HOW TO WRITE YOUR MOTIVATION LETTER

The motivation letter is a very important element in your application dossier; its importance isoften under-estimated. Before writing it, take the time to have a good look at the **study plan** (in the menu STUDY) to understand the structure of the program, and read carefully the description of the **courses** (SUBJECTS in the menu study). Also, we encourage you to read the suggested **open access readings** that are linked from our website (menu APPLY/ENROL). You will then be able to relate this information to **your academic background, your interests, and your professional aims**.

The first important tip is: **don't use** the models for the motivation letter that you find online – they are repetitive, easily identifiable, and they give the impression that you don't really have a personal motivation towards the program, which is exactly the opposite of what you need to convey. Remember that you don't have to impress us, but rather to convince us – quite a different thing.
The same goes for motivation letters written by generative AI chatbots. The only good thing that they can do for you is check the grammar after you've written your personal letter. Don't be tempted by things like "I am fascinated by the intricacies of human languages..." we've read that stuff hundreds of times. Just don't use them.

The second important tip is that everything you write should be **relevant** and **informative**. Do not put in the motivation letter autobiographical details that are not related to a specific motivation, for instance, that you love learning languages sice childhood. It is also useless to list in the letter all the wonderful things that you've done – we get those from your CV. Again, report only those experiences that are directly relevant to your motivation, and expand on those.

The third tip is that you should convey a **specific interest** in this particular MA program. If you just declare an interest in some discipline of the program, without elaborating, that is not informative enough. Discuss the way in which this program is connected to your past background and to your objectives for the future.

It is crucial for us that you be fully aware of what you will be studying. We approach the themes of language and cognition with the theoretical and methodological tools of formal disciplines such as logic, formal syntax and semantics, computational linguistics. In a nutshell, this means that before doing other fancy stuff – say, psycholinguistic experiments – you will have to cope with graphs, formulas, and simple algorithms. It is crucial that you specify **whether you are familiar** with this type of approach, and if not, why you think it will be useful for you, so that you are willing to enter a new territory. For this aim, if you are not familiar with formal disciplines, please read carefully the suggested readings, and reflect on those.

The letter should be articulated as follows:

1- Briefly introduce yourself and your background studies
2- Explain which past experiences and/or professional objectives led you to consider applying to our MA.

3- Explain which subjects of our MA you are already familiar with, and which are new to you. Specify whether you are already familiar with any formal disciplines (also outside those of our MA), and why you think a formal approach is relevant to your objectives.
4- Briefly discuss one or two topics that you are specifically interested in, and which you think you will be able to tackle in the context of our MA.

The motivation letter is relevant to our first **evaluation criterion** (specificity and soundness of motivation). The other main evaluation criteria are academic excellence, and congruence of the academic background with the disciplines of our program. We are somewhat flexible on the third criterion: if your background is not fully congruent, but you articulate very well your motivation and you obtained high grades in your BA, and/or have relevant research ,experience you will have good chances. On the other hand, if the motivation letter is badly written or produced by AI, this will impact negatively on your application even if you fully meet the other criteria.