

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH
CREATIVE WRITING CRITICAL INTRODUCTION GUIDELINES
(MENG 6940 Projects: Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry)

The critical introduction is intended to be part of a creative project that in sum is equal to the amount of work required for a 3-credit 6000-level class. In addition to the creative work (fiction, nonfiction, poetry) students will write a critical introduction of 10-12 pages as outlined below.

Broadly speaking, the intent of the critical introduction is to help you as writer focus on the literary, historical, and/or theoretical context(s) of your creative submission. Your work will be placed in conversation with other writers, both acknowledged influences and trends, as well as those the text pushes back against.

With the help of your Project Committee Chair, you will select relevant texts, read them, and reference them vis-à-vis your own writing in the critical introduction. In this regard, the critical introduction will help writer and readers understand where on the spectrum of the chosen genre the writing lies. Included in this may be a measure of reflecting on the process followed to imagine, create, and polish your writing. At the same time, the critical introduction should be essentially an outward-looking work; that is less a reflection on your own creative process and more an engagement with the literary, historical, and/or theoretical context(s) in which your writing is situated.

Here are two models for developing the critical introduction. Each is based upon the type of creative project chosen:

1) For a **Creative Response to Literature**: You respond to a specific author or work of literature in a creative way. (Examples: Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* reimagines *King Lear*, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones Diary* reimagines *Pride and Prejudice*, Beth Ann Fennelly's *Tender Hooks* responds to poetry of Sylvia Plath, etc.)

For this type of project, the critical introduction will clearly articulate how your creative work responds to the author or work of literature. It should include references to numerous peer-reviewed articles that have informed your view of and response to the literature. In other words, the critical introduction should also behave as a form of *literary* response and should therefore situate itself within the critical conversation. Assessment will be based upon the degree to which the critical introduction demonstrates an understanding of the literature to which the critical introduction responds, as well as the degree to which creative craft suits your critical purpose. Your creative work, (that is, the Creative Response to Literature) should be able to stand on its own.

2) For an **Original Work**: You show mastery of writing craft by creating original stories, poetry, or a novel excerpt.

For this type of project, the critical introduction should place your work within a tradition, showcasing knowledge of writers and literary schools and should speak in depth about one aspect of writing craft evident in your creative work. The critical introduction should quote extensively from essays or books that discuss this aspect of craft, showing your nuanced understanding of the complexity of writing craft. The critical introduction should contain quotations from the creative work in order to demonstrate an understanding of how craft is evident in the creative work. The critical introduction will be assessed on the quality of ideas and on the depth of understanding of craftsmanship. Also assessed will be the extent to which the critical introduction demonstrates thorough knowledge of the landscape of the chosen creative genre.