

# Graduate Programs in English

There is a famous aphorism which says that "All good things must come to an end." While this may hold true in a multitude of areas, thinking like this carries little weight in the realm of education, where learning is a life-long process.

English majors of junior or senior standing who find the world of literature and writing irresistible and who desire to continue their analysis of various rhetorical and theoretical methods, genres, or hone their own creative writing styles may wish to consider graduate school. For those seriously considering entering the profession of English as a university teacher, a graduate degree in the field is a must. Most two-year colleges will require their teachers to have at least a Master's degree, and all four-year schools will require a doctorate for tenure-track positions. The purpose of this page is to provide you with basic information about graduate programs in English and the application process associated with them.

## Types of Graduate Programs

One of the first major decisions that will need to be made in regards to graduate school is the type of program being sought. Some programs result just in a master's degree, while others require a student to complete both a master's degree and a doctorate (Ph.D.). A master's degree can take one of two forms:

- A Master of Arts (MA) is given for all areas of literature, though some schools do offer an MA in creative writing as well
- A Master of Fine Arts (MFA) is most often given for work in creative writing.

## Choosing a Graduate Program in English

Choosing a graduate program may seem like a daunting task, but in reality, the questions that students should ask themselves do not radically vary from those asked when an undergraduate institution was being selected. Some possible questions may include the following: Do you want to be in a metropolitan area? How much are you willing to spend on tuition? Are fellowships available? Is there a school that has specialists or well-known experts in your area of interest? What is a typical course workload? How large or small is the program? Are most students full-time or part-time? What have friends or teachers heard about that particular school?

## Information resources on graduate schools:

- Your English teachers, all of whom had to get a graduate degree somewhere!

- *Peterson's Guide to Graduate Programs in the Arts, Humanities, and the Social Sciences* (a copy is available to look at in JRC 356).
- *The AWP (Associated Writing Programs) Official Guide to Writing Programs* (also available to look at in JRC 356).
- The two-drawer filing cabinet in JRC 356, which contains brochures and tear-away information cards for various graduate schools and programs across the country.
- [Dr. Catherine Craft-Fairchild](#), current director of the St. Thomas Master of Arts in English program, or [Dr. Andrew Scheiber](#), English department chair.

## Typical Master's Program Admission Requirements

In order to be admitted into a master's program in English, a student must usually have done the following\*:

1. Completed a bachelor's degree (either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science) and majored in English. It is sometimes possible for non-majors to be admitted into a graduate English program, but only if the student is willing to take a certain number of undergraduate courses as a prerequisite. An official transcript from an accredited college or university is required as proof of graduation. Most programs also require a minimum grade point average for all undergraduate English courses.
2. Taken the General Record Examination (GRE) general test, and in some cases, taken the GRE Subject Test in English Languages and Literature.
3. Presented anywhere from two to four confidential "letters of recommendation from individuals with knowledge of your relevant abilities and achievements. Letters from college professors are preferred" (University of St. Thomas).
4. Submitted a writing sample of undergraduate work.
5. Completed a "personal statement" or a "statement of purpose."
6. Proven proficiency in a foreign language.

\* Note: The above are general admissions requirements only, and do not necessarily apply to all schools. Please ask the particular school you are looking at for their specific requirements.

## Graduate Creative Writing Programs

Graduate programs in creative writing (MFA or MA) can vary widely. Some programs are traditional in nature, requiring that students take courses covering various literary periods and genres, have proficiency in a foreign language, and demonstrate an ability to use research and documentation skills. Other programs--frequently referred to as studio programs--are far less traditional and focus primarily on the growth of the student's writing. Additionally, some graduate writing programs offer workshops only in fiction and poetry, while others have these and other workshops in playwriting, screenwriting, creative nonfiction, travel writing, and more.

"The best advice...is paradoxical: study both with writers you like and with writers you don't like. If you study only with writers you already admire, you may run the risk of becoming merely eclectic, imitative. Study with a wide range of talents will probably serve you best. You may learn, for example, to construct your own extraordinary stories of the ordinary, in the unadorned style of Barbara Pym or Ray Carver, only by first studying the redounding rhetoric of Henry James, the caustic satires of Dawn Powell, and the encyclopedic narratives of your teacher (all of whom you previously resisted); in the end, you may find yourself--master of influences--writing simply in your own voice. Or you may improve your sonnets and sestinas by studying with advocates of free verse. By doing things unlike themselves, writers grow, mature--and become artists. "

--D.W. Fenza, editor, *The AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs*

## **Typical Admissions Requirements for Doctorate Programs**

Admissions requirements for a Ph.D. program are similar to those required for a master's program (see list above), except that an MA or MFA degree is required.

## **The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test and the GRE Literature in English Test**

For complete information—including test format, cost, testing locations, and sample tests—concerning both the General Test and the Literature in English subject test (the latter is only required by certain schools), please visit the official Web site of the Educational Testing Service:



You can also check out another Web site that has free sample GRE tests and sample assessment models:

[http://www.testprepreview.com/gre\\_practice.htm](http://www.testprepreview.com/gre_practice.htm)