Lancaster University
Department of English & Creative Writing

Applying for the PhD in Creative Writing

The information provided here should be read in the context of the advice we give in our Creative Writing Postgraduate Handbook, which discusses the context for study at doctoral level. This document will offer practical advice on each component of your application, which is intended to show your potential as a research student and to highlight your achievements so far.

Application for the PhD programme is through our electronic applications system, but you should provide the following documents as well as other statutory requirements such as transcripts of degrees. All statements of length are indicative, but you should be careful not to make your application too lengthy, as it is unlikely to add to its appeal!

Pre-Requisites

The pre-requisite for PhD study is an MA in some subject (not necessarily Creative Writing). As a general guide, applicants who hold a Merit or Distinction at MA level will stand the best chance of success. If you intend to apply for any form of AHRC or Lancaster University Faculty funding, then that is unlikely to succeed unless you hold a Distinction at MA level, or (in the case of some applicants) have significant publications.

Elements of the Application

**Letter of Application** (2 pages max)

This should briefly detail your project and the genre in which you intend to write, your personal background and qualifications, any relevant experience or publications and why you wish to study at Lancaster University. This is also a good place to mention that you wish to be considered for University or Research Council funding. Do not go into exhaustive detail: think of this as a summary of your personal and professional background and of your intentions as a doctoral student.

**Curriculum Vitae** (8 pages max)

A formal Curriculum Vitae which starts with current position and experience and moves back to indicate key academic and work experience as well as any relevant publications and previous research.
PhD Project Outline (8 pages max including all elements a-f)

a) Title

This can be the title you envisage for your creative contribution or it may be an over-arching title for the PhD.

b) Research Abstract

This is a condensed version of your entire project and shows your ability to think and speak in academic terms. It should be no more than half a page and should express the focus, methodology, ideas, themes and original contribution of your research and how it will be expressed in creative and critical terms. Keep it crisp!

c) Research Questions

These are a vital part of your application and should relate to both the creative process and strategies for shaping reflective content. We recommend no more than five questions at this stage. Research questions are the intellectual underpinning of your project and indicate the focus of what it is you wish to find out. Good research questions are nuanced and open-ended. They will lead to a dynamic creative and critical process and to a range of possible outcomes rather than to specific answers.

d) Detailed Project Description (3 pages max)

This is a more discursive element, which should outline your intended project in more detail, identifying themes, writing genre and intended literary form (novel, poetry collection, short story cycle) and saying something about the research context (other creative and scholarly writing on the subject), your intended methodology, and why your own project might be considered an ‘original contribution’ to the field.

You should outline your intentions in the literary work, but also say something about the overall composition of the project – how you see the weighting between creative and reflective work (usually 80/20 or 50/50) and how the components might relate to each other.

Remember that your literary work will also pursue primary research objectives. In the case of the 80/20 model, the shorter reflective account is most often a reflection upon process and decisions in the formation of the creative work; in the case of the 50/50 model, the reflective thesis usually engages with aspects of critical theory or methodology that runs in parallel with the creative work and creates a dialogue with it.
e) A sample of creative writing that, ideally relates to the proposed PhD project. This would normally be around 12 poems or up to 10,000 words of narrative prose or sample script.

f) Timetable

A brief timetable to the Project outline, showing how you think your research will unfold over the three-year period of the PhD. This can be useful in showing how methodically you are approaching your project. It can also be useful in the case of projects that involve substantial fieldwork, showing how ‘finding out’ and ‘writing up’ relate to each other. In the case of the 80/20 model, the reflective component is usually designed at the end of Year II and written during Year III; in the case of the 50/50 model, you will probably be engaging with critical discourse from the very beginning.

g) Indicative Bibliography

An indicative bibliography, with scholarly bibliographic referencing, showing books you have read or have identified in the creative or critical/theoretical field. This can be very useful in showing your awareness and exploration of the research context.

Note

The information you put in your application for PhD will form the basis of study, if successful. It will be reviewed on an annual basis, so you should think of it as a starting point and as a rigorous but flexible framework at this stage and not as an unchanging commitment.