions or law or conflict resolution? Do I want to go into the Peace Corps or Teach for America or travel for a religious organization or an NGO? If so, should I learn Spanish, or Russian, or French, or an Asian language?
- Am I interested in international business and politics? If so, might I consider, for example, French or German for the European Union, German or Russian for Eastern Europe, Chinese or Japanese for Asia?
- Am I fascinated by art, or art history, or Shakespeare research in other countries (for which many sources exist, for example, in German)? Which national literature, culture or sport interests me?
- Am I interested in medieval and/or Renaissance history and culture in Europe? Should I consider studying Latin or French or Spanish? Am I interested in the history/culture of western civilization? Should I consider a classical language (Latin or Greek) or a modern European language (Spanish, French, German)?
- Am I fascinated by different alphabets or systems of language notation? Should I consider Russian, Hebrew, Chinese or Japanese?
- Am I thinking about graduate school? Medical school? Seminary? Should I investigate which language(s) is required/recommended in the area I plan to study?