Creative Writing at Nottingham

nottingham.ac.uk/english
Sparking your creativity

“It would be hard to imagine a city with a better writing scene than Nottingham, and our creative writing course plays a big part.

In 2015, Nottingham was named a UNESCO City of Literature, an award that reflects the city’s rich literary heritage and wide-ranging writing community. Between them, the campus and the city also offer a huge range of facilities and networks for students interested in the creative and performing arts. For instance, the New Theatre, based on our University Park campus, was the first wholly student-run theatre in the UK. The University is also a partner of the Nottingham Festival of Words and has close connections with the Nottingham Playhouse, Theatre Royal and other local theatres, as well as with regional publishers, authors, poets and writing organisations.

To join the BA English with Creative Writing course, or to take creative writing as an optional module, is to become part of this vibrant creative writing community, where staff and students support each other in the writing process. You will work alongside experienced academics and established writers, so you can benefit from their expertise as well as that of guest authors and poets.

Our Writer in Residence, Jon McGregor, coordinates our creative writing literary journal, The Letters Page, and oversees the work of the student editorial team. The journal offers a unique chance to gain first-hand experience of editing and publishing, enabling students to put their skills into practice from a publishers’ perspective. There are also a number of creative writing societies and student publications that you can get involved with. Turn to page 7 to find out more about our creative writing community.

Dr Spencer Jordan
Programme Director and Assistant Professor, Creative Writing.
Undergraduate opportunities

There are two ways to study creative writing at Nottingham; either by selecting the three-year BA English with Creative Writing course, or by choosing optional creative writing modules on the BA English or BA English Language and Literature programmes.

**BA English with Creative Writing**

This course allows you to explore key areas of English literature, language and drama, whilst developing your writing skills and creative practice under the guidance of creative writing tutors and published authors. The amount of time spent on specialist creative writing modules increases year by year until, in your final year, half of your time is spent focusing on creative writing.

**Year one**

Through six year-long core modules, you will explore all the areas of English offered at Nottingham: language, literature, drama and performance, as well as creative writing. This broad basis gives you the freedom to select modules in your second and final years which reflect the areas of English you most enjoy.

**Year two**

You will take two compulsory creative writing modules, ‘Poetry: Forms and Conventions’ and ‘Fiction: Forms and Conventions’, and choose four other modules to cover at least three areas of English studies. You may also apply to spend a semester abroad.

**Final year**

You will take three compulsory creative writing modules, ‘Advanced Writing Practice: Poetry’, ‘Advanced Writing Practice: Fiction’, and a dissertation project in creative writing. You will also choose three modules to cover at least two areas of study in the School of English, or you can choose one creative writing option (‘Writing for Performance’, or ‘Digital Story: Craft and Technique’) and two modules from two other areas of study.

For more information see [nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/english](http://nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/english)

---

*How to get involved*

**Sophie Horton**
BA English with Creative Writing

Following the captivating lectures that this course offers, I have really enjoyed experimenting with the short story and with poetic forms like the sonnet and villanelle.

---

**Patrick Landy**
BA English with Creative Writing

At first, the idea of seminars where we write and share our work was terrifying, but all the students are so supportive and most of the time you completely forget you’re in a university seminar because it just feels like being around friends.

---
Choosing optional creative writing modules

Students on the BA English and BA English Language and Literature degrees can choose Creative Writing Practice as one of their year one optional modules.

In year two, you can choose one of the following creative writing modules:

- **Fiction: Forms and Conventions**
  You will examine techniques of writing fiction, including narrative voice, point of view, character development, dialogue, plot, and setting. You will be introduced to a diverse range of writers and techniques, and explore the publishing industry as it relates to fiction.

- **Poetry: Forms and Conventions**
  You will examine poetic styles and techniques, including poetic line, stanza, rhyme and imagery, along with traditional forms such as the sonnet or haiku. You will develop your own creative work as well as your critical and reflective skills.

In your third year, you can choose from a range of advanced modules, which build on the knowledge and skills acquired in years one and two, including:

- **Advanced Writing Practice**
  Through a series of workshops, you will be encouraged to read and critique the work of your peers, with the aim of improving your practice. You will read key writers within specific forms and conventions as well as relevant secondary texts.

- **Writing for Performance**
  You may choose from one of two routes: Script Analysis, or Script Writing. Areas covered will include setting, story and plot, beats/units of action, objectives, character and dialogue.

**Joint honours students**

Joint honours students from the School of English can get involved with the numerous creative writing opportunities on offer, from writing for our *Words on Words* blog, to joining the Creative Writing Society. For more information about opportunities open to all students, see [nottingham.ac.uk/english/write-create-perform](http://nottingham.ac.uk/english/write-create-perform)

Modules may change, for example due to curriculum developments. The most up-to-date information can be found on our website, at [nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/english](http://nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy/english)
Postgraduate opportunities

MA Creative Writing
Each year we welcome a new cohort of masters students into our supportive postgraduate community. They enhance their writing practice and creative network through a range of activities, including regular postgraduate seminars and conferences. Students enrolled on our MA in Creative Writing will benefit from:

- a diverse range of modules that focus on the craft, structure, methodologies and techniques associated with writing fiction and poetry
- specialist workshops led by published poets and authors
- sessions with guest publishers and professional writers (previous guests have included Alison Moore and Ruth Fainlight).

For more information, visit nottingham.ac.uk/go/creative-writing-ma

PhD research
To undertake a research degree with us is to join a lively, diverse and international body of researchers and practitioners, in which an exceptionally wide range of specialist interests is combined within a close-knit community. All PhD students are assigned supervisors, who are experts in a related field of research.

A PhD creative writing thesis will primarily consist of your own original creative work. The creative element could be a novel, a manuscript of poems, a collection of short stories, a play, or another form of creative output.

Alongside this you will be expected to write a critical analysis of your work, its context, and your research methodology.

For more information, visit nottingham.ac.uk/go/creative-writing-phd
Nottingham’s creative writing community

Opportunities at the University

Student magazines
- Impact Magazine (the University’s official student magazine)
- Firelight (the Creative Writing Society magazine)
- Her Campus (online magazine - see hercampus.com/school/nottingham)

The Creative Writing Society

From coffee shop critiques to the Off the Page podcast, this friendly community welcomes anyone with a passion for writing.

Nottingham New Theatre

If you’ve ever fancied trying your hand at writing for the stage, the Nottingham New Theatre could be for you! It is the only theatre in the country run entirely by students, enabling you to try everything from acting, directing, producing and writing.

The Letters Page

Edited by the school’s Writer in Residence, this respected journal allows students to publish stories, essays, poems, interviews and reportage – all in the form of letters.

Words on Words

Develop your own voice and writing style and share your student experience by contributing to the School of English blog. See blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/wordsonwords

The English showcase

A student-run event which celebrates the work produced by final year undergraduates and masters students. For more information, see nottingham.ac.uk/english/showcase

Opportunities in Nottingham

UNESCO City of Literature

Nottingham became a UNESCO City of Literature in 2015. For events and news from across the city, see nottinghamcityofliterature.com

Nottingham Writers’ Studio (NWS)

Offering workspaces, networking, advice, and creative and professional support, NWS helps writers navigate the path from aspiration through to publication. For more details, see nottinghamwritersstudio.co.uk

Writing East Midlands

Writing East Midlands organises a range of creative writing events and projects for and with emerging and established writers across the region.

“Nottingham offers a wide range of societies to get involved in, including the online magazine Her Campus. I contribute articles to the travel section, and this has helped me meet students in years other than my own, as well as helping me to learn about pitching ideas and producing them efficiently whilst keeping to deadlines.”

Emily Talbut
BA English with Creative Writing
Nottingham Poetry Exchange

Nottingham Poetry Exchange is a dynamic poetry platform based in the Centre for Regional Literature and Culture at the School of English. It hosts a diverse events programme and a reading group, where discussions include modern to contemporary poetry, covering works by Lorine Niedecker, Kamau Brathwaite, Jorie Graham, Anna Mendelssohn, and Edna St Vincent Millay.

There are plenty of opportunities for students to get involved, whether through contributing a poem to the student-run poetry magazine, Voices, or participating in the annual open mic event, ‘Lunch Poems’. The Exchange also runs lectures, which are led by students, staff, and visiting poets. Lecture topics have included sign language poetry, poetry and coding, and poetics of the reserve in the layered landscape.

Nottingham Poetry Exchange's regular performance and reading series has hosted special events with a number of contemporary poets, including Sophie Collins, Rachael Allen, Eley Williams, Abigail Parry, Andrew Taylor, Nisha Ramayaa, Sam Buchan-Watts, Nasser Hussein and Isabel Galleymore.

The Exchange is open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Nottingham. It is a fantastic way to meet other students from across the University who share a passion for poetry.

For news and events, plus interviews with visiting poets, see nottinghampoetryexchange.wordpress.com

Image shows (left to right): visiting poets Abigail Parry, Andrew Taylor, and Katy Lewis Hood.
Experience real-life publishing

The Letters Page is a literary magazine produced by School of English students, under the editorial guidance of our Writer in Residence, Professor Jon McGregor. Now in its seventh year, the project enables our students to experience writing - and publishing - as real world practices.

What’s unique about The Letters Page is that the stories, essays, and poems featured are all submitted in the form of handwritten letters.

The journal aims to develop links with writers and publishing professionals across the world. It explores the role of the letter in literary culture and in life, playing with the tensions between writing for a single reader and writing for an audience.

The Letters Page offers opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience in publishing through a work placement scheme. Placement students work alongside Jon to read and select submissions, carry out editorial and design work, and write copy for the website and social media platforms.

“Working on The Letters Page was an utterly invaluable experience. It gave me insight into everything from editorial process and consumer marketing to the logistics of producing a print publication. After I’d graduated, my placement with The Letters Page was also one of the biggest talking points I had with potential employers during job interviews.”

Olivia French
BA English with Creative Writing graduate
(now working as Marketing and Communications Manager at HarperCollins)

For more information see theletterspage.ac.uk
Meet our academics

Thomas Legendre
Assistant Professor in Creative Writing

I am interested in helping students to produce fiction of all shapes and sizes. My classes are devoted to not only rigorous writing exercises, but also careful attention to the process of reading published works from a writer’s perspective.

Using this approach, we develop an understanding of the subtle but crucial use of narrative voice and distance in relation to point-of-view, the structures of narrative, and the unexpected renderings of character, dialogue, setting and plot that lead to engaging stories and novels.

My creative work tends to draw from other disciplines, exploring the subjective underpinnings of apparently objective material. My first novel, *The Burning*, features characters whose personal lives are inextricable from their discoveries in the fields of economics, ecology, and astrophysics. My play, *Half Life*, was an entirely different sort of project - an immersive, site-specific performance which took place on the west coast of Scotland as part of NVA’s environmental art installation - yet its dramatic technique was derived from the methods of archaeology as well as general relativity and cosmology.

More recently, my forthcoming novel *Living in the Past* involves a blend of geology, archaeology, music, and time travel, while another work in progress, *Spring Fever*, is a quantum romantic techno-thriller with a literary sensibility.

I have also written critical essays, reviews, and stories. In addition I have explored audio as a medium for storytelling. This is reflected in *Divine Wind*, issued by 4'33" audio magazine and *Dream Repair*, a radio drama broadcast on BBC4.

“My classes are devoted to not only rigorous writing exercises, but also careful attention to the process of reading published works from a writer’s perspective.”
Dr Gordon Ramsay  
Lecturer in Drama, Performance and Creative Writing

The first thing I would say is that performance is a ‘doing’ thing and that writing is in effect ‘writing for doing’. So getting students to see and hear the characters and dialogue they are creating is a key part of the writing process. To this end, my writing workshops involve a high degree of sharing as well as feedback.

In my classes I try to encourage lots of playfulness, experimentation and draft work: from quick writing exercises where you can catch yourself out with what you have come up with; to the opposite, the reworking and crafting that is so important in the writing process.

I have written a number of stage plays, produced in London and Edinburgh, and my plays Found and The Exile have had staged readings at Nottingham Playhouse and with New Perspectives Theatre Company. I have also written a one-mile-long site-specific installation poem, Godiva Feeling (which ran from the A38 Branston turn-off to Tatenhill, Staffordshire!), and am currently working on a performance poem, Out of the Woods.

Favourite sayings that I bore writing students with include: ‘Take the left turn’ and ‘Slaughter your babies’ (not literally, please). Finally, I am a National Teaching Fellow and a Nottingham Dearing Award holder. And I support Spurs.
Matt Welton
Associate Professor in Creative Writing

Perhaps the most exciting thing about teaching creative writing is that I work with students whose experience in the other areas of their degree – language, literature, drama and medieval – means that when it comes to creating their own poetry, fiction and drama, their writing feels like it has been informed by a broad understanding of what language can do.

The vital element creative writing classes can add is an understanding of the way that writers go about making their work. I teach the poetry content on the ‘Creative Writing Practice’, ‘Creative Writing: Crafts’, and ‘Advanced Writing Practice’ modules, and use the sessions to encourage students to think of their own writing in the same contexts which apply to published writers. The processes of keeping a notebook, drafting and redrafting your writing, reading contemporary writing, and developing your knowledge of how publishing works all play a part in our student writers’ development.

I take a playful approach to writing poems, using the sounds of words to emphasise the musical qualities of language, and like to explore the overlap between poetry and fiction, and between tradition and innovation. My first book, The Book of Matthew, used repetition and variation to mess around with poetic structures. My second, We needed coffee but… was basically a set of language games. I am currently working on a book of new poems which blur the boundaries between language and maths.

I am also deeply involved in the Nottingham writing scene. There are lots of opportunities here for our students to learn about the world of writing from professional published authors. I do everything I can to encourage them.

“There are lots of opportunities here for our students to learn about the world of writing from professional published authors.”
Dr Spencer Jordan
Programme Director and Assistant Professor in Creative Writing

One of the great things about creative writing is that it forms its own unique relationship with each and every writer, every time they take up a pen or strike a keyboard. That’s what makes creative writing such an exhilarating experience.

As members of the School of English, in the Faculty of Arts, our students become part of a rich and rewarding academic community that includes subjects from film and archaeology, to philosophy and music. Bringing these wider interests into your writing, allowing your practice to bridge disciplines and genres, is one of the key benefits of studying with us at Nottingham.

I was born and brought up in the East Midlands so perhaps it’s no surprise that my novel, Journeys in the Dead Season, was set in the landscape in which I grew up. Yet the writing also quickly became an exploration of my own interests in history and memory. It also allowed me to explore techniques I’d picked up from writers like W. G. Sebald and Kazuo Ishiguro with their claustrophobic first person worlds. I quickly learned that writing is a research technique in its own right, a way of understanding more about the world. These are some of the things I bring into my teaching, whether at undergraduate or doctoral level.

Perhaps that’s why I’m also fascinated by digital storytelling and the impact of ‘the virtual’. It’s here that I see my interests coming together, including my love of fiction and the literary geographies of place.

“Our students become part of a rich and rewarding academic community that includes subjects from film and archaeology, to philosophy and music.”
Dr Lila Matsumoto
Assistant Professor in Creative Writing

Creative writing gives unique insights into literature. Students who take creative writing learn not only how to read and analyse texts, but how to create the effects of those texts: its story, voice, humour, bathos, emotional resonance. My aim as a teacher of poetry is to help students develop the skills to convey the world imaginatively, and to pay close attention to the texture of the word.

In my classes we share our work in friendly and supportive workshops, discuss a wide range of poetry, take field trips to art galleries and museums, and partake in collaborative writing exercises. Writing may take place in private, but ultimately we produce work for others to read.

There are so many opportunities in Nottingham for engaging with creative writing, including readings at the artist-led space Primary, small press book fairs such as Bread & Roses, and lots of open mic events in the city. With a team of dedicated students I run the Nottingham Poetry Exchange, a programme of poetry performances, workshops, and reading group sessions.

I am a practicing poet and publish and perform my work regularly. My publications include Urn & Drum (Shearsman), Soft Troika (If a Leaf Falls Press), and Allegories from my Kitchen (Sad Press). I am particularly interested in experimental forms of production and performance of poetry, and the points of contact, historical and potential, between literary practice and visual arts.

I am also committed to organising literary events and creative writing workshops. I recently organised the Women’s Poetry Publication Workshop, held at the Nottingham Women’s Centre. Over the course of a day we learned about and produced our very own ‘zine’ (a hand-made poetry publication) using collage, typewriters, thread, and tape.
Professor Jon McGregor
Writer in Residence and Professor of Creative Writing

My role in the Creative Writing team is, in part, to act as a link between the seminar room and the world of publishing. My working week is divided 50/50 between the two, and my teaching is heavily informed by my experiences as a practising writer.

A very good approach to developing your writing skills is to read more, to write more, and to allow your writing to reflect your reading. These are skills and habits I work on with my students; encouraging analytical reading, an understanding of critical context, and an appetite for writing and rewriting. My focus in class is on storytelling technique: structure, pace, point of view, voice, character, and the search for a connection with your reader.

As well as teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, I work with students to edit and publish our literary journal, *The Letters Page*. This has given students an opportunity to really get their teeth into the ‘nuts and bolts’ of small-scale literary publishing. The buzzing editorial office of *The Letters Page* and the demands of the annual production cycle provide a real hub for those students who want to get more from their time at Nottingham.

When I’m not teaching, I write fiction. My most recent novel, *Reservoir 13*, won the Costa Novel Award in 2017, and my previous novel, *Even the Dogs*, won the International Dublin Literary Award in 2012. I have also published the story collections *The Reservoir Tapes* and *This Isn’t the Sort of Thing That Happens to Someone Like You*, and the novels *So Many Ways To Begin* and *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*. I have also published work in *Granta*, *Zoetrope*, *Conjunctions*, *The Guardian*, and *Five Dials*. I was once Writer in Residence with the British Antarctic Survey, in Antarctica, but I don’t like to talk about it...
I'm currently in the second year of my PhD in Creative Writing, looking at the role of historical fiction and its relationship to history. What is historical fiction for, and what can it do? Are accuracy and authenticity really the best measures of a historical novel's success?

For the creative part of my thesis I'm working on a novel set in a medieval monastery that includes various marvellous and supernatural themes, such as miracles, portents and dream-visions, to try to explore some of these complex issues and even challenge some of the accepted conventions of the genre.

One of the most exciting things about studying at the University of Nottingham is being part of a supportive research network and creative community. Writers, in my experience, tend to be solitary creatures out of necessity rather than by nature. It's actually when we get together and share ideas that we start to produce our most exciting work.

University life has brought me into contact with writers of all types – novelists, poets and others – and it’s been hugely inspirational and energising to hear about their work and to discuss the challenges, frustrations and joys of the creative process with them.

Before beginning my studies I’d already had several novels published in the UK and overseas. My most recent title, *The Harrowing*, set in the aftermath of 1066 and featuring five English refugees fleeing the Norman invasion, was named by *The Times* as a Book of the Month.

The PhD, however, has given me the opportunity to redefine myself as a writer and to expand my horizons by experimenting with form, voice and prose technique, and by combining genres in original ways. I’ve made a conscious effort to break away from my usual habits and to go beyond my comfort zones, and the writing I’ve produced has been some of my most imaginative work. It’s been a wonderfully liberating experience and I don’t think it’s any exaggeration to say that this is the most creative period I’ve experienced in my career to date.
I’m Hem, a 21-year-old who likes to call herself a writer. Yet, when I was a mere 7-year-old book worm – switching off the reading lamp when I could hear my mum plodding up the stairs so she’d think I was asleep – I never thought I’d be using my love of words in the real world.

The University of Nottingham has probably been the best thing to ever happen to me. Don’t get me wrong, it’s been a long and hard ride, but I’ve found my voice! When I applied for this degree five years ago, it was the creative writing aspect that really made me want to come here.

From the get-go, creative writing workshops nurtured my strengths and improved my weaknesses in a safe, supportive environment. I was never made to feel silly for asking for advice, and poetry is now my favourite part of my degree. I get so excited for my poetry workshops with Matthew Welton – they are simply so motivating. We are constantly being challenged – constantly being introduced to writers who I’ve never even heard of, and I love it.

My writing has improved so tremendously thanks to the support available here, and so has my confidence. The Poetry and Spoken Word Society has massively helped with that. The best bits are the spontaneous-feeling open mics. The first time I went to one, I was so nervous I didn’t let any of my friends come in case it was going to be embarrassing – it wasn’t. It was amazing. All of these people are there to listen to what you have to say, to listen to your art. People are genuinely interested. It’s just the loveliest vibe.

Before I started my degree, I worked at Grazia Middle East for a bit after interning there. Everyone asked me why I left to go to university, but I’m so glad I did! The education here is so diverse - it'll definitely help me when I return to magazines.

I’m so sad to be leaving UoN in a matter of months, but cannot wait to take my newfound skills to a fancy magazine office in London. Thanks, Notts! You’ve been the best.
Annie Brown
BA English and History student, aspiring writer and poet

The University of Nottingham is an incredible place to get involved with creative writing!

For two years, I have been part of the Creative Writing Society at Nottingham, which has enabled involvement with many creative projects, such as writing for Firelight Magazine, an incredible opportunity to have your work read by your peers, and the magazine itself is featured in many prominent Nottingham bookstores!

Waterstones in Nottingham city frequently run events with authors, allowing people to meet and discuss their favourite books with the authors themselves. I have attended several events, where I have met authors such as C.J. Tudor and Mhairi McFarlane.

The Creative Writing Society itself is friendly and welcoming, and you do not have to study creative writing to get involved! The society also has connections to wider Nottingham creative writing, such as through competitions.

A recent competition I entered was for Beam Editions, which I became involved with through the Creative Writing Society. The task was to write a short letter to nature to celebrate the release of John Newling’s Dear Nature, and I entered the competition with a short poem and won!

As part of my prize, I got the opportunity to attend the book party launch at the Nottingham Contemporary, and to read one of John Newling’s poems. I also received a printed copy of my poem, a copy of Dear Nature and the opportunity to meet John Newling himself. It was an amazing opportunity to get involved with and something I wouldn’t have known about without the Creative Writing Society.

“... The Creative Writing Society itself is friendly and welcoming, and you do not have to study creative writing to get involved!”

Creative Writing Society
Graduate destinations

Creative futures

Our graduates have moved into a diverse range of careers, working as:
- Teachers and lecturers
- Copywriters
- Journalists
- Communications officers
- Editors
- Singers/songwriters
- Digital marketers
- Proof readers

Our creative writing programmes are designed to develop a range of transferable professional skills, including:
- Analytical reasoning
- Communication
- Research
- Creativity
- Self-motivation
- Time-management
- Developing and presenting complex ideas

Clare Harvey, professional author

Clare graduated from Nottingham with an MA in Creative Writing in 2012. Her MA coursework formed the basis for her award-winning debut novel, *The Gunner Girl*. Clare has published four historical fiction novels since 2015. Her most recent, *The Escape*, is out now.

“...I loved my time at Nottingham, and the high quality tuition I received definitely lifted my writing to a level that got it noticed by agents and editors, and was the stepping-off point for my career as a published author.”

Hannah Reid and Dot Major, London Grammar

London Grammar’s vocalist Hannah Reid and Dominic ‘Dot’ Major are both alumni from the School of English, having graduated in BA History of Art and English and BA English, respectively.

The band formed in 2009, when Hannah met guitarist Dan Rothman (Economics and Philosophy) in the Ancaster Hall of residence. Dot joined a year later, and London Grammar was born. Fast forward to 2013, and their platinum-selling debut album, *If You Wait*, was iTunes Album of the Year. Read London Grammar’s *LeftLion* interview about songwriting, studying and performing in Nottingham at tiny.cc/szbh7y

Photo credit: Simon Buck

Image shows: Dot Major and Dan Rothman of London Grammar, collecting their Alumni Laureate Awards in 2014.
Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this brochure is accurate at the time of publishing, but changes (for example to course content) are likely to occur given the interval between publication and commencement of the course. It is therefore very important to check our website for any updates before you apply for the course by following nottingham.ac.uk/ugstudy. Where there is a difference between the contents of this brochure and our website, the contents of the website take precedence.