

MA Forensic Linguistics



Discover why 100% of MA Forensic Linguistics students were satisfied overall with the quality of their course

(Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, 2023)



aston.ac.uk/study/courses/forensic-linguistics-ma



MEET OUR FORENSIC LINGUISTS

DR NICCI MACLEOD

Senior Lecturer in Forensic Linguistics
Programme Director, MA Forensic Linguistics

I I completed my PhD at Aston University in 2010, in what was then the Centre for Forensic Linguistics. I remained at Aston University for a further eight years in various postdoctoral teaching and research roles, most notably working with Professor Tim Grant on a project investigating language and identity in the context of online investigations of child sexual abuse, resulting in the monograph *Language and Online Identities: The Undercover Policing of Internet Sexual Crime (CUP)*. After a brief period at Northumbria University, I returned to Aston University in 2022 to take up my current role. My research interests lie primarily in the language of police interviewing, but also in other areas relating to language and communication as they relate to law, crime, and society, especially in online contexts. I have delivered training to police officers in the areas of investigative interviewing and online investigations and have completed expert witness reports in over fifty criminal and civil cases, dealing with a range of linguistic problems including authorship analysis, determining meaning, and assessing linguistic competence. I am listed on the National Crime Agency's Expert Advisers' Database and served as Executive Secretary of the International Association for Forensic and Legal Linguistics 2021-2023."

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At Aston University, you will learn from some of the world's leading academics in the field of forensic linguistics, based at our world-leading research institute - the Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics.

→ Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics

The mission of the Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics is to improve the delivery of justice through the analysis of language.

- > Colleagues have provided evidence and investigative reports in more than 500 civil and criminal court cases, and have trained investigators, and contributed to policy with regard to language use and communication in legal and forensic contexts.
- > The Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics (AIFL) was founded in 2019. It is a substantial expansion of the former Centre for Forensic Linguistics (CFL) that was founded in 2008. In the autumn of 2019 into early 2020, AIFL appointed a total of 18 new staff to establish the Institute, funded via a £6 million investment including a £5.4 million award from Research England's Expanding Excellence in England (E3) fund.
- > AIFL is the largest grouping of forensic linguists in the world and has a unique structure in delivering internationally recognised exploitable research and investigative forensic practice, both of which inform our undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and our courses for law enforcement and legal professionals.



→ Find out more

Research and impact

Collectively, these research units work collaboratively with practitioners and external organisations to produce genuinely useful research informed by, and grounded in, professional practice.

Bringing together professional practice, research and teaching

Researchers within the AIFL have engaged directly in investigative and evidential work in the civil and criminal courts in the UK and further abroad, providing evidence and investigative reports in more than 500 cases. As well as making a real contribution to the delivery of justice, it is this applied work that inspires their research and informs their teaching.



The Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics (AIFL) comprises five research units. These are:

Centre for Forensic Text Analysis

The research focus of the Centre for Forensic Text Analysis is on individual variations in language use in the context of forensic author identification. Our aims are to develop the theoretical underpinnings of the notion of idiolect and to validate methods of authorship analysis for a variety of forensic tasks.

Centre for Spoken Interaction in Legal Contexts

The Centre for Spoken Interaction in Legal Contexts focuses on contexts where spoken interaction is central to legal and institutional outcomes, such as police interviews and emergency calls. Our aim is to instigate improvements to current processes, especially in the treatment of spoken language as evidence, including through developing professional training.

Centre for Language and Law

The Centre for Language and Law was established in 2020. We include researchers from legal, linguistic, and computer science backgrounds using mixed methods to analyse written and spoken language in our five themes: vulnerability and the law, safeguarding and the law, the language of the law, evidence in legal proceedings, and the law/legal technology agenda.

Forensic Data Science Laboratory

The Forensic Data Science Laboratory conducts research applicable to multiple branches of forensic science. We develop forensic-evaluation systems that calculate likelihood ratios based on relevant data, quantitative measurements, and statistical models/machine-learning algorithms, and validate the performance of those systems under casework conditions.

Forensic Linguistic Databank

The Forensic Linguistic Databank is a pioneering forensic linguistics resource. The team is gathering a permanent, controlled-access data repository for malicious communications, investigative interviews, commercial extortion letters and legal texts, as well as forensic evidence validation data for both speech and text.

Why study Forensic Linguistics at Aston University



Home to the world's largest group of forensic linguists - Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics.



Modules taught by internationally leading experts.



Strong links with the police gives students unique access to real-world data.

Awarded Triple Gold - the best possible rating - in the Teaching Excellence Framework (2023).



Aston University was ranked top 25 overall in the UK (Guardian University Guide, 2024).



Aston University graduates are among the highest paid graduates in the UK, five years after graduating (Longitudinal Education Outcomes, 2023).

100% overall student satisfaction (MA Forensic Linguistics; Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, 2023).



You will be joining a close-knit and supportive community of students and staff within the School of Social Sciences and Humanities.



School of Social Sciences and Humanities

Study today, change tomorrow.

- > Welcome to the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, where making a difference to society is at the heart of everything we do. It's what helps us create a better world and is also how we embrace diversity to grow understanding and build opportunities.
- > We strive to offer our students a quality education that supports their graduate outcomes and their future choices. We operate at the heart of a dynamic, diverse and global city, offering our expertise to businesses and professions by shaping our placement students and graduates, and by working in partnership with organisations and authorities.



Find out more



MEET OUR FORENSIC LINGUISTS DR FELICITY DEAMER

Lecturer in Forensic Linguistics

I As a lecturer in Aston University's Institute for Forensic Linguistics, my current research uses language analysis to shed light on issues that emerge at the intersection between law and psychiatry; domains which primarily pursue different social purposes through profoundly different constructs and methodologies, and yet must interact with one another across myriad legal proceedings. A separate strand of my research examines interactional style and power dynamics in online communities. My work explores a broad range of linguistic data including clear web and dark web chat, expert psychiatric reports submitted as evidence during murder trials, police interviews, bodycam footage from secure mental health wards, and 999 calls. Prior to working in a forensic context, I held research fellowships on interdisciplinary mental health research projects. I have used insights from pragmatics and non-literal language use to better understand psychotic symptoms, and have used a variety of methods, from conversation analysis to eye-tracking, to investigate a variety of phenomena, including patient/therapist interactions and metaphor comprehension in psychosis."

Our range of study options for the MA Forensic Linguistics programme gives you added flexibility to study in a way that suits you best.

- Full-time / on campus
- Part-time / on campus
- Full-time / distance learning
- Part-time / distance learning


Course duration:	1 year (full-time) 2/3 years (part-time)
Course start:	September
Entry requirements:	2:1 degree in English Language, Linguistics or a related subject.

Course overview

Our MA Forensic Linguistics programme is available to study either full-time or part-time, both in-person, at our campus in the heart of Birmingham, or fully online via distance learning.

Designed for English language and/or linguistics students, the MA Forensic Linguistics programme aims to expand your linguistic skills and understanding so that you can apply these to forensic texts and contexts.

The programme is applied in nature, giving you a chance to gain valuable hands-on experiences involving real-world forensic and legal data. It includes practical project work as well as academic essay assessments. You will study and improve your knowledge and abilities in the linguistic analysis of spoken and written language, in contexts such as police interviews and courtroom interactions, and you will learn how linguists apply their methods to aid police investigations and provide evidence in court.

 [Find out more](#)

What you'll study

Our MA Forensic Linguistics programme comprises a total of seven core modules which aim to expand your linguistic analysis skills and understanding so that you can apply them to forensic texts, and in forensic and legal contexts.

Analysing Discourse (15 credits)

In this module, you will explore the fundamentals of text analysis, starting with an understanding of 'text' and 'discourse'. Major theories and methodologies of discourse analysis will be covered, empowering you to make informed choices when conducting your own analyses. At the end of the module, you'll understand key research on written and spoken discourse in various contexts, evaluate different research approaches, and be able to apply suitable techniques to your own projects.

Corpus Linguistics (15 credits)

This module will provide you with advanced digital analysis skills in order to investigate large linguistic and literary datasets. You will learn how to apply theories and methods from corpus linguistics to analyse large and complex corpora, developing skills in digital literacy which can be applied to any area of academic study and to a wide range of professional contexts.

Research Methods (15 credits)

In this module, you will gain the skills to assess research critically and conduct your own research ethically. You'll learn to evaluate different research methods, select suitable ones for your work (especially the dissertation), grasp various research paradigms, consider ethical aspects in projects, and explore specific approaches relevant to forensic linguistic evidence.

Linguistics in Legal Contexts (30 credits)

In this module, you will explore the primary research methods in forensic linguistics, deepening your comprehension of language and law interactions. You'll learn how to apply methodological tools in forensic settings, enhance your ability to analyse language in legal contexts, and become more mindful of linguistic choices and structures. Additionally, you'll refine your skills in detailed language description.

Language as Evidence (30 credits)

In this module, you will explore investigative forensic linguistics, advancing your skills in collecting and handling linguistic data for forensic purposes. You'll learn to produce and assess mock expert witness reports, relevant in UK courts. The module will strengthen your grasp of linguistic description, legal context-text interaction, linguistic choices, and structures. You'll be capable of critiquing expert witness work and presenting your analysis in writing.

Practical Applications in Forensic Linguistics (15 credits)

In this module, you will expand your expertise in collecting and handling forensic linguistic data, while developing ethical sensitivities. You'll become an independent learner, devising and producing forensic linguistic projects. This experience will allow you to apply academic research in real-world practice. You'll learn to collect and analyse relevant data under time constraints, conducting your analyses in legal language contexts.

In previous years, students have worked on a project in collaboration with Aston Villa Football Club. They were invited to Villa Park to present their research findings as part of this module.

Dissertation (60 credits)

In this module, you will showcase your capability to design, execute, and report a research project relevant to your masters programme. You will work independently, under the guidance of a supervisor.



What our students say

Millie Fletcher

MA Forensic Linguistics student

|| The Forensic Linguistics MA course at Aston University could not be any more perfect. The staff are so passionate and have real experience within the field. They provide an excellent introduction to linguistic theory and how it can be applied to legal settings, whilst bringing in examples of their own experience and real data. The practical aspect of the course alongside other opportunities to perform casework allow students to see the real-world effect of forensic linguistics to real clients. There is also excellent variety within the course, looking at many different topics and fields within forensic linguistics, from qualitative discourse analysis to quantitative likelihood ratio calculation and statistics."



Sophie Hörl

MA Forensic Linguistics student

|| I really enjoyed the Forensic Linguistics programme here at Aston University. Many of the world-leading researchers work at the Institute, which allowed us to learn from and talk to experts from a wide array of topics within the field. I also enjoyed the opportunity to work with real-life data and gain practical experience of working in the field."




Arabella Graves

MA Forensic Linguistics student

|| The course at Aston University is fantastic because it brings together theory and practical application with fascinating real-life data collected by the Institute. The teaching is excellent, and the inspiring passion of the tutors is contagious! I really felt like they were investing in each of us throughout the year. The course has a broad range of topics within forensic linguistics whilst still being able to really get into the detail of the language and focus on areas that interest you most. It has been the most exciting year of my study to date."



 Find out more

Michaela Wolf

MA Forensic Linguistics student

|| The Forensic Linguistics course at Aston University exceeded all my expectations. I really enjoyed the group project which allowed us to work with an external client and to present our findings. The lecturers were very enthusiastic about their modules and made sure that we got loads of opportunities to work with real-life data which made the course very compelling and insightful. Studying Forensic Linguistics at Aston University was the best decision I could have made."



Why our students chose to study with us

We sat down with some of our current MA Forensic Linguistics students to find out their motivations for studying at Aston University and their plans beyond graduation.

We asked: Why Forensic Linguistics?

- > For some, the topic of their dissertation in final year sparked their interest in forensic linguistics.
- > Some were introduced to forensic linguistics through a module at undergraduate level.

“ I really enjoyed it. It was my favourite module, and I liked the applied nature of it”
It was my favourite module, I fell in love with it straight away”

- > Other students discovered their passion for forensic linguistics by their interest in crime documentaries and other television programmes.

“ I heard about forensic linguistics through the Netflix show, Unabomber.”



We asked: Why Aston University?

- > There were only really two institutions for students to consider when it came to deciding on somewhere to study forensic linguistics at postgraduate level in the UK.
- > Students were drawn to Aston University for the following reasons:

“ The choice was between [another university] and Aston University, but Aston has a better reputation for [forensic linguistics].”

“ ...with forensic linguistics...there are other places that do it but because of the Institute, Aston really is the only place. If you want to do forensic linguistics, you're going to come here.”

“ Because of the central location in Birmingham...it makes it so much easier with the transport connections.”

“ All the big names that keep coming up when you do research in this field are all working at Aston University, so I want to learn from them and get the best education.”

“ I was citing a lot of people that worked at Aston University.”

“ If you're going to go and [study forensic linguistics], Aston University is the best place to do it. The staff are working in the field and teaching you as well.”

“ Aston were really good...I had a response really quickly so it was really, really good communication and a lot better than I had experienced at my previous uni.”

This is what some of our students did after graduating.

- > Police jobs in fields adjacent to forensic linguistics such as forensic analyst and forensic researcher.
- > Working as a forensic linguist at the Ministry of Defence.

“ The connection did really help there because one of my interviewers did her PhD at Aston and I was referencing her in my latest essays.”

- > Some students wanted to work for a few years and gain some practical experience and progress to further study in the form a PhD, with Aston University.

Our campus

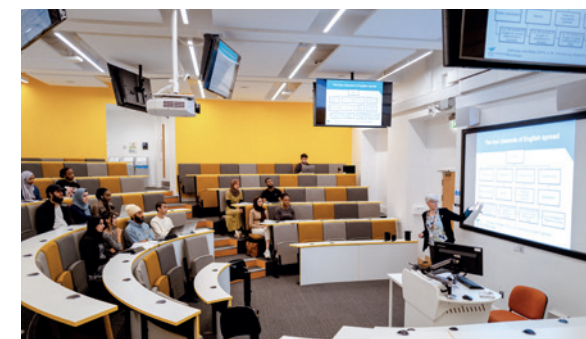
As an Aston University student you get the best of both worlds: a green, well-equipped, friendly campus in the centre of a vibrant city. With our entire social, support and academic facilities based on campus you'll never have far to go.

Campus facilities include:

- > Library: open seven days a week, (24 hour opening during exam periods)
- > Health and welfare services including dental, optician and counselling services
- > The Martin Luther King Multi-Faith Centre
- > 24 hour on-site security
- > Sports centre with sports halls, a 110-station gym, classes and swimming pool
- > Extensive IT facilities, some with 24 hour access
- > WiFi internet access available across campus
- > Aston Students' Union (ASU) at the heart of Aston community with social spaces, meeting rooms and event facilities, stylish bar and restaurant.



With modern on-campus accommodation and the city of Birmingham on your doorstep, there are a wide range of housing options to suit all tastes and budgets. All accommodation is provided and managed by, Unite Students.

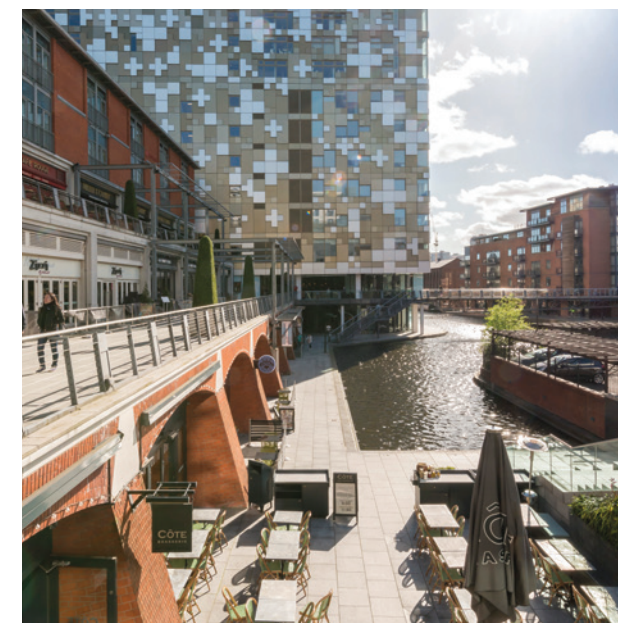




Birmingham

Our campus is based in the centre of Birmingham, the youngest major city in Europe and a great place to live, work and study.

- > **Great music and entertainment with a vibrant nightlife.** Bars, clubs, pubs, live music, festivals, concerts. Whatever your tastes, there's something here for everyone.
- > **Fantastic food.** Birmingham's diverse community means you can try anything from the famous Balti triangle, the Chinese Quarter, high street chains, halal and vegan food, and Michelin-star dining.
- > **World-class shopping.** The Bullring and Grand Central is a shopper's paradise. From the world's biggest Primark to luxury brands at the Mailbox.
- > **Arts and culture.** Museums, galleries, theatres, concerts and Birmingham's art collection is as wide as it is impressive – not to be missed.
- > **Green, open spaces.** One of the greenest cities in Europe, Birmingham has hundreds of publicly accessible parks and green spaces across the city.
- > **Sporting action.** Birmingham has some of the most exciting venues for watching or participating in sport in the UK.



OUR UK LOCATION

BIRMINGHAM, ASTON UNIVERSITY
LONDON





MEET OUR FORENSIC LINGUISTS

DR TAHMINEH TAYEBI







Lecturer in Forensic Linguistics

My research interest lies in the broad areas of language aggression and online language crimes. I am particularly interested in online offensive language, hate comments and cyberbullying. In this respect, I focus on the perception of hate from the perspective of the 'offendee' or rather the 'victim' and how it can potentially lead to proposing preventative measures. My analysis is informed by pragmatics theories, especially those which attribute a certain degree of 'agency' to the hearer in the interpretation of messages directed at them. I have conducted extensive research on language aggression against women, perceptions of impoliteness, and taking offence in both online and face-to-face interactions, the outputs of which have been published in some of the leading journals of linguistics. I am currently writing a monograph contracted by Cambridge University Press on language and perception of hate comments."


Accommodation

Accommodation is on Aston University's city centre campus and everything is within walking distance.

All accommodation within Aston Student Village is provided and managed, by Unite Students. We guarantee a room offer to the first 100 full-time postgraduate applicants who accept their offer and pay their deposit before the relevant deadlines (see the Allocation Policy for full details:) www.aston.ac.uk/undergraduate/your-application/accommodation/allocation-policy

-  Bedroom complete with study space
-  All utility bills included
-  Free high-speed internet
-  Private bathroom facilities
-  Onsite safety
-  Laundry



 For further information, including rents, find out more



Take the next step towards your MA

Entry requirements and admissions information



How to apply

To be eligible to study the MA Forensic Linguistics programme at Aston University, you will need one of the following:

- > a good UK honours degree, minimum upper second class (2:1) in English language, linguistics, or a related subject. Please note that transcripts must indicate some studies of linguistics, or
- > equivalent overseas degree recognised by Aston University.

You must also provide evidence of mathematics at GCSE level C/4 or above (or equivalent), as well as:

- > two professional references – at least one must be from an academic referee,
- > an official academic transcript of your university grades to date, and
- > a completed application form.

Applicants with extensive work experience

We recognise the value of extensive professional experience. If you do not have the academic qualifications but have extensive and relevant professional experience and a proven ability to succeed, we would welcome your application.

International students

- > If your first language is not English, you'll be required to provide evidence of an English language qualification.
Find out more about English language requirements
- > **Find out more about accepted qualifications**
- > We recommend that international students apply before the end of June (for a September start) due to visa requirements, as these can take a few weeks to process.

Applying is easy, just visit:
aston.ac.uk/study/courses/forensic-linguistics-ma

Before starting your application, make sure you have:

- > copies of your university transcripts, for each year of study,
- > copies of your English language qualifications (if necessary),
- > two references (one academic and one employer), and
- > a personal statement (250 words maximum).

Your statement should explain your interest in your chosen subject area, highlight non-academic achievements or activities that you wish to be considered, and demonstrate how the course will support your career plans. Once your application has been

submitted, you'll receive a confirmation email followed by an electronic copy of your completed form. Our admissions team will respond to you via email within five working days.

Find out more about the full application process

If you need a visa to study in the UK, remember to allow sufficient time for the visa application process. Please contact our visa advice team for more information by email issu@aston.ac.uk or phone **+44 (0) 121 204 4567**.

We're here for you. If you would like to talk to us at any stage for information, support or guidance, you can contact our Hello team by email, phone or chat.

 **Find out more**



MEET OUR FORENSIC LINGUISTS

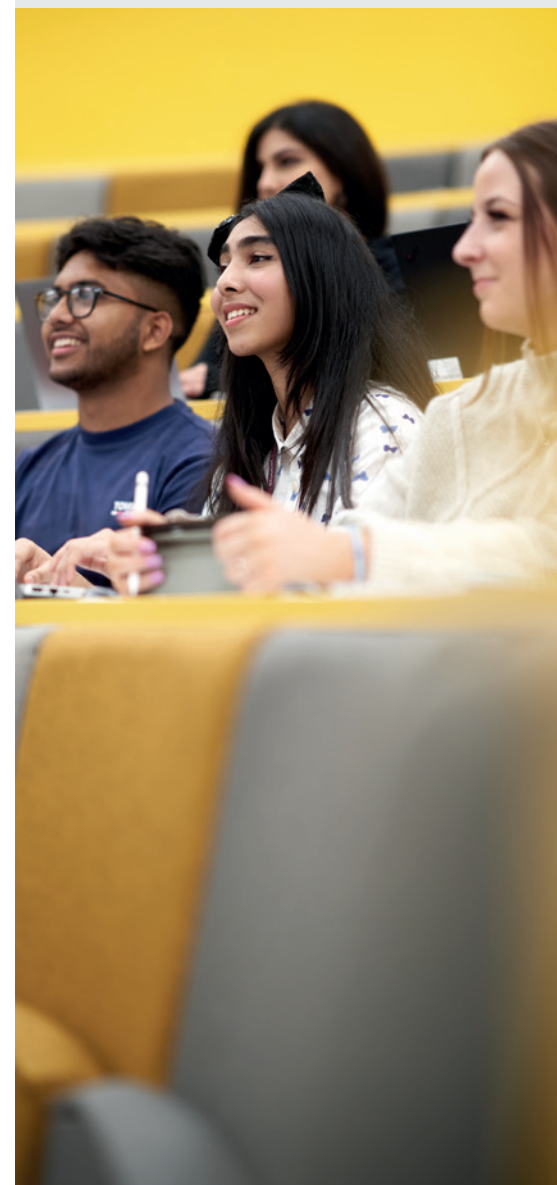
DR SARAH ATKINS

Teaching and Research Fellow in Forensic Linguistics

I I am based in the team developing the Forensic Linguistic Databank (FoLD), a pioneering online repository for data of value to forensic linguistics. Researchers, practitioners and educators can share their data through the repository, as well as access openly available material or request more sensitive data. The aim of FoLD is to build capacity in the field of forensic linguistics, where it has been hard to access the types of data required for research and teaching.

Since joining the Institute I've built on my experience in researching institutional discourse and professional lay-person encounters, developing a project with a UK police force on 999 emergency calls, where difficulties in communication were occurring in reports of serious crimes such as kidnap and extortion – so called 'crimes in action'. I place a strong emphasis on applying findings from my research, developing practical outputs with project partners and training materials for practitioners. I also research the ethical implications of conducting this kind of applied research in linguistics and its impact on professional practice"

Funding and scholarships



When considering postgraduate studies, it's important to understand what financial support is available. We understand the financial commitment and offer a range of scholarships and loans to ensure that anyone who is qualified to come to Aston University can do so, regardless of their financial circumstances.

For everything you need to know about funding your studies and for loan eligibility.

 Visit our website

Get in touch

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Aston Triangle
Birmingham
B4 7ET
UK

✉ hello@aston.ac.uk
☎ 0121 204 3000
🌐 www.aston.ac.uk/postgraduate
🌐 [@astonuniversity](https://www.linkedin.com/company/astonuniversity)

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