



Programme Specification

Please note that this specification is subject to change, in line with the national guidance on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. General information

Awarding institution:	Royal College of Art
Programme title:	MA Writing
Award:	Masters
Qualification framework level:	Level 7
School/Department or equivalent:	School of Arts and Humanities
Programme duration:	15-months
Total UK credits:	240 credits
Mode of study:	Full time
Date valid from/to:	2020-21

2. Programme Philosophy

The MA Writing offers students an opportunity to explore new ways of writing about culture — critical and creative — at a time of immense and often bewildering change. The programme has been developed in the belief that critical writing is a creative practices in its own right, with its own techniques, ethics and technologies. We encourage formal experimentation, and also that students extend their areas of enquiry, while also developing their own specific interests and expertise.

By the time a student graduates, they will have an extensive portfolio of writing demonstrating diverse writing skills and focused subject expertise. The programme is distinctive in that it considers writing as a practice, rather than simply the means for academic study. As such, it places great emphasis on how a student’s writing not only considers the world as subject matter, but also as a site of engagement.

The programme is taught by leading writers, artists, critics, publishers and editors, and students can work alongside artists and designers in the RCA’s studio-based courses; as a result, students graduate with writing, research, and thinking skills, as well as the expert knowledge, required to pursue successful careers in the arts and academia.

3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

Programme Aims

Students on the MA Writing programme will:

- become skilled and expert writers in art, design, and contemporary culture equipped to pursue high level careers in the arts and academia;

- establish productive relationships with partners in different fields of the media and the arts;
- integrate contemporary cultural discourses and knowledge into their practice;
- develop writing practices by making use of the best aspects of art and design teaching at the RCA (crits, workshops, etc.);
- develop subject expertise and related research skills in areas of their own choosing;
- build close working relationships with staff and students of other programmes at the RCA, so that new interdisciplinary thinking and practice can be developed;
- generate and promote high levels of critical and creative reflection on, and interpretation of, art, design, and contemporary culture.

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. These are as follows:

Programme-Specific Learning Outcomes

Able to:	A. Intellectual Engagement
A1.	Develop new ideas, approaches and methods of communication which constitute original ways of writing about, or in relation to, art, design, and contemporary culture.
A2.	Demonstrate an advanced understanding of the historical, theoretical, and contemporary context in which their work can be placed.
A3.	Source, select, and interpret primary sources and conduct interviews to develop original interpretations and understandings of a subject or a form.

Able to:	B. Technical Skills
B1.	Write and edit a text to a high standard that demonstrates an advanced understanding of the limits and potential of the medium.
B2.	Make informed judgments about the best form in which an idea or research might be articulated.
B3.	Display a mastery of the technical skills required in the authorship, publication, and dissemination of an idea and/or research.

Able to:	C. Professional Development
C1.	Initiate and shape projects with a clear and confident understanding of the context of publication and the audience.
C2.	Participate in collaborative projects with a clear understanding of the complementary expertise and skills of others, including commissioning editors, broadcasters, and designers.
C3.	Develop a confident sense of their own professional potential based on self-reflection and an informed understanding of the market for his or her work.

4. What will I learn?

Programme Units and Credit Weightings

240 credit Masters:

- Unit SoAH: 20 credits
- CHS (College-wide Unit): 20 credits
- Writing Unit 1: 40 credits
- Writing Unit 2: 40 credits
- Writing Unit 3: 40 credits
- Writing Unit 4 Publishing Project: 20 credits
- Writing Unit 5 Final Major Project: 60 credits

Curriculum Map

MA Writing 15-month Curriculum Map			
Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4*
Writing Unit 1 (40)	Writing Unit 2 (40)	Writing Unit 3 (40)	Unit 5 Final Major Project (60)
	Unit 4 Publishing Project (20)		
College-wide Unit (CHS) (20)			
School-wide Unit (20)			

Credits for each Unit are shown in parentheses.

* The programme is 15 months, and four terms, for full-time students; students may request to become part-time after T3, in which case a fifth term is added.

5. How will I learn?

Please note that these are subject to change, in line with the national guidance on the Covid-19 response.

Tutorials

Students will receive two personal tutorials each term. There may also be occasional group tutorials, of perhaps three-to-five students, during particular projects or workshops, to give advice and feedback on works-in-progress. Formative — that is, non-credit bearing — assessment and feedback is given during these tutorials.

Writing Workshops

Writing workshops are the primary means by which students on the programme receive formative feedback on their writing. Typically, a writing workshop commences with a 'brief' and ends with a group 'crit'. Here, the writing of all workshop participants is shared in advance, and then read and commented on in a group discussion, usually over the course of a day or more. In this way, you will develop skills not only as a writer but as an editor and commentator on the work of others. Writing workshops are led by individual members of staff and, occasionally, guest tutors. Writing workshops vary in length.

Seminars

Seminars are tutor-led classes in which students are asked to reflect on readings, films, and other material that they have read or studied in advance; these might be grouped together by theme — such as three classes on ‘Criticism’, for example, or ‘Biography’ — or may be discrete classes given by guests.

External Partner Project

In this project, which takes place in Unit 2, students develop a public outcome (such as an event, or publication) for an external partner, such as a gallery, museum, or archive; this is developed through a process of discussion and practical work. Typically, these projects involve working with a collection or archive, and may require some introduction to this material, and to necessary research skills, from the staff team and/or external partner. ‘Real world’ projects such as these are subject to changing circumstances — this is one of the most interesting challenges which they present — and students must be prepared to work with these, and to develop a project with the necessary resilience.

Work in progress presentations

Students will present their initial ideas, and work in progress, on longer-term, or long-form projects, such as ‘Archaeologies’ in Unit 2, or the Final Major Project (Unit 5). These provide useful feedback not only to the student presenting, but also to those participating in the session. They also provide valuable opportunities for students to develop and improve skills in verbal presentation.

Publishing Project

The Publishing Project develops over three terms, and provides students with the opportunity to devise, develop, produce, and deliver a publication, whether that is printed, online, or both. In Term 1, a series of ‘Publishing Platforms’ events provide students with a better understanding of the context in which they are intending to work; these consist of either readings, seminars, or site visits; these are given either by the programme staff team or by visiting lecturers or other professional guests. In Term 2, the scope, form, and content of the publication is developed collaboratively, and with the input of Writing staff and invited guests. A design brief is also produced, and designers are commissioned, as are contributors. Students can choose to participate as they wish, as contributors, editors, or in other roles. Formative feedback is given throughout the process, and at the end of the unit each student will complete a self-assessment pro forma, upon which they will receive written feedback.

You may get the opportunity to participate in an exhibition of your student work, either during or at the conclusion of your studies. Your Programme Handbook should provide more information on the nature of this participation.

6. Assessment and feedback

Assessment

Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment enables the student’s performance and progress to be understood and accounted for through a wide variety of academic contact points, recognising that students are able to perform in different ways and through different means and aspects of the curriculum while still achieving the requisite performance standards. This assessment is validated through a structure

that ensures that student performance is evaluated from a range of perspectives and by a range of different tutors who are able to triangulate their experience of the student and enable parity of assessment across the cohort.

Final Examination (Viva Voce)

The Final Examination examines the student's ability to synthesise their learning and to express it in a formal exam context.

- *Writing Unit 1 – 40 credits*

A self-assessment form will be completed by each student, in which they reflect upon their contribution to each part of Unit 1, each Writing Workshops especially; this will then be used as the basis for written feedback from a member of Programme staff. The form should be submitted at the end of Term 1, and feedback will be given shortly afterwards, either at the end of Term 1 or the beginning of Term 2, as appropriate.

In addition to this formal feedback, formative feedback will be given throughout Unit 1, in crits (individual and group), and in two personal tutorials. In both types of feedback, whether the written assessment or formative discussion in class, consideration will be made on the overall progress of the student's work, rather than each particular workshop. This is to encourage students to experiment in their work, knowing that they have the 'right' to 'fail' a particular Workshop.

- *Writing Unit 2 – 40 credits*

The main written work in this unit is called 'Archaeologies of Criticism', an essay of 6,000–8,000 words. This is submitted either at the end of Term 2, or the start of Term 3, as appropriate, and a written report will be provided in response by a member of Programme staff shortly afterwards.

In addition to this formal feedback, formative feedback will be given throughout Unit 2, in crits (individual and group), and in two personal tutorials.

- *Writing Unit 3 – 40 credits*

This unit is to support students in developing their thinking on the form and content of their Final Major Project (FMP), which makes up Unit 5. By the end of Unit 3, students will have completed a proposal form for their FMP and, if acceptable, this will be approved by their tutor.

In addition to this formal assessment, formative feedback will be given throughout Unit 3, in crits (individual and group), and in two personal tutorials.

- *Unit 4 – Publishing Project – 20 credits*

This unit continues over the first three terms, with the publication date set for some point in Term 3. Following this, each student will complete a self-assessment form in which they will be asked to reflect upon their contribution to the project, and its successes and failings; this will then be used as the basis for written feedback from a member of Programme staff. In addition to this formal feedback, formative feedback will be given throughout Unit 4.

- *Unit 5 – Final Major Project (FMP)*

The FMP is a piece of writing (or work in a comparable medium) of usually 15–20,000-words; this

can be shorter if accompanied by supplementary work, in agreement with their tutor. Assessment of the written component is accompanied by an oral exam. Students will be asked to introduce and defend the project, and invited to discuss its future as a publishable piece of work.

• *Unit SoAH – 20 credits*

Students will be required to produce a 1000–2000 word critical reflection on their learning from the School Unit. This written response offers the opportunity to consider the question of The Urgency of the Arts in relation to your own thinking and practice. The critical reflection should contextualise your work in relation to contemporary debates and needs to include:

- A reference to at least one speaker from the SoAH School Unit Lecture Series
- A reference to a text / concept / theme that was covered during the MA School Group that you attended
- Up to 3 images (max. 5mb each) relating to your participation in the School Crit with some evaluative commentary

This will be submitted to the joint assessment panel for the Joint Unit 2B / School Unit Exam, taking place toward the end of academic year.

• *Critical and Historical Studies— 20 credits*

Students are required to submit one or two pieces of writing based on the lectures, seminars, reading groups, and resources from CHS scheduled in Weeks 7–12. Students are invited to join these sessions, where their programme timetable allows; they will also be expected to draw upon the materials and resources provided online in preparing their work for assessment.

The students can decide to pick either one task, or both; in either case, the total submission should consist of 3,000 words, with an overarching reflective summary that sets out what each text aims to communicate, its intended audience, and its potential impact upon its reader(s).

The tasks are as follows:

1. Position

Write a response to one of the texts distributed for the CHS Reading Groups, identifying how the author has articulated their 'position' within it.

You might respond to the following questions:

- What is the author's topic?
- What is the author's opinion on this topic?
- How do they persuade you to take their view?
- What is the author's writing style?
- Does it appeal to you?
- How would you write it differently?

2. Voice

Choose another text from those distributed for the CHS Reading Groups. Pair it with an image or object of your choice.

Write a response to the question of what makes this pairing so interesting and convincing.

You might respond to the following questions:

- In your opinion, how does the image/object relate to the text?

- Why have you brought them together?
- How can you persuade me of their relationship?
- Can you find any other writing to back up your opinion?

Please note that for this element of the submission, you are required to provide footnotes for the sources you reference (you may include footnotes for 'Position' also, though this is not mandatory.)

Your work will be submitted at the beginning of Term 2; following this it will be assessed by members of the Programme staff, who will respond with a brief written report.

Information regarding individual assessments will be included in the Unit Descriptors, and will be available to students at the beginning of the academic year.

7. What award can I get?

To be awarded an RCA MA degree you need to gain 240 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 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 course 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 course 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 Tier 4 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.

Applications are considered chronologically by date and time of final portfolio submission. Whilst a programme still has vacancies, successful candidates will be made an offer of a place. Once a programme becomes full, subsequent successful applicants will be placed on a waiting list, and may be made a firm offer should a place become available for them.

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>