

The Creative Writing PhD

The creative writing PhD has broadly the same characteristics as any other doctorate in terms of its requirements of breadth, depth and originality. It does differ from a literary studies PhD, however, in some significant details, and particularly in the composition of the thesis and research methods.

The creative writing PhD will normally have two components:

1. A 'creative' element made up of, for example, a collection of poetry, prose fiction either in novel form or a collection of shorter fiction, or creative non-fiction such as life writing, travel writing etc.
2. a 'critical' element that might include but is not limited to, critical work on relevant literature, theoretical enquiry and critical reflection on the writing process.

These are both part of the research processes of the doctoral programme of study. If the PhD is exploring something like 'how do experiments in poetic form develop our understanding of the experience of critical illness?', or 'how does the historical novel contribute to our knowledge of ecological issues in the nineteenth-century?', then both creative and critical work will respond to the question.

Important considerations:

1. UCD has a norm of 70% creative work and 30% critical work for the creative writing PhD. This can vary but it is very helpful to bear these proportions in mind, particularly in the early stages. As the thesis approaches completion, it is important to ensure that, whatever the final proportions, the creative and critical components taken together meet the requirements of a PhD.
2. Candidates are encouraged to think about their critical work in parallel with their creative practice. While the critical element needs to be at doctoral level, the candidate cannot reproduce the volume of critical research in a literary studies PhD in their field and will need to be selective in the avenues they explore. Clear and well-constructed research questions can be helpful in providing boundaries and limitations.
3. In common with other doctoral candidates, those on creative writing PhDs will be searching for a style or tone adequate to express their ideas. The creative element will bring its own aesthetic demands, but some candidates will also seek to develop their own style for the critical element. This can result in work that is more like an essay that might appear in the New York or London Review of Books for example, rather than work closer to an academic article. Thus, some candidates may explore different styles in the critical element of their thesis while fulfilling all requirements of citation and referencing, and might be aiming to write for publications other than the academic and the scholarly.

4. Creative practitioners often carry out other 'research' into particular topics in order to inform the content of their work. Examples might include gathering historical information for the plot of a novel, or scientific knowledge to inform work in ecopoetics. The focus is on the ways that such work is used in the creative practice.
5. Linked to 3 above, writers of poetry and prose fiction often range very broadly across many fields to get ideas for their work. The critical part of the thesis does not have to reflect all aspects they have thought about but should focus on one or two most relevant to their research questions and that they feel they really want to consider in some depth.

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