

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

A Guide to Admissions

MA Program in English and Comparative Literature Columbia University

The MA Program in English and Comparative Literature serves many different kinds of student. Some students want additional training before applying to Ph.D. programs; some have majored in another subject and want to strengthen their literary education; some are pursuing (or want to pursue) careers in publishing, high school teaching, library science, cultural non-profits, or other areas for which an advanced humanistic degree will be useful; and still others are motivated solely by the desire to know literature in greater depth. These are some common reasons, but of course, students' motivations for choosing the MA in English and Comparative Literature are as diverse as the students themselves.

Applying to our MA Program

All students apply to our MA program through Columbia's general online graduate school admissions portal, which goes live every September on the [GSAS Admissions website](#). The application deadline does not usually fall until the following March, but please [check here for the current deadline](#).

Required Documents

Document Name	Required?	Details
Statement of Academic Purpose	Yes	1-2 pages.
Writing Sample		Yes. 15-20 pages, preferably a single research essay related to your academic interests
Resume	Yes	Yes. 1-2 pages
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 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 score 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 and a good match between the applicant’s interests and those of our faculty. If getting an MA in English and Comparative Literature fits into your long-term academic or career plans, please explain how in your Statement of Academic Purpose. The admissions committee pays attention to applicants’ prior academic record and letters of recommendation but it is most interested in direct written evidence of your abilities and interests, as well as your reasons for wanting to study for your MA in our department.

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

Application Fees

GSAS charges a nonrefundable fee of \$120 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. We typically admit fewer than 25% of our applicants, while only a handful of the 15-20 students we admit each year will qualify for merit-based financial aid assistance.

We do not, however, only accept students with perfect academic records from elite universities. We are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in admissions and we regularly admit students with a wide range of educational experiences and from a diverse range of backgrounds. You do not need to have been an English major to apply, but it will certainly help your application if you can show experience in literary or cultural studies, or training in a related discipline such as art history, classics, history, modern languages, philosophy, or religion.

Our department also participates in the [MA Access Program in Modern Literatures, Languages, and Cultures](#). Designed to enhance access to a Columbia graduate education in the humanities for those who would otherwise not be able to afford it, this highly competitive fellowship program provides tuition, fees, health insurance, and a cost-of-living stipend for qualified admits.

“Subfield” Designations

The online application system requires you to select from a short list of two subfields of literary study that best reflect your academic interests (e.g., 19th Century British, Renaissance, Postcolonial and Global South). We refer to these as your Primary Subfield and Secondary Subfield and they are used to distribute applications for evaluation to the most appropriate specialists on our faculty. Subfield designations also are used to help achieve a balanced representation of interests among incoming classes of graduate students.

When you apply, please select the subfields that most closely reflect your current and expected area(s) of academic specialty. You are not, however, making a long-term commitment to some narrow area of study. Graduate education should be a process of experimentation, and we expect that some students will change their areas of interest over time.

Program Structure / Full and Part-Time Study

For a full list of degree requirements, including required courses and foreign language requirements, see the [online guide to the Freestanding MA program](#).

Students in the MA program may be in residence full- or part-time. Part-time students may also choose whether to study at half- or quarter-time pace. You may also switch between full-, half, and quarter-time registrations as you prefer each semester. The only essential thing is that you must have registered for the equivalent of two full-time semesters of study before you can graduate with the MA degree.

Full-time MA students usually take four or five classes per semester. Part-time students usually take two or three classes. You must pass eight graduate classes, amounting to at least 30 points of credit, with a “B” average or higher in order to graduate.

For more information, see the GSAS webpage on [Residence Units and Other Enrollment Categories](#).

Admission to Doctoral Program

There is no direct route from the free-standing MA program to the doctoral program. Although we do occasionally admit our own MA graduates to the doctoral program, we cannot guarantee anything other than a fair hearing. The only way for MA program graduates to enter our doctoral program is to apply through the regular admissions process.

Program Size

We generally admit between 15 and 20 MA students per year. This number allows us to offer a full range of graduate classes across all fields of literature in English, and to offer a variety of courses in comparative, theoretical, and interdisciplinary subject areas.

Funding

Our MA program is, with the exception of the handful of fellowships available through the [MA Access Program](#), largely unfunded. You should expect to support yourself and pay Columbia tuition over the course of your studies. See the [GSAS Financial Aid website](#) for information about financing your education at Columbia, including information about student loans and available fellowships. See the [Cost of Attendance](#) page for tuition and fee rates for the current academic year.

The department does award a small number of financial aid grants to admitted students on the basis of merit. There is no formal application process for these grants, which are not awarded until after final admissions decisions have been made. Financial aid grants pay only a portion (around 20%) of Columbia's tuition and fees and include no cost-of-living stipend.

Advanced Standing / Transfer Credit

We do not offer advanced standing or transfer to MA students who have already completed graduate coursework in another program. You must complete all your MA requirements at Columbia.

Teaching

MA students are not expected to teach and are not allowed, by university statutes, to serve as instructors of record. MA students can, however, earn money and experience as Readers, in which capacity they assist a professor with grading papers and exams for an undergraduate class.

Pre-Application Appointments, Tours, and Emails

Given the volume of applications, and the limited number of faculty and staff hours, we cannot answer all admissions queries individually. The DGS, Associate DGS, and Graduate Coordinator are, also, not generally available for pre-admissions Zoom meetings, campus tours, or general email correspondence. We apologize for not being more accessible, but we need to reserve most of our attention for students already enrolled in the program.

Further Information

If this document leaves a question unanswered please read the [GSAS Admissions FAQ](#) first and only then contact the department by writing to Professor Matthew Hart, Director of Graduate Studies, at mh2968@columbia.edu.

For more information about our doctoral program, including academic requirements and key academic benchmarks, please browse the [department website](#). Given the volume of queries we receive from applicants, please do not write or call until you have consulted the website.