

A Guide to Admissions

Freestanding MA Program in English and Comparative Literature Columbia University

How to Apply to our MA Program

All students apply to the MA program in English and Comparative Literature through Columbia's general online graduate school application portal, which goes live every September on the [GSAS Admissions website](#). The application deadline generally falls in late November. [Click here for the current deadline](#).

Application Requirements

Document Name	Required?	Details
Statement of Academic Purpose	Yes	1-2 pages, single spaced, 12-point font, on your plans for the MA, your past academic experience, and why our program is right for you
Personal Statement	Yes	1000 words (max.), on how your personal experiences and history will contribute to a community that values diversity of perspectives
Writing Sample	Yes	15-20 pages, double-spaced throughout, 12-point font. Preferably a single research essay connected to your Statement of Academic Purpose
Resume	Yes	1-2 pages, focused on academic study and relevant professional experience
Transcripts	Yes	Copies in English of all official transcripts from colleges and universities you have attended. Do not send high school transcripts. If you have not yet graduated from your current degree program and don't have official transcripts, send a screenshot or PDF of your

		academic record. You will have to submit official transcripts before enrolling
Letters of Recommendation	Yes	3 letters, preferably from teachers or mentors familiar with your academic work
GRE General Exam	No	n/a
GRE Subject Exam	No	n/a
TOEFL for non-native English speakers (or equivalent)	Yes	See GSAS Admissions FAQ for current requirements.

The most important parts of the application are the Statement of Academic Purpose and Writing Sample. In both these documents, our admissions committee looks for a sense of a personal voice and direction, an awareness of relevant scholarly debates, and a good match between the applicant's interests and those of our faculty. The committee pays close attention to applicants' overall undergraduate record (and prior graduate record, if any), as well as letters of recommendation. However, we are most interested in the direct written evidence of your individual abilities and interests.

For more information about general application and admissions requirements at Columbia, please read the [GSAS Admissions FAQ](#).

Admissions Categories

In order to ensure an intellectually diverse entering cohort, and to help ensure that your application will be read by the right combination of faculty, the online application system will first prompt you to choose among three broadly geographical and linguistic areas of concentration, then select two narrower subfields reflecting your specific disciplinary or interdisciplinary interests.

We acknowledge that some applicants' interests will not fit neatly into these categories. Please feel free to address such issues in your Statement of Academic Purpose. Please also understand that you will not be locked into these choices: students admitted to our MA program study a wide range of subjects and develop new interests over the course of their study at Columbia.

1. Geographical Area

Choose one of the following options:

- a) American

Applicants selecting this concentration intend to work largely on literary or cultural texts, objects, and histories relating to the North American continent. Applicants selecting “American” may wish to work on canonical US texts and authors, or in an established literary-historical field. But applicants in this concentration may also take hemispheric, transnational, multi-ethnic, or multilingual approaches to the Americas – *e.g.*, topics in diasporic, expatriate, or indigenous literatures that overflow familiar national, disciplinary, or linguistic boundaries.

b) British and Irish

Applicants selecting “British and Irish” expect to study some aspect of the literatures and cultures of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Again, for some students this will mean research in an established regional/national field such as British Romanticism or Irish Modernism. Others may work in a trans-Atlantic, global, or imperial frame, with British authors read alongside authors from, *e.g.*, South Asia or Africa. Still others may study English-language texts alongside one of the many other languages written or spoken in Britain and Ireland, now or in the past, from Old Norse to Urdu to Jamaican Patois.

c) Comparative, Postcolonial, and Global South

Applicants selecting “Comparative, Postcolonial, and Global South” will typically work across multiple national and linguistic traditions, with many also working across media and periods, or on topics of a theoretical nature.

2. Disciplinary/Interdisciplinary Fields

After selecting your area of geographic concentration, you will be asked to select two disciplinary/interdisciplinary fields of study from the following list.

18th Century British 19th Century British 20th-21st Century British Pre-1865 American Post-1865 American African American Literature Asian American Literature Comparative Literature Contemporary Literature Digital Humanities/Media Studies Disability Studies/Health Humanities Drama, Theatre, and Performance Early American	Environmental Humanities Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Indigenous Studies Jazz Studies Law and Literature Latinx Studies Medieval Modernism Poetry Postcolonial and Global South Renaissance and Early Modern Theory
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Application Fees

GSAS charges a nonrefundable fee of \$125 to apply to Columbia. (Please note: this fee is not levied by, nor does it go to, the Department of English and Comparative Literature.) If you cannot afford this fee, you may apply for an application fee waiver. For information, [please see this website](#).

Selectivity, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Our MA program is selective, with fewer than a third of applicants admitted on average.

However, that doesn't mean we only accept students with perfect academic records from elite universities—indeed, we regularly admit students with a wide range of educational experiences and from diverse backgrounds. You do not need to have been an English or Comparative Literature major to apply, but it will certainly help your application if you can show experience in literary or cultural studies; training in a related discipline such as Art History, Classics, History, Modern Languages, Philosophy, or Religion; or a background in an interdisciplinary field such as Gender Studies or Media Studies.

Program Structure

For a complete description of the MA program, including a summary of academic requirements, see [here](#).

Advanced Standing / Transfer Credit

We do not offer advanced standing in the MA or allow MA students to transfer credit from prior graduate coursework.

Program Size

We currently admit around 15 students per year to the MA program, with an additional 8-10 doctoral students entering the Department each year. This number allows us to offer a full range of graduate classes across most fields of literature in English—and to offer a variety of courses in comparative, theoretical, and interdisciplinary subject areas—while maintaining small class sizes and individual advising.

Financial Aid

There is limited financial aid for students admitted to the Freestanding MA program. Financial aid awards, and their amounts, will be confirmed only after admission.

Teaching

MA students do not generally teach in our Department. However, limited opportunities do exist for students to be employed as “MA Readers” (more commonly known as “MA Graders”), who are paid to help faculty evaluate undergraduate student work.

Pre-Application Appointments, Tours, and Emails

Given the volume of applications, we cannot answer all admissions queries individually, nor can we generally facilitate pre-admissions Zoom meetings, in-person meetings, or campus tours. We apologize for not being more accessible, but we need to reserve most of our attention for students already enrolled in the program.

You should feel free to email professors whose interests align with yours, or whom you envisage as potential advisors. (See the [faculty directory](#) for more information.) Please note, however, that our professors receive many such emails and cannot reply to them all, so please don’t be discouraged if your note goes unanswered. Likewise, please understand that a lively email exchange with a professor does not guarantee admission, even if they express interest in working with you. Entry to our MA program is decided by the relevant faculty committee. No individual professor can guarantee admission.

Further Information

If this document leaves a question unanswered, please first read the [GSAS Admissions FAQ](#) and only then contact the Department by writing to Steven Barroga, Graduate Coordinator, at enclgraduatecoordinator@columbia.edu.