



Royal College of Art

Postgraduate Art and Design

Programme Specification

1. General Information

Programme title:	Writing
Award:	Masters
Qualification Framework level:	Level 7
School/Department or equivalent:	School of Arts and Humanities
Campus location(s):	Battersea
Total UK credits:	180
Date valid from/to:	2023-24

2. Programme Philosophy

Consider the MA Writing programme as part of the ongoing occasion of your learning, one which you have already begun, will share with us for a year, and which will then continue — irrevocably changed — once you leave. While you are with us, you will be taught a lot, but you will learn a great deal more.

There is not one particular type of writer that we would like to produce, and so whether you would like to write for a mainstream audience, or prepare for doctoral study, we will be able to support you to become the best possible version of the writer you would like to be. If we tend towards anything it is 'creative non-fiction', imperfectly described, although 'literary writing', rather than literature, might be a less inadequate alternative. In recent years our students have used the expanded essay to produce an extraordinary range of forms and consider an extraordinary range of subjects, and you will be encouraged to do so, too. The projects often combine these different approaches unexpectedly, or fold together established genres — such as memoir and cultural history, for example — to produce work which possesses both intellectual rigour and poetic form.

The Writing programme consists of six distinct but complementary units through which you will develop your writing practice. Although you will be asked to respond to particular briefs and projects throughout these units, we do not want you to think of these as discrete tasks but rather as parts of your larger writing practice. By the end of the programme, you will

have not only a substantial portfolio of writing, but also a strong sense of how these works constitute your broader practice, and how you might want to develop this further. As such, you can use the programme units both as an opportunity to consolidate your practice and also the means by which you might test and extend it, whether that is by experimenting with form, or exploring new areas of enquiry.

Each unit will be taught by the MA Writing staff team as well as numerous guest lecturers, and will consist of reading classes, seminars, discussion groups, group and individual tutorials, presentation, and group critiques. The programme builds a supportive and critical environment between staff and students, and you will no doubt learn as much responding to the other students' work as you will in having them respond to yours. Writing is largely reading, and so you will do a lot of that, extracts from novels, essays, and interviews, but perhaps more importantly you will read the work of your peers, and develop an intimacy with their writing unlike any you have experienced previously. And they with yours, too. This is the first step in developing a network of peers upon whom you can draw for the rest of your career, and many of our graduates continue to work closely with one another.

That writing is *in* the world, and *of* it, rather than simply being *about* it, is a fundamental ethos of the programme, and although this is certainly no vocational programme, you will accumulate a great deal of professional skills, and meet a wide range of practitioners, from writers and editors to publishers and commissioners. Our graduates can be found editing *The White Review*, or being published by Granta, Zero Books, or Fitzcarraldo Editions. They work as editors on publications, or start up their own, or they pursue a career in academia, with our graduates having followed PhDs in Oxford, Manchester, Edinburgh, Goldsmiths, or Birkbeck, and teaching in numerous prestigious institutions, including the Royal College of Art (RCA).

When John Ruskin established his school of drawing at the University of Oxford it was not simply in order to produce better draughtsmen (although that too), but to use drawing as the means by which to attend to the world and understand it better, whether that is a Gothic arch or the material conditions of the artisan who produced it. We consider the Writing programme similarly: as the means to make better writers, yes, but also better thinkers, people who are better able to notice the world and so discern the best way to engage with it.

3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

Programme aims

The MA Writing programme aims to:

- Improve your intellectual and creative abilities;
- Make you not only better writers, but also better thinkers;
- Encourage you to develop subject expertise and related research skills in areas of your own choosing;
- Develop skilled and expert writers in contemporary culture equipped to pursue high level careers in the cultural sector and academia;
- Establish writing as the fundamental cultural and artistic practice both within the RCA, and beyond.

What will I be expected to achieve?

Upon successful completion of the programme, you will be expected to meet the requirements of both the College-wide Learning Outcomes and your programme-specific Learning Outcomes.

College-wide Learning Outcomes

You should be able to:

- Interrogate and articulate the intentions of your work in relation to the critical and conceptual context of your field(s) of study;
- Independently plan and produce work that is informed by developments at the forefront of your field(s) of study;
- Evaluate and critique the principles and methods of research in your field(s) of study, and apply these principles to your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice;
- Demonstrate originality in how you translate knowledge into practice;
- Communicate your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice to a non-specialist audience;
- Critically reflect on the likely public impact of your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice, and on your responsibilities as a practitioner;
- Define your professional ambitions and identify the challenges involved in meeting them.

Programme-Specific Learning Outcomes

You should be able to:

- Produce work at an advanced level that combines intelligence, speculation, and technical ability;

- Articulate the intentions of your work, and reflect upon them in relation to the critical and conceptual context of your practice;
- Experiment with form, and develop an understanding of which form — or combination of forms — might be most appropriate for your work;
- Develop an awareness of the many ways in which you can make your work public, and demonstrate a sensitivity to what might be most appropriate in different circumstances;
- Demonstrate an advanced understanding of research methods and principles, and apply them effectively within your own practice;
- Define your practice, and your professional identity, through both self-reflection and a consideration of the cultural context in which you are working.

4. What will I learn?

Curriculum Map

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Distance and Proximity (15 credits)	Urgency of the Arts (15 credits)	Independent Research Project (60 credits)
Attention (15 credits)	The Practical Past (15 credits)	
Publics and Counterpublics (15 credits)	How to Live Together (15 credits)	
AcrossRCA (30 credits)		

Programme Structure

Unit Title	Term	Credit Value	Core or Elective?
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Distance and Proximity	1	15	Core
Attention	1	15	Core
Publics and Counterpublics	1	15	Core
AcrossRCA (College-wide unit)	1–2	30	Core
The Practical Past	2	15	Core
How to Live Together	2	15	Core
Urgency of the Arts (School-wide Unit)	2	15	Core
Independent Research Project (IRP)	3	60	Core

Unit 1 – Distance and Proximity (15 credits)

We are always writing from somewhere, and this unit consider what it means to have a position, whether in relation to a subject, or a person. It is often said to be important to maintain a ‘critical distance’ to a subject, and yet ‘close knowledge’ is also greatly valued. How far from – or how close to – a subject might one be to write best about it?

Unit 2 – Attention (15 credits)

Attention is one of the foremost qualities of a writer, whether it is turned to the rhythm of a sentence or the cut of a jacket, a political movement or the stillness within a dance. To notice, to discern, to discriminate: all of these things will be considered within this unit.

Unit 3 – Publics and Counterpublics (15 credits)

How might we create the public for whom we write? In this unit we will consider how our writing might enter the world, and the effect it might have upon it once it does.

Unit 4 – The Practical Past (15 credits)

Research is one of the most important ways by which we engage with the world, and in this unit we will look at how we can develop our research skills to improve our writing practice. As well as reading groups and discussions on various historiographic approaches, you will visit archives, libraries, and other collections to learn how these might be used to extend their practices.

Unit 5 – How to Live Together (15 credits)

Writing is often presented as a solitary activity; we prefer to think of it as something collaborative, something that is made with and for others. In this unit you will work together to produce work for a cultural organisation which will be made public; this might be a small publication, for example, or a podcast, or a series of talks.

AcrossRCA (30 credits)

Across **terms 1 and 2**, you will participate in **AcrossRCA**. This unit aims to support you to meet the challenges of a complex, uncertain and changing world by bringing you together to work collaboratively in interdisciplinary teams on a series of themed projects informed

by expertise within and beyond the College. These projects will challenge you to use your intellect and imagination to address key cultural, social, environmental and economic challenges. In doing so, you will develop and reflect on the abilities required to translate knowledge into action, and help demonstrate the contribution that the creative arts can make to our understanding and experience of the world.

Urgency of the Arts (15 credits)

In term 2, School of Arts and Humanities Masters' students will participate in a School-wide unit called "The Urgency of the Arts." In this unit we ask how arts and humanities research and practice can engage with our current socio-political climate, and how might it shape, be necessary and essential in contemporary cultural debates.

The unit introduces students to a diverse range of perspectives, approaches and methods relevant to contemporary practice and thought in the arts and humanities. The delivery, predominantly based on workshops and featuring specialist presentations by leading artists, aims to assist students in recognizing, questioning, expanding, and reevaluating their own artistic practices and disciplinary assumptions. Through interactions with staff and students from across the School, as well as through a variety of methodological approaches, students will develop an understanding of the contemporary concerns that shape and influence artistic practice.

Students will be supported in understanding the possibilities, complexities and impact of their own work. They will be encouraged to contextualise it within broad cultural landscapes to recognise and emphasise its potential and also the complex ways in which their work may be received and understood.

Independent Research Project (60 credits)

The IRP is the culmination of the MA Writing programme, and constitutes the largest piece of work to be completed. The form of the IRP is subject to negotiation but it is suggested that the submission consists of a piece of writing of between 10,000–12,000 words; this might be reduced if the submission also contains other elements, such as a website, or other audio-visual materials, for example. Although the IRP consists largely of independent study, it is also supported by individual and group tutorials, and work-in-progress presentations.

The IRP forms the major part of a Portfolio of Practice which also consists of a Practice Statement of no more than 500 words, as well as other contextualising material which contributes to your practice. You will also take part in a public event during which you will present a short extract of your work; your work will also appear in the online event.

5. How will I learn?

The programme makes use of a number of different, yet complementary, teaching components in order that you develop a practice that is both robust and well-rounded.

These components include briefings; seminars (including reading classes); workshops; group tutorials; individual tutorials; publishing, events, exhibitions, or other forms of public presentation; study visits; group critiques, but the programme may not be limited to these methods.

Briefings are used to introduce a project, and explain what will happen, or is to be done.

Seminars are a group discussion between staff and students on a particular theme or subject; if these are a reading class then they will be on the texts which have been set and read in advance by the students.

Workshops are group sessions in which a particular skill or process is developed, whether this is Riso printing, or the editing of a text.

Tutorials — whether in small groups or individually — allow you to discuss their work with a member of staff to test their ideas, and to receive guidance on how best they might proceed.

Much can be learned simply by the process of making a work public, and a work's strengths — or flaws — are often revealed as soon as they are spoken in a busy room, or appear within covers, whereas previously they had remained obscure. (This process will reveal much to you, although the larger public project might also include other teaching components, such as briefings, seminars, and critiques, amongst others.)

Study visits might help you understand the public nature of work, and how a work becomes public, and might also include presentations, and workshops on how to use archives, for example.

And finally group critiques provide the opportunity for work to be shared, discussed, and feedback given, and so are useful not only for the feedback received, but also for the process by which it is formulated, and shared; you might gain as much if not more by what one student says about another's work as they do by what is said about their own work directly, and so their full engagement in this process is paramount. Similarly, the necessity to formulate what it is that they like, do not like, or are troubled — or entranced — in the work of another can prove to be as important to the development of their own work as it is the students whose work is under consideration. Writing, here, becomes the occasion for thought, and its bettering, too.

Formative feedback is given throughout the programme, most especially during the group critiques and tutorials, but also during seminars and reading classes, to provide a supportive, creative, and challenging environment in which you might best develop their work.

6. Assessment and feedback

Regulations

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found [here](#). Please note that College regulations are subject to annual updates and amendments.

Unit assessment

Although writing is often considered a rather solitary act, we consider it to be but one of a number of complementary activities, many of which require the participation of others. This is certainly the case when it comes to the sharing of work, and the feedback which follows.

Each of our units, including the IRP, make use of formative feedback, from both tutors and the your peers, often in group critiques, and so you may learn something even more valuable from a comment on someone else's work as you might upon your own; the necessity to comment on the work of their peers is also important in developing a strong critical eye in each student, which will benefit their reading of their own work, too. Formative feedback will also be given during individual and group tutorials, while written feedback will be given in response to students' self-assessment forms.

In addition, formative feedback will be given during the development and writing of the IRP; it will be assessed as part of a Portfolio of Practice submitted later in term 3, and written feedback will be given.

7. What award can I get?

To be awarded an RCA MA degree you need to gain 180 credits at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will involve successfully completing all units.

If you fail a unit at the first attempt, you will be offered an opportunity to resit the unit. If you are successful at resit you will be awarded the credits for that unit. If you are unsuccessful, you cannot progress further in your programme.

Exit awards:

If you have gained at least 120 credits at level 7 of the FHEQ, you may be eligible for the exit award of Postgraduate Diploma. An exit award is a final award from the College and cannot be rescinded.

For more detailed information about the College's assessment, progression and awards policies see the Regulations.

8. Admissions

Cross-College requirements

Academic Entry Requirements

Candidates must normally have obtained a good relevant undergraduate degree or an equivalent qualification. The College recognises as an equivalent qualification any degree, diploma, certificate or other evidence of formal qualification awarded by a university or other higher education establishment where the award is made following the successful completion of a programme of at least three years' study, the programme of study being open, as a general rule, only to persons holding a certificate awarded on the successful completion of a full programme of upper secondary education.

Other qualifications may be approved, providing that the College's Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD) is satisfied that the applicant has the ability to pursue the programme of study successfully. The ABCD is empowered to make judgements about the extent to which qualifications or experience gained elsewhere may be accepted in partial fulfilment of its requirements.

Portfolio

All applicants are required to submit a portfolio as part of the application process. A portfolio is a showcase of an applicant's work as an artist or designer and can be made up of images, videos or writing examples. The portfolio helps us to better understand the applicant and allows them to show evidence of their ability and motivation to undertake a given programme.

Each programme is looking for different things in a portfolio; each Head of Programme provides specific advice on portfolio requirements in the online application system. We advise prospective students to consider these requirements carefully before submitting their application.

Applicant Qualities

Generally, we are looking for applicants to demonstrate their:

- creativity, imagination and innovation;
- ability to articulate the intentions of the work;
- intellectual engagement in areas relevant to the work;
- technical skills appropriate to the work;
- potential to benefit from the programme and achieve MA standards overall.

English Language

Applicants who are not a national of a majority English-speaking country will need to demonstrate their English language proficiency. The College accepts a range of English language qualifications. The full list can be seen at <https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/entrance-requirements/english-language-requirements/>

Applicants are exempt from this requirement if they have received a 2.1 degree or above from a university in a majority English-speaking nation within the last two years.

If a student would need a Student Visa visa to study at the RCA, they will also need to meet the Home Office's minimum requirements for entry clearance.

Admission Process

Applications must be made directly to the College through our online application portal:

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/application-process/ma-application-process/>

Upon completion of that first stage of the application process, candidates will be invited to submit a portfolio of their work, a 300-word statement of intent and a video communicating clearly their motivations, personal interests and why they are pursuing a Masters degree at the Royal College of Art. These materials are reviewed by members of the programme team who will communicate an academic decision to the College Registry, who manage the process of offer-making in line with the College's recruitment targets. In some cases, where the programme team is not able to make an admission decision based solely upon the work submitted by the applicant, we may invite the candidate to undertake an interview with us.

Whilst there are still spaces available, successful candidates will be made an offer of a place. If there is no vacancy for a subsequent successful applicant, the candidate will be placed on a waiting list, and may be made a firm offer should a place become available.

Programme-Specific requirements

Specific advice on programme portfolio requirements is provided by the Head of Programme in the online application system. Please consult the College website for further information on programme-specific admission and portfolio requirements:

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/study/programme-finder/writing-ma/#requirements>