

PhD Application Guidelines

These informal guidelines will help you to draw up your proposal to conduct research towards a PhD in Creative Writing at Kingston. The purpose of your Research Proposal is to help us to evaluate your application and to help you to make a coherent case for undertaking research. It is the central document against which your application will be assessed, so it is important that you follow these guidelines carefully.

1. The Creative Writing PhD at Kingston

Wherever you choose to do it, a PhD is a substantial investment in time and effort, requiring a sustained period of intellectual and creative work. At Kingston, we aim to guide and support you through that process, which normally takes three years full time, or six years part time, in four main ways. These are supervision, research training, access to resources, and participation in events.

Supervision takes place on a regular basis throughout your period of study. You will be assigned to a supervision team made up of a Principal Supervisor, who is primarily responsible for your intellectual and creative development, as well as up to two secondary supervisors who will offer additional support and expertise. For a Creative Writing PhD one supervisor will normally focus on your critical work while the other will oversee the creative piece. The supervisor for the critical element might be from English literature or another department, depending on the nature of your research and the expertise available. The supervisor for the creative element will be from the creative writing department and will be an author working within your genre/area.

Research Training is an important part of the Kingston PhD. You will get training in practical and intellectual research methods through seminar series provided both at the university and subject level. You will also be encouraged to take part in training sessions being held elsewhere, such as at the British Library or the Institute of English Studies.

Access to Resources: Kingston PhD students have access to a wide range of locally, nationally, and internationally important research resources, ranging from the physical and electronic resources provided by our own library to the resources of the British Library.

Events take place regularly at Kingston University, ranging from poets and novelists reading from their work to leading academics from around the world presenting their research. You will also be encouraged to make use of the many cultural events taking place throughout London every day.

2. PhD Proposals in Creative Writing

Creative Writing theses require creative work of or equivalent to 50,000 words accompanied by a critical thesis of approximately 30,000 words, not counting notes, bibliography, or appendices. Your proposal will thus contain two parts: an outline of your creative piece followed by an outline of your critical piece, and must show that you are proposing projects of the required length.

Creative Element

The main body of your thesis will be your creative project. This will consist of a substantial piece of writing in the form and genre of your choice—a novel, a substantial collection of poetry, a screenplay, a biography, or any other form of creative writing. Your proposal should demonstrate your understanding of and experience in writing in the form or genre you choose, should detail the ambitions, scope, and intentions of the final project, and should offer a provisional chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the work you intend to write. Your proposal should offer a convincing demonstration of your ability to complete the project you undertake, and evidence of reading and thinking in relation to your creative writing beyond MA level.

Word counts for the creative element of a creative writing PhD may be somewhat flexible according to the form of the creative piece. For example, a collection of poems may be rather shorter than 50,000 words. On the other hand, it may be that you feel the plot and characterisation of a novel cannot be adequately explored within 50,000 words. In cases such as these, some flexibility is allowed, but you will be discouraged from submitting pieces that are excessively short or long.

The proposal for your Creative Project should include the following:

- Title
- Introduction
- Explanation of choice of subject and genre or form
- Explanation of the originality of your proposed project
- A chapter by chapter breakdown showing how you envisage your work will develop (this is a provisional draft only, since we fully understand that further thought will result in changes to the organisation and structure).
- A substantial sample of your creative writing (a chapter, scene, or collection of poems for example)

Critical Thesis

Critical Theses for creative writing PhDs must be, as the title suggests, discursive, critical pieces that are academic in tone and substance and which demonstrate an understanding of relevant critical or theoretical contexts for the creative piece. *They may not simply be self-reflective discussions of your writing practice or your feelings about your own creative work.* In practice, critical theses may take many forms. For example, a poet writing a sonnet cycle may write a literary history of the sonnet, a novelist writing a horror story may engage with discourses of the uncanny, a life-writer writing a

biography might address theories of memory, or a dramatist writing a play may explore ideas about staging and performance. Whichever angle you take in your argument, your proposal should show an up-to-date knowledge of both primary and secondary materials relevant to your topic. If your research requires access to manuscripts or archives, you should make this clear in your proposal. The topic for the critical thesis will be considered to be an important part of your research proposal.

The proposal for your Critical Thesis should include the following:

- Title
- Introduction, which must include a clear thesis statement and/or research question
- Justification of choice of area/topic
- Explanation of the originality of your research proposal
- Your methodology/academic approach/theoretical perspective
- A review of existing literature in the field (to indicate your knowledge of the field)
- A bibliography

3. Getting Started on your Proposal

A doctoral thesis, when completed, should be a genuine contribution to scholarship. In creative writing, this means you will present an original piece of writing accompanied by critical work that gives fresh insights into your chosen topic. Although within the proposal you can only intimate directions you hope your work will take, your knowledge, enthusiasm, and confidence should shine through.

We realise that writing a Research Proposal may seem difficult since at this stage you may well have only a vague idea concerning the creative piece that you aim to write or the critical approach you might wish to take. It might seem unfair to expect you to produce a detailed plan of how you see your research developing when you have not yet actually embarked on it seriously. However, you do need to persuade the readers of your application that you merit serious consideration as a potential research student. This means that your proposal must be well-written and well-researched; it is not something that you can dash off in fifteen minutes. When you are asked for interview, your proposal will provide the basis for any discussion, so it should show evidence of solid knowledge and suggest serious reflection upon a topic. Certainly you will be asked to go through your project with us in some detail. You should, therefore, invest substantial time and effort into your proposal.

Some applicants start the process of writing a proposal with a very clear idea of what they want to write and research. Others know the approximate area, but have not yet formulated a precise research question or writing goal. In either case, you will need to read extensively in your field before starting to write your proposal to ensure that what you intend to research is original, substantial, and achievable. Sometimes, on further reading, even the clearest ideas turn out to be already well-established. Once you have a good sense of the field you want to study, and you are reasonably happy that the topic you want to work on will be original and can be completed within three years, you are ready to start writing your proposal.

The proposal is not intended to represent a final statement. Where appropriate, it might well undergo substantial revision during and after the application process. There are several useful guides to writing doctoral theses that you could consult before writing your proposal. These include, *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*, by Estelle M. Phillips and D.S. Pugh, 5th edition (Open University Press, 2010), *The PhD Application Handbook: Revised Edition*, by Peter J. Bentley (Open University Press, 2012) and *Authoring a PhD: How to Plan, Draft, Write and Finish a Doctoral Thesis or Dissertation*, by Patrick Dunleavy (Palgrave, 2003).

Your research proposal should be clearly written and impeccably presented, without errors of grammar, spelling, or punctuation. All references should be presented in accordance with a recognised academic style such as Chicago, Harvard, or MHRA. The length may vary somewhat depending on the topic, but it is unlikely that a complete research proposal could be outlined in a document of less than 2000 words. Proposals in excess of 5000 words are almost certainly too long.

4. The Application Process

Before you submit your application, you are encouraged to informally discuss your proposal with members of academic staff working in your field. If you do not already have a potential supervisor in mind, you should read the staff profile pages to see if there is a suitable potential supervisor or supervisors for your thesis—your supervisor should be someone who is a specialist in the broad area in which you wish to work. You can find out more about staff research interests at <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/faculty/staff/>

When you are ready, you should submit your full research proposal and a CV to the Research Administrator at the address below. Once this is received, it will be passed to appropriate members of academic staff in the Department of Creative Writing for their consideration. In some cases, it may be decided at that point that your thesis cannot be supervised at Kingston, in which case you will be informed of that decision at that point. If it is felt that your proposal could be supervised at Kingston, you will then, in most cases, be invited to attend an interview, after which a final decision will be made on whether to make you an offer of a place. If you are offered a place and you decide to accept, you will complete a formal application at that point.

Please note that research proposals are complex documents and may need to be read and discussed by several members of staff. This means that it may take several weeks to process your application.

6. Further Information

For any further information or to submit a proposal, please contact:

Research Administrator, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Kingston University, Penrhyn Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2EE

fassresearch-info@kingston.ac.uk

<http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/degrees/>