

Guide to Applying to the Graduate Program in English at the University of Calgary

Thank you for your interest in applying to the graduate program in English at the University of Calgary! Before you apply, please review the [Application Guide](#) prepared by the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Calgary, along with the resources and checklists on [this page](#).

This guide is intended to complement these resources and answer common questions about the program-specific portions of the application. If you have finished exploring this guide and still have questions, please feel free to contact our Graduate Program Administrator (somner@ucalgary.ca) and Graduate Program Director (englgpd@ucalgary.ca) for more information.

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FAQs About the Admission Requirements

Admission requirements for the PhD program

In addition to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Arts [qualifications for admission](#), the Department of English requires the following for admission to the PhD program:

- a. A completed four-year undergraduate program (or equivalent), and a completed Master's degree. At least one of the degrees must be in English Literature. In exceptional circumstances, degrees in a closely related discipline may meet admission requirements.
- b. A grade point average of 3.5 on a four-point scale at the graduate level.
- c. A research proposal (approx. 2 pages), along with a summary of the proposed research project (approx. 600 words);
- d. A 5-10 page sample of critical writing, and, for creative writing applicants, an additional 5-10-page sample of creative writing;
- e. For applicants required to provide proof of proficiency in English, a minimum TOEFL score of 97 (Internet-based test); an IELTS score of 7.0 (with no band less than 6.5); a CAEL score of 70 (with no section less than 65); a PTE score of 68. This requirement can also be met by completing the [Academic Communication Certificate](#) with a grade of "A-" in two courses and "B+" in all other courses.
- f. Two reference letters.
- g. A curriculum vitae.

Admission requirements for the MA program

In addition to FGS and Arts [qualifications for admission](#), the Department requires the following for admission to either the course-based or the thesis-based MA program:

- a. A completed four-year undergraduate program (or equivalent) with a Major in English Literature or in a closely related discipline.
- b. A minimum admission grade point average of 3.3 on a four-point scale over the final 60 units of the undergraduate degree.
- c. A research proposal (approx. 2 pages), along with a summary of the proposed research project (approx. 600 words);
- d. A 5-10 page sample of critical writing, and, for creative writing applicants, an additional 5-10-page sample of creative writing;
- e. For applicants required to provide proof of proficiency in English, a minimum TOEFL score of 97 (Internet-based test); an IELTS score of 7.0 (with no band less than 6.5); a CAEL score of 70 (with no section less than 65); a PTE score of 68; a Duolingo score of 135 (with no subscore below 115); or a Cambridge score of 191. This requirement can also be met by completing the [Academic Communication Certificate](#) with a grade of "A-" in two courses and "B+" in all other courses.
- f. Two reference letters.
- g. A curriculum vitae.

The next section will provide advice on how to navigate each of these elements of the application. If you have applied unsuccessfully in the past, you may find that the rationale provided in this section can help improve your application should you choose to re-apply.

FAQs about the Admission Requirements

Relevant academic experience

REQUIRED for PhD applicants: A completed four-year undergraduate program (or equivalent), and a completed Master's degree. At least one of the degrees must be in English Literature. In exceptional circumstances, degrees in a closely related discipline may meet admission requirements.

REQUIRED for MA applicants: A completed four-year undergraduate program (or equivalent) with a Major in English Literature or in a closely related discipline.

The admissions committee uses this evidence of a previous degree in English to confirm that you will be able to meet program milestones on time and complete our graduate program with success. If you are applying to the PhD program and none of your previous degrees are in English, you may wish to delay your application until you can complete one or two English courses at the graduate level. If your undergraduate degree is in English but your current graduate degree is in a closely related discipline, we encourage you to pick up at least one English course at the graduate level before you apply. If your undergraduate degree is in a closely related discipline and your graduate degree is in English, you are welcome to apply, but you should select referees who can speak to your demonstrated ability to succeed in a graduate-level English course.

Likewise, if you are applying to the MA program and you did not Major in English as an undergraduate student, we encourage you to pick up at least one (and ideally more) upper-level English courses before you apply. You should also be sure to select referees who can speak to your demonstrated ability to succeed in an upper-level English course.

GPA

REQUIRED for PhD applicants: A grade point average of 3.5 on a four-point scale at the graduate level.

REQUIRED for MA applicants: A minimum admission grade point average of 3.3 on a four-point scale over the final 60 units of the undergraduate degree.

As above, the admissions committee will use your previous GPA to predict your ability to meet our program milestones on time and complete our graduate program with success. Though we can occasionally offer conditional acceptance to otherwise qualified applicants who do not meet these minimum requirements, applicants should consider this grade point average the minimum threshold for consideration. If there are extenuating circumstances that affected your GPA, you should use Question 9 to contextualize any grades that have kept your GPA below these minimum requirements.

Research Proposal

REQUIRED for PhD and MA applicants: A research proposal (approx. 2 pages), along with a summary of the proposed research project (approx. 600 words)

Both PhD and MA applicants will be asked to briefly description their proposed research project as the answer to the first of the program-specific questions on the application, and both PhD and MA applicants will be asked to upload a 2-page research proposal as a required supporting document. Once you have submitted your application to the graduate program, you may also be asked to provide a separate research proposal for the Graduate Awards Competition. Please note, however, that the admissions committee for the Department of English will NOT receive a copy of your application to the Graduate Awards Competition and does not consider it part of your application for the graduate program in English. The information below, then, pertains to the research proposal that you will be asked to provide as a required supporting document, and to the brief description of your research project you will be asked to provide in the program-specific portion of the application to either the PhD or MA program.

The purpose of a research proposal is to introduce your reader to your main research question or the problem you want to explore over the course of your graduate degree, and to make a persuasive case both for the urgency of this study and the potential significance of its contribution. If you are applying a course-based program, your proposal may devote more space to illustrating the type of evidence you plan to examine – but if you are applying for a thesis-based program, it is also important to demonstrate some knowledge of the terms and stakes of existing critical debate about the subject of your proposed research. Either way, be as specific as possible about the topic you want to explore; a plan to examine ‘gender in early modern literature’ is more compelling than a plan to study ‘early modern literature’ in general, but a plan to examine the implications of a specific pattern you’ve observed in a more narrowly defined field (the country house poem, say) would be stronger still. Also, don’t worry if the department isn’t running any graduate courses that appear to be immediately related to your proposed project in the coming year. There are always faculty members who are seeking graduate students but not teaching, and all students in our thesis-based graduate programs will have opportunities to take courses in their second year (if necessary).

At the bottom of your research proposal, you can highlight any aspects of your CV that speak to your ability to complete the proposed project with success. For example, if the proposed project will build on an idea you developed during a previous degree (like an Honours Project or a paper you started during your MA), you can say so and highlight any awards or special recognition this early iteration of the project has received. To establish ‘institutional fit’, you can identify the specific graduate courses at the University of Calgary that you look forward to taking in the year that you will be completing your coursework and identify any instructors whose research interests seem aligned with your proposed project. If your work requires a specific archive or any unique (e.g. transdisciplinary) research training, you can also highlight the institutional resources that you think make the University of Calgary an especially good place to pursue your proposed project.

Note: The committee will be able to find details about where and when you completed your previous degrees on your CV, so aside from these comments about how your academic training to date so far has prepared you to complete your proposed project with success, you do not need to use this part of your application to say anything else about your previous academic experience. Similarly, please do not use your research proposal to share personal reflections on the value of literary studies or your general affection for literature. These feelings are important (and shared by many faculty members and other students in this department!), but when space is limited, long comments of this type will necessarily displace important information that the committee needs to assess your proposed research project.

For more information about the difference between a statement of study and a research proposal, please refer to [this page](#) created by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Note that the subject of this page is applications for scholarships and awards, so not all the information there will be immediately relevant to your application for graduate school.

Writing Sample

REQUIRED for PhD and MA applicants: A 5-10 page sample of critical writing, and, for creative writing applicants, an additional 5-10-page sample of creative writing.

The admissions committee will look to your writing sample for evidence that everything else that your application says about your abilities and research potential is true. Ideally, then, your writing sample should represent the best scholarly work you have prepared to date, and it should showcase all the critical skills you'll need to carry out your proposed research project with success. Specifically, your writing sample should demonstrate your ability to thoughtfully contextualize and skilfully explicate primary evidence, as well as your ability to productively engage with the terms of existing critical debate. Your citations should be polished and appropriately formatted – and though the sample you choose doesn't need to be closely related to your proposed research project, a sample that takes a related approach to similar material can help assure the admissions committee that you are well-prepared to complete your proposed project with success. If you have previously published work that can demonstrate all these skills, that can make a great writing sample – but if not, you should approach the writing sample as an element of the application that requires as much preparation and revision as your research proposal.

To choose a writing sample, you can begin by reviewing any term papers or portions of your Honours project or MA thesis that received especially positive feedback, but you should not plan to simply submit the assignment you prepared for this previous academic assessment along with your application. If your previous instructor offered you advice about how to improve your paper, you should consider those suggestions and revise the paper to the best of your ability. Bear in mind, however, that the admissions committee won't know the parameters of the assignment that originally inspired the paper – so if, upon reflection, your paper's thesis or premise has been strongly shaped by an assignment prompt, you should revise it so that it works without this context. Either way, you should prepare a writing sample that showcases your critical thinking and research skills in a context that is relevant to your application – so in this case, it is especially important that your writing sample is attentive to the disciplinary norms of

literary studies in English. Please do not submit writing samples prepared for courses in other disciplines – and don't hesitate to request feedback from both specialist and non-specialist readers.

If your proposed thesis is a creative project, you must submit both a critical writing sample (following the guidelines above) and an additional 5-10-page sample of your creative writing. This sample will be shared with both the members of the admissions committee and the wider Creative Writing Research Group, and both committees will be using it to assess your ability to pursue and complete a rigorous writing project over the course of your program. Note that applicants submitting a creative portfolio along with a critical writing sample must include both writing samples in ONE file.

Choose your creative writing sample carefully, as it is a vital component of your application to our MA or PhD creative writing program. The work in your portfolio should be original and engaging enough to showcase the quality and depth of your work and your range and promise as a writer. If you are submitting just a portion of a longer work, choose the most engaging portion, even if that means leaving out some of the exposition you might provide at the beginning. The pieces in your writing sample don't have to be published, but if any of them have already been published in any journal, magazine, or anthology, you should highlight that record of publication in your application.

Proof of proficiency in English

REQUIRED for PhD and MA applicants: *For applicants required to provide proof of proficiency in English, a minimum TOEFL score of 97 (Internet-based test); an IELTS score of 7.0 (with no band less than 6.5); a CAEL score of 70 (with no section less than 65); a PTE score of 68. This requirement can also be met by completing the [Academic Communication Certificate](#) with a grade of "A-" in two courses and "B+" in all other courses.*

If you are required to provide proof of proficiency in English, you can arrange for the agency where you completed your test to send an electronic copy of your official score report to the University of Calgary. These language scores should be sent to gradtranscripts@ucalgary.ca. The information you supplied in your online application is not considered official but will assist the Department in evaluating your application until the official score is received. For your reference, detailed information about how to report your English Language Proficiency (ELP) scores and exemptions is also available [here](#).

Letters of reference

REQUIRED for PhD and MA applicants: *Two reference letters.*

When you are choosing your referees, you should look for someone who knows you well in an academic context that is relevant to your proposed graduate program (i.e. an upper-level undergraduate seminar in English, or another graduate course in English), someone who can provide specific anecdotes to illustrate your existing research strengths and potential, and someone who is well-established in your proposed field of study – but most importantly, you

should look for someone who will explicitly confirm that they can write you a strong and supportive letter of reference.

Ideally, references for this application should be academic in nature. Professional references are appropriate only if they are necessary to contextualize professional experience that is immediately relevant to the proposed project. Please do not submit letters of reference from friends, family members, other graduate students, or professional colleagues, and please do not submit general letters of reference not written specifically in support of your application to this graduate program. For more advice about how to choose and approach potential referees, please explore [this guide](#) prepared by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. [This page](#) also provides a useful summary of the various categories of experience that your supervisor may be called to address (e.g. academic ability and record, research ability and record, teaching and language ability, etc.).

CV

Both PhD and MA applicants will also be asked to provide a curriculum vitae (CV) along with their application materials. Your CV provides a full list of your academic credentials, research experience, publications, and relevant certifications. For advice about how to prepare an effective CV (and sample graduate CVs), please explore [this guide](#) created by Career Services at the University of Calgary.

Tips for Answering the Program-Specific Questions for English

Technical Information

When completing the Program-Specific Questions portion of the application, it is a good idea to draft and revise your answers in a separate document and copy/paste each one into the appropriate field. The system may alter your formatting, so be sure to double-check any special characters. You must answer all questions in order to complete this section. To save the information you have entered, you need to click “Save & Continue.” If you skip this page or do not save your answers regularly, you will lose your answers in this section of the application.

Question 1. *Please describe the research project you plan to pursue during this graduate degree (approx. 600 words). This description should articulate your key research questions and methodology and situate your proposed project in a relevant critical context. It should also briefly explain why our department is a suitable venue for the proposed project.*

Please refer to the advice about preparing a Research Proposal above (p. 4 ff). Please note that the description of your proposed research project that you provide in this space is the only one that the admissions committee will consider when evaluating your application. If you submit an additional proposal (or a different proposal) as part of your application to the Graduate Awards Competition, the admissions committee will not receive or be able to consider that material.

Question 2. *Please state your general area of research interest in a few words (e.g. Creative Writing, Poetry, Medieval Literature, Young Adult Literature, etc.). For reference, you can find a list of well-established and active research clusters in the English department [here](#).*

The admissions committee will use the information you provide here to determine which faculty members in English should be consulted about your application. Once you have identified your general area of research interest, we will circulate your application to all faculty members in the English department who share that general area of research interest and invite their feedback. You can find [a complete list of faculty in the English department here](#).

Question 3. *Please list up to three full-time faculty members in the English department with whom you hope to work on your proposed research project. For reference, you can find a list of full-time faculty members in the English department [here](#).*

Along with your answer to Q2 above, the admissions committee will use the information you provide here to determine which other faculty members in the English department should be consulted about your application. Once you have identified three potential supervisors here, we will circulate your application to these faculty members and invite their feedback. You can find [a list of faculty who are explicitly accepting inquiries from new graduate students here](#). Note that this link is to the first of three pages of potential supervisors – so if you are still exploring the department, please be sure to click through all three pages of potential supervisors.

You can also [find a complete list of faculty in the English department here](#). If you are beginning your search from the English directory, however, please remember: only full-time faculty

members can act as supervisors in the graduate program, so you should not list sessional instructors, adjunct instructors, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, or professors emeriti as potential supervisors.

Currently, the English department does not require you to have confirmed a supervisor before you can apply, but if you'd like to reach out to a prospective supervisor directly to discuss your research, you're welcome to do so. You can find useful tips for making this first contact on p. 9-10 of [this Faculty of Graduate Studies guide](#).

Question 4. *Please list any publications relevant to this application. If you include both creative publications and scholarly publications, please organize these entries into separate lists with clear headings in the space below. Please also indicate which scholarly publications are peer-reviewed.*

The admissions committee will use the information you provide here to develop an overall impression of your academic achievements and publishing experience to date.

You are welcome to list both scholarly and creative publications, but you should separate your list of scholarly publications into refereed (peer-reviewed) and non-refereed (non-peer-reviewed) publications. If it makes sense for you to do so, you can also separate or label your creative publications by genre. You are also welcome to list publications in undergraduate student journals as well as work you have published as a journalist. You can list forthcoming work, but please indicate whether that work is at the proof stage (or earlier in the process, e.g. 'Under review').

Note: It is typical for applicants to the MA program to have a shorter list of publications than applicants to the PhD program. This is fine, and your answers will be assessed with attention to your experience.

Question 5. *Please list any academic awards, achievements, honours, or other distinctions you have received during your undergraduate and/or previous graduate degrees.*

The admissions committee will use the information you provide here to predict whether you are likely to continue to win major awards and scholarships and meet program milestones in a timely manner. Part of an overall record of academic achievement, this account of the distinctions you have already received also demonstrates that your work has attracted positive interest from other readers. If you don't already make a habit of submitting your scholarly work to academic competitions, consider this your invitation to start! **Note:** Whether you are applying to an MA program or the PhD program, you can feel free to include academic achievements reaching back to the beginning of your undergraduate degree in this section, but no earlier.

Question 6. *Please indicate whether you have applied for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Canada Graduate Research Scholarship (CGRS) award this academic year.*

If you have applied this year, please confirm which competition (CGRS D or CGRS M) you have entered. If you have applied this year and you have already been notified that your application has been forwarded to the national competition, please add this information below.

The admissions committee is aware that not all students are eligible to apply for Tri-Council funding. If you are an international student to our thesis-based MA program and say no to this question, your answer will not affect your eligibility for admission.

If you are a domestic student, a permanent resident, or an international student applying for a doctoral program, however, we strongly encourage you to apply for all federal funding for which you are eligible. If you are a prospective PhD student, you will have to complete your SSHRC application in September of the year that you are preparing your application to our graduate program – but if you’re planning ahead and you’d like more information about how to apply for SSHRC funding as a prospective PhD student, we encourage you to explore the resources that the Faculty of Graduate Studies has [collected here](#). If you are a prospective MA student, you may be preparing your SSHRC application alongside your application to graduate school, and you will almost definitely need to submit your SSHRC application before you know whether you have been accepted to a graduate program. That’s no problem, but the admissions committee does take note of any major federal awards when we’re considering an applicant’s overall record of academic achievement – so if you are notified that your SSHRC application has been successful before you have heard from the admissions committee, please email the Graduate Program Director (englgpd@ucalgary.ca) and Graduate Program Administrator (somner@ucalgary.ca) to let us know about your award. For more information about applying for SSHRC funding as a prospective MA student, please explore the resources that the Faculty of Graduate Studies has [collected here](#). If you have questions about the application process or requirements, please contact gsaward@ucalgary.ca.

Question 7. *Please list any other scholarships, grants, or forms of financial support from any source for which you have applied this year to support your proposed research project and graduate studies. Please do not include the SSHRC competitions discussed above in this list.*

Note: Once you have submitted your application for your graduate program at the University of Calgary, you will also be invited to apply to the Graduate Award Competition for this year. This competition and admissions to our graduate program are adjudicated separately, but many of our largest recruitment scholarships are distributed through the Graduate Award Competition, so we strongly encourage all prospective students to apply.

For more information about this competition (and application instructions), please refer to this [guide](#).

As stated above, the admissions committee is aware that international students are not eligible for all the same national, provincial, and university funding competitions that are available for domestic students and permanent residents. Answers to this question will be assessed with attention to these differences. If, however, you are an international student and you are eligible for a Commonwealth scholarship, China Scholarship Council funding, etc., you should mention that here.

If you are a domestic student or permanent resident, however, we strongly encourage you to apply for all external and university funding for which you are eligible. If you are not sure which awards or scholarships you are eligible for, you can explore the [Graduate Awards Database here](#). This database can be an excellent way to find external funding competitions with somewhat narrow eligibility criteria, and many external competitions welcome applications from international students, too. (Also, don't limit your research only to awards that explicitly require enrollment in an English program, as many awards are open to any student in a thesis-based program at any level.) For more information about how to make the most of this database, please review the [material \(and additional awards lists\) here](#). For more information about how to put together an effective application for a major academic award, please review [the material collected here](#) and [here](#). You can also learn more about [our major recruitment awards here](#).

Important Information about the Graduate Awards Competition

As you'll notice, many of the funding competitions that you'll find through this database are facilitated internally (though a university-wide program like the Graduate Awards Competition, for instance). For your reference, all successful applicants to the MA and PhD programs will be automatically considered for all entrance awards facilitated by the Department of English (often labelled 'Recommended by Program' in this database), so there is no need for you to submit a separate application for these awards.

All successful applicants to the MA and PhD programs will also be considered for the appropriate recruitment awards and relevant awards administered through the Graduate Awards Competition (GAC). The GAC opens on Nov. 1 and closed on Jan. 15 every year. **However, because the Graduate Awards Competition is adjudicated separately from the admissions process, all prospective students – domestic students, permanent residents, and international students – are required to prepare and submit a separate application for the GAC along with their program application materials.** Once you have submitted your application to either the MA or the PhD program and paid your application fee, you will receive an invitation to apply for the Graduate Awards Competition through your University of Calgary Student Centre. (The Student Centre will be automatically generated for you as an applicant to a U of C graduate program.) As a prospective student, you can indicate that you would like the reference letters and transcripts that you have included along with your program application materials to be duplicated for the Graduate Awards Competition, but in most cases, you will also be asked to submit an additional 1-page research proposal. You are welcome to use the same research proposal that you prepared for your program application – but the GAC will not receive a copy of your application, so you will need to prepare that proposal as a separate standalone document for this competition. Likewise, if you decide to prepare a new version of your research proposal for this competition, please note that the admissions committee in the Department of English will NOT receive or consider your GAC application materials. If you have any questions about the Graduate Award Competition, please review the information that the Faculty of Graduate Studies has provided [here](#) and in this [FAQ](#). If these guides have not answered your questions, please contact Lori Somner (somner@ucalgary.ca), our Graduate Program Administrator.

Question 8. *Please list and briefly describe any extracurricular activities or community service relevant to this application below.*

The admissions committee will use the information you provide here to develop an overall impression of your preparation and readiness for graduate school. To that end, this is a good place to list any leadership experience or community service that demonstrates your research skills, pedagogical training, or otherwise informs your scholarly work. For instance, any of the following roles could constitute relevant experience: a research assistant, a teaching assistant, an editorial assistant (particularly if this position was with a scholarly journal), any work in archives or information management, or any administrative or volunteer work in an arts-related context or any context comparable to post-secondary education, etc. (This list isn't meant to be exhaustive, but rather just to illustrate the type of work that could demonstrate skills relevant to your work as a graduate student.) Alternatively, if you have previous extracurricular experience that is clearly related to your proposed research project, you should also list that here, even if it doesn't clearly speak to your preparation for grad school. You should not use this space to list other recent forms of employment that are unrelated to your research or pedagogical development.

Question 9. *Please add any other information you feel would be important to the Admissions Committee in evaluating your application. (Optional)*

This section allows all applicants to provide additional information about your lived experience that can usefully contextualize your record of academic achievement for the members of the admissions committee. For instance, if you'd like to briefly highlight your family responsibilities, the impact of the pandemic on your academic experience so far, the timing of any significant leaves of absence, or any barriers to entry facing individuals from under-represented, rights-holding, and/or equity-deserving groups with which you identify, this is the section where you can do so. If you complete this section, you may also ask your referees to address the circumstances you mention here in their letters of support, but this is not a requirement.

The University of Calgary strives to create and maintain a positive and productive learning and working environment in which there is respect for the dignity of all persons and fair and equitable treatment of individuals in our diverse community. For more information about the University of Calgary's commitment and recent actions to foster equity, diversity, and inclusion across campus, you are invited to explore [the resources collected by the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#).

Note: All members of the graduate admissions committee for the Department of English will receive training in identifying unconscious bias, and our admissions criteria include consideration for diversity of experience and perspective. As part of this consideration, we are occasionally able to offer conditional admission with a qualifying year for particularly promising students who may not yet meet minimum requirements – so if you are applying to graduate school from a very different context (or many years away from school) and would be open to this option, this can also be a good place to indicate that interest.

Question 10. Please calculate your cumulative GPA and enter the value here using this [GPA Calculator Worksheet](#). Further information and resources are available to support you on our [webpage](#).

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Question 11. Please select the grading scale you have used to calculate your Cumulative GPA. *NOTE: If your institution uses a reverse scale, please select other and indicate this in the text box.*

The admissions committee will use the information you provide here to ensure that your GPA meets the minimum requirement for each graduate program. For admission to the MA program, the English department requires a minimum grade point average of 3.3 on a four-point scale (or the equivalent) over the final 60 units of the undergraduate degree. For admission to the PhD program, the English department requires a grade point average of 3.5 on a four-point scale (or the equivalent) at the graduate level. Though we can occasionally offer conditional acceptance to otherwise qualified applicants who do not meet these minimum requirements, applicants should consider these grade point averages the minimum threshold for consideration.

Thank you again for your interest in applying to the graduate program in English at the University of Calgary. If you have finished exploring this guide and still have questions, please feel free to contact our Graduate Program Administrator (sommner@ucalgary.ca) and Graduate Program Director (englgpd@ucalgary.ca) for additional information.