A guide to the PhD and MRes thesis in Creative Writing – candidates and supervisors

Faculty of Arts

Terms

- Thesis: the final work which includes both creative and scholarly components, bibliography, appendices, etc.
- Creative Work: the creative writing component/s of the thesis.
- Critical Research Component: the critical writing component of the thesis. Also referred to as the exegesis, research component, and critical research component.

Overview

The PhD and the MRes in Creative Writing requires candidates to write a thesis comprised of two separate but related pieces of writing, or a single work comprising linked creative and research components. Candidates will formulate a clear research question or questions and will annotate their sources as in other postgraduate theses. As with other ‘traditional’ HDR degrees, a student undertaking a creative higher research degree will demonstrate that they can undertake a project at an advanced level and produce a work that is an original contribution to knowledge in the field. The thesis must showcase the results of your original research during your candidature, with PhD theses requiring a distinct contribution to knowledge. Thesis by publication is allowed. For more information on thesis publication and guidelines pertaining to the creative component see the Before submission and prep pages at https://students.mq.edu.au/study/my-research-program/before-submission-and-prep

For general requirements about these degrees see the Macquarie University PhD and Research Degrees pages at http://www.mq.edu.au/research/phd-and-research-degrees

In addition, candidates should consider the following information provided below. Depending on the nature of the proposed creative work (e.g. creative nonfiction, novel, short stories, poetry, or hybridisations of these, etc.), the candidate will undertake a program of appropriate research engaging with both creative and scholarly primary and secondary texts that are relevant to their topic. The results of this research will be embodied in both the creative product and the critical research component.
The research may be interdisciplinary and draw on approaches informed by (for example) literary studies, ethnography, philosophy, history, cultural studies and sociology. Candidates must demonstrate competency in all fields that they engage as methods or approaches in the thesis.

The thesis will include a statement or reflection which discusses the relationship between the critical and creative components. This statement might consider how the student’s research has informed the writing and final form of the creative product and how the creative process has informed the scholarly research. It might investigate the origins and development of the product. The reflection and statement of relationship may be embedded within the critical research component, or it might be a separate ‘bridging’ chapter or statement.

The final thesis will demonstrate that the candidate has expertise in their field of inquiry and (for the PhD) has made an original contribution to knowledge.

**Doctor of Philosophy, PhD**

The work of the PhD in Creative Writing thesis involves conceptual, creative and research work. It will consist of approximately 50% of the thesis being a critical research component and approximately 50% will be a conceptually and formally developed and realised work of creative writing.

The University requires doctoral theses to be 75,000 – 100,000 words in length. A creative writing PhD may exceed this word length, if the creative component is a standard-length 75,000 – 90,000 word novel or long-form creative nonfiction work. As a guide, the final length of such a thesis should not exceed 120,000 words with the critical research component being 50,000 words or more in length.

There will be a relationship between the research and creative components. This relationship is the crux of the thesis’ integrity. It will comprise a theoretical approach to the thesis as a whole, contextualising the creative work and posing a research question which arises from the creative writing or shapes some aspect of the creative writing, for example, form or genre, ethical questions, issues of representation or language.

The thesis project as a whole and the relationship between the creative and research components will be developed in consultation with the student’s supervisor.

**Creative writing**

- This will be a fully realised piece of creative writing. It may be fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, play script or writing for performance. If it consists of multiple short pieces such as stories, prose pieces or poetry, they must be linked thematically and structurally.
• The work will consist, for example, of a publication length collection of short stories or poems, a novel, memoir, creative nonfiction essays, play script or hybrid forms of these.
• The creative project should demonstrate excellence in literary technique, writing and narrative skills, and awareness of form and genre.
• The creative writing should be able to sustain critical scrutiny and together with the critical research component be an original contribution to the field: it should demonstrate knowledge of the literary genre, form and context in which it is written. It should demonstrate critical awareness of its context and form at a level of engagement that relates to the research component.
• As with the traditional thesis requirements, the creative component must display a professional standard of presentation (proof-read for syntactical, grammatical or spelling errors, with appropriate layout).

Critical Research Component
• The critical research component must be researched and structured as a critical research component with chapters/parts or single essay, or if a ficto-critical work it must demonstrate scholarship within the body of the hybrid work. It will engage with the creative writing in clearly conceived ways. It should demonstrate a theoretical approach and its methodology. It should include substantial research in an area that directly relates to the creative work.
• The Critical Research Component critical research component may take the form of a theorization or study of the genre and the student’s use or reworking of it; or it may investigate an area of literary, critical or cultural theory, or other disciplinary area of research, which relates to the creative project.
• It should not be a personal commentary on the writing of the creative project, although it should engage in a scholarly way with critical issues that inform the creative work.
• The research component and the creative project are conceived as complementary elements of a coherent thesis. There will not be a hierarchical relationship between a ‘primary’ creative text and a ‘secondary’ critical component. The research component is not a supplementary justification or explanation of the creative work.
• The relationship between the two components can take a variety of forms and must be developed in discussion with the supervisor.
• The same scholarly expectations for academic theses (relating to referencing, footnoting, bibliographies and critical insight and analysis) should apply to the research component.

The statement or reflection on the dialogic connections between the creative and research components of the thesis may be embedded within the critical research component or be a bridging or introductory section of the thesis.
Masters of Research, MRes
The work of the MRes in Creative Writing thesis involves conceptual, creative and research work. It will consist of a thesis 20,000 words in length, made up of at least 50% of the thesis being a critical research component and up to 50% will be a conceptually and formally developed and realised work of creative writing: 8,000 - 10,000 words maximum for prose (creative nonfiction, novel, short story, etc); 10-15 poems or up to 2,000 words for poetry; and up to 2,500 words for a play script.

There will be a relationship between the research and creative components. This relationship is the crux of the thesis' integrity. It will comprise a theoretical approach to the thesis as a whole, contextualising the creative work and posing a research question which arises from or shapes some aspect of the creative writing, for example, form or genre, ethical questions, issues of representation or language.

The thesis project as a whole and the relationship between the creative and research components will be developed in consultation with the student's supervisor.

Creative writing
- This will be a fully realised piece of creative writing. It may be fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, play script or writing for performance. If it consists of multiple short pieces such as stories, prose pieces or poetry, they must be linked thematically and structurally.
- The work will consist, for example, of a collection of short stories or poems, the first chapters of a novel or the first act of a play script.
- The creative project should demonstrate excellence in literary technique, writing and narrative skills, and awareness of form and genre. It must display a professional standard of presentation (proof-read for syntactical, grammatical or spelling errors, with appropriate layout).
- The creative writing should be able to sustain critical scrutiny: it should demonstrate knowledge of the literary genre, form and context in which it is written. It should demonstrate critical awareness of its context and form at a level of engagement that relates to the research component.

Critical research component
- The critical research component must be researched and structured as a critical research component with chapters/parts or single essay, which engages with the creative writing in clearly conceived ways. It should demonstrate a theoretical approach and its methodology in the same way as a research-only thesis. It should include substantial research in an area that directly relates to the creative work.
- This may take the form of a theorization or study of the genre and the student's use or reworking of it; or it may investigate an area of literary, critical or cultural theory, or other disciplinary area of research which relates to the creative project. Its focus on research requires that it should not be a personal commentary on the writing of the
creative project although it should engage in a scholarly way with critical issues that inform the creative work.

- The research component and the creative project are conceived as complementary elements of a coherent MRes thesis. There will not be a hierarchical relationship between a ‘primary’ creative text and a ‘secondary’ critical component. The research component is much more than a supplementary justification or explanation of the creative work.
- The relationship between the two components can take a variety of forms and must be developed in discussion with the supervisor.
- The same scholarly expectations for academic theses (relating to referencing, footnoting, bibliographies and critical insight and analysis) should apply to the research component.

The statement or reflection on the dialogic connections between the creative and research components of the thesis may be embedded within the critical research component or be a bridging or introductory section of the thesis.

**Relationship between the MRes thesis and the PhD thesis**
The relationship between the two theses can take a variety of forms and must be developed in discussion with the supervisor.

The university advises that "If your topic for your PhD or MPhil thesis is related to your MRes, you must include a clear statement outlining what work was done for the MRes. If you must include any text or data from your MRes thesis in your PhD or MPhil thesis, you must identify this as such, as it is non-examinable. Failure to do so is a breach of Academic Integrity." For more information on the relationship between MRes and PhD see the Before submission and prep pages at [https://students.mq.edu.au/study/my-research-program/before-submission-and-prep](https://students.mq.edu.au/study/my-research-program/before-submission-and-prep)

**PhD and MRes Examination**
External assessors will examine the thesis, both critical research component and creative product, in the same way as other theses: e.g. as a whole work. Although it is normally made up of two elements, the thesis *as a whole* must fulfil the requirements for an MRes or PhD by research as laid down in the Macquarie University *PhD and Research Degrees* pages.

For PhD, three external examiners are required; for MRes two examiners. For information on the examination process for these degrees, please refer to the Macquarie University *PhD and Research Degrees* pages at [http://www.mq.edu.au/research/phd-and-research-degrees](http://www.mq.edu.au/research/phd-and-research-degrees)