



**MA in English in the Field of
Creative Writing**

STUDENT HANDBOOK

2025-2026



English
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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1. INTRODUCTION

The MA in English in the Field of Creative Writing (MACRW) at the University of Toronto is a program that engages the writer and the scholar; a program that prepares students for careers as professional writers while also qualifying those wishing to pursue PhD studies. Launched in 2004-05 under the directorship of Governor General's Award-winner Rosemary Sullivan, this program draws on the expertise of faculty at the University of Toronto and on the extraordinary vitality of Toronto's writing community. Internationally acclaimed writers, a multiplicity of cultural traditions, and an energetic publishing industry provide the environment for nurturing new talent. Students have at their disposal the academic and creative resources of the English Department, including its strengths in historical research and scholarship, its numerous interdisciplinary collaborations, and its expertise in world literature and literary theory. Students also have access to one of the world's great library systems, including the manuscript collections at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book library. The English Department offers a lively intellectual and social life, and students are encouraged to join in annual events such as the Creative Writing Gala, the Research Roundtable, the Brown Bag Lunch lecture series (which usually includes a spring reading by the first-year MACRW students), and the faculty-student softball game. With the highest esteem for all of our students and their accomplishments, we welcome you to the MA in English in the Field of Creative Writing, and we look forward to celebrating your success.

2. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Students must successfully complete a total of **3.5 full-course equivalents (FCEs)** as follows:

- [ENG6950Y](#) *Workshop in Creative Writing*. All students must complete the Workshop in Creative Writing in Year 1 of their program.
- [ENG6960H](#) *Advanced Creative Writing Workshop*. All students must complete the Advanced Creative Writing Workshop in Year 2 of their program.
- 2.0 approved FCEs in English.

2.1 ENG 6950Y: WRITING WORKSHOP

This full-year course gives our first-year students an opportunity to share poetry, fiction, drama, and/or creative nonfiction in a supportive space presided over by the Program Director and/or another instructor from our Creative Writing faculty. Students will read the work of their fellow writers, engage in class discussion, and offer thoughtful criticism. Students must bring the readings for each week to class, as well as written feedback for each author – typically line-edits and other annotations, as well as a brief letter addressing each piece's strengths and weaknesses. Minimum and maximum page counts for submissions vary depending on the instructor's expectations, but students should bear in mind that the workshop runs for just two hours and there will be multiple pieces to discuss.

A place of camaraderie rather than competition, the workshop encourages the cohort to embrace a sense of community with other writers and to collaborate in refining and improving their work. Ideally, students will build

editorial relationships with each other that endure well into their writing careers. The course structure will be determined by the workshop instructor but may also include readings, exercises, and guest speakers. The workshop often includes visits from authors and publishing-industry professionals with the goal of introducing students to the publishing environment. Please be aware that the class location and time may change in the winter term.

By the end of year one, you will have generated a portfolio of writing which you may expand and develop into a manuscript in year two if you so choose. Students are encouraged to submit their work to literary journals. To be eligible for Arts Council grants (e.g., the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council), even as an emerging writer, you will need publications.

2.2 ENG 6960H: WRITING WORKSHOP

This course provides a framework for students to complete their thesis while considering other aspects of a writing life. The course priorities include generating thesis material, editing manuscripts, producing a literary journal, giving feedback as a Creative Writing TA, preparing for readings, and considering a creative life beyond the program. Please note that this is a half-year course spread across the two academic sessions (Fall/Winter) during which students meet 10 times. About half of each class is used as a writing session. By the end of the course, you will have completed your thesis.

2.3 ENGLISH COURSEWORK

In addition to the full-year Writing Workshop, students must also complete four (4) semester-long graduate English courses. You may request permission to enroll in a course from other graduate programs such as Comparative Literature. The student must have completed all requirements for the degree, exclusive of ENG6960H Advanced Creative Writing Workshop and thesis research, by the end of Year 1 in order to remain in good standing in the program. Completing courses in the first year of study allows students to focus their attention in year two on the writing of their creative project. Courses will involve lively class discussion, seminar presentations, and written research papers. To manage their workloads, Creative Writing students sometimes elect to enroll in one or two courses in the summer. Be aware that summer courses are shorter in length and more intensive as a result.

3. FUNDING

3.1 SSHRC AND OGS

All MACRW students apply to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS) funding programs in the fall of their first year. You are asked to attend information sessions and workshops on the SSHRC CGS-M (Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master’s) and OGS, where you will learn strategies for writing a successful application. Below, you will find the application details. Review all eligibility requirements before proceeding with an application. Information regarding application forms and deadlines for SSHRC and OGS can be found on the Department of English’s website at <http://www.english.utoronto.ca/grad/financial.htm>.

(A) APPLICATION FORMS

SSHRC CGS-M applications, including letters of reference, are to be completed online. For more information about the procedure and deadline, see the English Department website under “Financial” (<http://www.english.utoronto.ca/grad/financial.htm>) and visit the SSHRC website: <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/home-accueil-eng.aspx>

Applications for OGS can be found on the U of T SGS website:

<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Ontario-Graduate-Scholarship.aspx>

(B) PROJECT DESCRIPTION

It can be surprisingly difficult to write up the "Plan/Program of Study" that these applications require. The project description is a distinct genre. Writing for a general audience—a team of academic evaluators in multiple disciplines who don't already know your field and don't know why your work is significant—is tricky. Your SSHRC proposal, in particular, will potentially be read by individuals at the departmental, university, and federal levels, and writing for this diverse readership is a challenge.

You must keep within a very tight word count and use an appropriate tone while identifying the gaps in current scholarship and literature that your work will fill. Keep in mind that the adjudicators are reading in a rush and, therefore, need to encounter a confident thesis statement up front. You will want to summarize your creative project while at the same time emphasizing any research components: e.g., plans to visit historic sites or archives and/or to address historical events. Unlike a standard academic research project, a theoretical methodology might not apply, but you should state what your critical approach, scholarly/literary/social contexts, and intellectual/artistic innovations and contributions will be. Students are strongly encouraged to complete a draft of their project description as soon as possible, as scholarship deadlines typically fall near the busy end of the fall semester. Each September, meetings are scheduled for the Director to provide individual feedback on your descriptions.

(C) MODELS

University of Toronto students who have won fellowships in the recent past have donated their Plans/Programs of Study. You can pick up copies outside the Graduate Assistant's office (JHB 603) at any time. These models will give you a sense of what is possible within the parameters of the genre of the project description.

(D) GETTING FURTHER FEEDBACK

While the grant writing workshops will help you to deal with the logistics of funding applications and to master the “genre” of the proposal, you will also benefit from specific feedback about your project description. Have you identified a strong research opportunity? Have you taken account of the most recent and relevant scholarship and provided models that identify the ambitions of your project? If, for instance, your project is a novel, have you framed your subject to indicate knowledge of new theoretical orientations/methodologies suited to your themes? You may wish to approach a faculty member in the appropriate field and ask if they have time to comment. Ask one of your course instructors (if their subject area corresponds to your proposal) or ask the Director of Graduate Studies to suggest knowledgeable readers. Please remember that the fall is a busy time for everyone and that you should give faculty members a generous lead-time. The more refinement your proposal receives, the stronger it will be.

(E) LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Given a choice between the University of Toronto faculty who will have seen you in the classroom for only a

few weeks and faculty with whom you worked while you completed your BA and/or other degrees, you are much better off choosing as your recommenders those who know you well. If, however, you've been in Toronto's graduate program for a year and you've asked only your undergraduate instructors, that will ring alarm bells; so will a failure to ask for letters from people in your chosen field. Above all, contact your referees early.

(F) ACCEPTING YOUR OFFER

The department advises successful CGS recipients to select the May 2023 start date when they complete the Payment Activation forms. This will enable you to graduate in June while receiving your full funding.

3.2 TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

To offset tuition costs, Creative Writing students are conventionally offered a teaching assistantship for each year of study. Be advised that you may receive a TAship that spans a semester or a full academic year. A single-semester TAship might occur in the Fall or Winter semester depending on the availability of appointments. Because the time commitment required for the MACRW program is substantial, some students elect to forgo the opportunity to TA in favor of devoting time and energy to their coursework and writing. From year to year, allocated hours can vary between 140 and 160 hours, depending on the Department's needs. Duties include grading assignments, holding office hours, corresponding with students, and, in some cases, leading tutorials. The supervising professor will draw up a breakdown of hours, outlining the parameters of your role, in a Description of Duties and Allocation of Hours form. As a Teaching Assistant, you will be a member of CUPE 3902 Unit 1. You will want to review your rights as a member of CUPE 3902 at <http://cupe3902.org/unit-1/>. You have every right to refuse work that extends above and beyond your contract.

Each year, there may be a limited number of TAships for Creative Writing courses. When the TA coordinator solicits your TAship preferences, be sure to indicate your willingness to teach in your field, and indicate your qualifications (e.g., publications, awards, courses taken, program of study).

3.3 ADAM PENN GILDERS SCHOLARSHIP

Established in honour of the late Adam Penn Gilders, the scholarship supports and encourages the best and brightest students from Canada and around the world to study Creative Writing in Toronto. This scholarship is open to MACRW students in their first year. You will be asked in January to submit a portfolio of creative work of no more than 25 double-spaced pages. This submission may be drawn from your on-going creative project, but it need not be. The submission should be identifiable by a pseudonym rather than your real name, as it will be blind-adjudicated by the Writer-in-Residence or a program faculty member.

3.4 DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH CREATIVE WRITING SCHOLARSHIP

This scholarship is awarded to one or more students completing the first year of the MACRW program who can demonstrate financial need (according to OSOTF criteria), who count as Ontario residents (also according to OSOTF criteria), who are in good standing, and who have a record of academic success. Winners of the Adam Penn Gilders Scholarship are not eligible for this award.

4. MENTORSHIP

In the second year of the program, each student is assigned a mentor with whose guidance they produce a manuscript of creative work.

4.1 MENTOR SELECTION

Discussion of mentors generally begins at the end of the first term in your first year. You will have an opportunity to identify your preferences to the Director in the second term, but keep in mind that not all mentors are available every year. You will, therefore, want to have several authors in mind. Be advised that the decision ultimately rests with the Director, who will seek to match you with the mentor best suited to you and your writing.

4.2 MEETINGS

You will have a preliminary meeting with your mentor in the summer of your first year to get acquainted, and you will have a chance to discuss the project you would like to undertake in the fall. At your preliminary meeting, you may also choose to develop a schedule for the year, such as words per month and/or meeting dates that are amenable to each of you. Starting in September, you will have regular meetings with your mentor to discuss the progress of your manuscript and receive helpful criticism. Mentors are asked to commit to approximately ten in-person meetings over the course of the year. If you have any questions about the progress of the mentorship during the year, be sure to seek the advice of the Director.

If you'd like to book a room in the JHB for a meeting, please contact the Department Assistant at english@utoronto.ca.

5. CREATIVE PROJECT

Prose writers may write a book-length narrative or a collection of short stories. While a book-length narrative such as a novel is often more marketable, some students find that a collection of short stories is more manageable within the program's timeframe. Do not feel that you must produce a complete book; a well-edited, polished work-in-progress is sufficient. A manuscript of 150 pages of prose is the standard, but some students exceed this. If you do not submit a complete book, you should submit the *first* 150 pages of it. Poets should produce a collection of at least 40 pages of poetry.

5.1 PROJECT SUBMISSION

Two copies of your manuscript are due on the first Monday in April and must be submitted to the Graduate Administrator, Tanuja Persaud (JHB 605), no later than noon. Your mentor must give you their verbal approval of the manuscript before you submit it to the Department, so you should aim to deliver a complete, edited manuscript to your mentor by March 1. That way, they will have time to provide feedback and you will have

time to implement it by the end of the month. It is also your responsibility to give your mentor, by the first Monday in April, a copy of the final manuscript that you submit to the Department.

It's recommended that students aim to complete a full draft of their project by February 1 so that, with the mentor's feedback in hand, they have time to revise it before seeking the mentor's approval of it.

(A) SPECIFICATIONS

There should be a title page containing some basic information: name, project title, date, program, and word count. There should also be a table of contents. Prose should be double-spaced and observe standard margins and font size (unless, for literary effect, it must be otherwise).

5.2 PROJECT DEFENCE

(A) DATE AND TIME

The Director will arrange a date and time amenable to you and your mentor. If you plan to travel in the month of April, you should organize your defence date before booking.

(B) DEFENDING

The overall tone is congenial. In attendance will be your mentor, the Director, and a defence chair who doesn't usually participate but only convenes the defence. You should prepare up to ten minutes of commentary on your project, as you will be asked at the outset to discuss its genesis and significance. Anticipate questions pertaining to your authorial choices and your objectives for the project. Your mentor will also have an opportunity to discuss your work and progress. The defence is considered an editorial meeting in which you will receive thoughtful criticism and suggestions.

(C) DECISION

Once all have had an opportunity to discuss your work, you will be asked to leave the room. When you are invited to re-enter, you will learn if your project has received a pass or fail. After the defence, you will be given until the end of April to submit a final, bound copy of your manuscript to the Graduate Administrator. A spiral binding is sufficient.

6. GRADUATION

If students have completed their coursework and creative project and intend to graduate in June of their second year, the oral defence must be completed, and course grades submitted, prior to April 20. Students can also choose to graduate in November after their second year.

6.1 LIFE AFTER THE PROGRAM

Our graduates are teaching English and Creative Writing courses in and outside of Canada. Some have chosen to continue on with PhD studies, while others have entered the workforce as teachers, Communications Managers, Specialists, Coordinators, etc. A high percentage of our alumni have gone on to publish books, win prizes, and secure residencies. Their work has been featured in national and international journals. If you intend to pursue

writing professionally, it is recommended that you apply for regional (Toronto Arts Council), provincial (Ontario Arts Council) and/or national (Canada Council) grants.

Please keep us informed of your work and career path. We look forward to celebrating your successes alongside you!

7. ECHOLOCATION

Echolocation is the print literary journal produced by graduate English students at the University of Toronto. The journal features poetry, fiction, short plays, and creative non-fiction by emerging and established writers in Canada and across the world. Visual art, photography, critical essays, interviews, and reviews are also vital parts of the publication.

7.1 VOLUNTEERING

MACRW students are encouraged to join *Echolocation's* editorial board and/or to hold staff positions. Over the past few years, the leading editorial positions have typically been held by MACRW students, and their talents and collaboration have been important to *Echolocation's* success. You will receive a wealth of hands-on experience in events planning, fundraising, social media marketing, grant writing, layout, design and/or administration. If you wish to search for editorial internships outside the university, your resume will benefit from publishing experience. *Echolocation* typically sends out the call for new editors in early September.

7.2 SUBMITTING

While MACRW students are encouraged to join the editorial team of *Echolocation*, current graduate students in English are generally discouraged from submitting their work for publication in the journal (unless specifically solicited from the editors) due to possible conflicts of interest during the editorial selection process. Alumni are warmly invited to submit their work.

8. CONTESTS AND AWARDS

8.1 ON CAMPUS

- The E.J. Pratt Poetry Medal is a competition open to any student based on the basis of a poem or group of poems. Submissions are usually due sometime in the winter term.
- Hart House runs an annual Literary Contest with prose and poetry categories. The deadline is usually in January.
- University College sponsors the Norma Epstein Award for Creative Writing, which alternates annually between being open to students across Canada and to University College students only. The deadline is usually May 1.

8.2 OFF CAMPUS

- CBC Literary Competition: entry fee. Poetry, short story, and creative nonfiction prizes. The deadlines are around Nov 1 for stories, Feb 1 for nonfiction, and May 1 for poetry.
- RBC Bronwen Wallace Award for Emerging Writers: no entry fee. For writers under 35. Both prose and poetry. The deadline is usually in March. Since 2012, three of our graduates have won this award.
- RBC/PEN Canada New Voices Award: no entry fee. For writers 17-30. Both prose and poetry. The deadline is usually in April.
- *The Toronto Star* Short Story Contest: no entry fee. The deadline is usually in late February.
- Many literary journals hold annual fiction and/or poetry contests. There's often an entry fee that includes a one-year subscription to the journal. For a list of such contests see <https://publishersarchive.com/canada-awards.html>.

9. LINKS

<https://www.facebook.com/UniversityofTorontoMAInCreativeWriting/>: The program's Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1386420718292753/>: Creative Writing at the University of Toronto Facebook group: local events, contests, jobs, etc.

www.echolocationmagazine.com: *Echolocation*

www.poets.ca: Canadian contests and awards

www.pw.org: Writing contests, grants and awards

www.resartis.org: Directory of international artist residencies (by discipline)

10. FURTHER RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The Patchy Squirrel Lit-Serv provides regular email updates about local events. If you'd like to subscribe, send a blank email with SUBSCRIBE in the subject header to patchysquirrel@gmail.com.
- The Emerging Writers Reading series, founded by MACRW alum Jess Taylor, accepts submissions by prospective performers. See ewreading.com for details.

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The University of Toronto operates on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.



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