

Writing a Practice Based PhD Proposal – Creative Writing

York Centre for Writing: School of Humanities

York St John University

What is a Creative Practice PhD?

- A practice-based PhD in Creative Writing provides you with the opportunity to produce an extended piece of creative work and an integrated piece of critical writing of 25000-50000 words (to be negotiated).
- This form of study is appropriate for students who have an interest in critically analysing a topic and/or practice through the process of creative writing. Whilst the creative component to a practice-based PhD forms the largest part of the overall word count there has to be a leading critical idea that is debated in and through the creative and critical sections.
- In a Creative Writing PhD your writing forms an 'experiment' that you reflect on and analyse. If you are interested in focussing exclusively on the creative artefact then it would be valuable to investigate the MFA Creative Writing programme.
- You can look at completed PhDs via a keyword search at <https://ethos.bl.uk/Home.do>

Foundations:

- You should use your knowledge of writing research proposals for the development of your PhD proposal. However, one thing that is distinct about a PhD proposal is that you are seeking to express creative and critical questions that your project will discuss.
- Start with your creative proposal and give the foundations of form, genre, length, etc. The production of the text or artefact is a major part of the research and, when complete, is a major outcome.
- Ask yourself what is your creative work testing - an idea, a question of form, a question of process – it may be all of these. This will lead you to the focus of the critical work

Structuring your proposal:

Your proposal should be no more than 1500 words plus a bibliography

- Title: This should include the title of your creative work and a sub-title which indicates your critical focus.
- Type: Identify whether you are going to write a novel, script, poetry collection, etc and give an indication of length.
- Form/Genre: Identify form and genre where appropriate. If you are working on a collection, you may also need to identify the unifying theme.
- Synopsis: Provide a *short* indicative synopsis of the creative work.
- Research Question: This is often the most challenging part of the process see the notes below. This is where you would identify the 'original contribution to knowledge'. You need to make sure that the

creative and critical sections are clearly connected. (This is often the part of the proposal that requires discussion).

- Context: What work already exists in this field. You need material to be available for you to build on and develop. This may include novels, plays, poetry collections, etc and critical sources on your form and topic. You will also need to include historical and/or cultural and/or theoretical models.
- Schedule: Can you give a very brief overview of key moment in the development of your PhD?
- Ethics: Are there any issues relating to research ethics that will need to be addressed? (This may be as a result of methodological choices such as interviews or where you are dealing with real people's stories).
- Biographical note: You may wish to indicate what work you have already undertaken that you will bring to the study. Note if you have any previous publications or prizes, whether you have agency representations.
- Indicative bibliography: It is important that there is material available about your subject. It is also important that you are familiar with the core texts that you propose to use. You don't have to have read everything you indicate on your bibliography in detail; it is a scoping exercise to identify core texts. Keep the bibliography specific and as current as possible. Identify creative and critical sources that you will investigate.

When you have drafted the above you should approach prospective supervisors or the School of Humanities Postgraduate Research Lead to comment on and help develop your proposal. You should also include a sample of your creative writing. Please take a look at the staff directory and enquire with the member/s of staff that have expertise in your research area. This can be an informal enquiry initially.

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/schools/school-of-humanities/staff-directory/>

It helps to enquire with at least a draft proposal. Then when you make a formal application via admissions you will need a completed proposal. Information on what is expected, and some examples can be found here. Of course, proposals will vary somewhat depending on the subject discipline:

<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research/apply/examples-of-research-proposals/>

Initial proposals are often too broad and the more specific you can make it the better it will be. This is where a prospective supervisor will be able to advise.

Don't worry about the proposal being in draft form – it is useful to share work in progress and in development.

If your proposal is successful, you will be invited to interview where you will be able to give a presentation to expand on your ideas. Treat your proposal as a focussed summary of the ideas.

Research Question:

This is often the trickiest section to get right at proposal stage and it is often the part of the research process that will change as you develop your proposal.

Consider:

- What 'intervention' is this proposal making in my field of study? What new knowledge about form and/or practice does it aim to produce?

- What does my creative writing seek to assess – this might be about a critical idea, form or writing, the practice of writing/being a writer, or all of these.
- What critical ideas am I bringing to the practice of writing and why?

Application Process:

Details of the application and entry requirements are available here -

<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/research-degrees/doctor-of-philosophy-phd/>

Information about the postgraduate student academic journey is available here –

<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/quality-gateway/research-degrees/the-york-st-john-student-research-lifecycle/>

NB:

If you are applying for a PhD with a practice-based component (such as the Creative Writing PhD) a portfolio of writing is also required. If you are thinking about a Creative Writing PhD and you have an MA in Creative Writing, do also consider our MFA in Creative Writing, which can be a more appropriate route for those of you who want to focus exclusively on your writing. See here for info:

<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/creative-writing/creative-writing-mfa/>

Additional Resources:

Find a PhD - <https://www.findaphd.com/guides/writing-phd-research-proposal>

Indeed - <https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-write-phd-proposal>

PhD Assistance - <https://www.phdassistance.com/blog/how-to-write-your-research-proposal/>

Prospects UK - <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate-study/phd-study/how-to-write-a-successful-research-proposal>

Vitae - <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/doing-a-doctorate/starting-a-doctorate/writing-a-research-proposal>