

BA ENGLISH LITERATURE

Your degree in a nutshell

Over the course of your degree you will benefit from:

- **Small group teaching.** There will usually be no more than seventeen people in your seminar groups.
- **One-to-one essay tutorials.** Tutors will be available to discuss your written work with you individually.
- **Timely feedback on your work.** Written assignments will be returned to you with feedback within fifteen working days.

PART ONE

We have three ‘core’ modules (EN1GC; EN1PE; EN1RC) and most students take all three. Students taking English Language and Literature (UCAS Q301) will take two (EN1PE and EN1RC), and will have EN1GC as an optional module. These modules allow you to explore the themes, topics and approaches that will inform your three-year study of English Literature.

Genre and Context (EN1GC), offers an in-depth look at two formative pairings of historical moment and literary genre: the Renaissance stage and the Victorian novel. In the first term, we study two Renaissance plays. We will focus on key aspects of the Renaissance stage, from playing spaces to the use of stage props. In the second term we look at three major Victorian novels, engaging with contextual issues of urbanisation, gender, sexuality and identity. Plays studied may include John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* and Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*. Novels studied may include Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*.

Assessment methods: Essays.

Poetry in English (EN1PE) helps you develop your close-reading skills while giving an overview of the history of poetry in English. This module covers major movements and ideas from the early Renaissance up to the present, and a range of genres including love poetry, political poetry, pastoral, satire, and the dramatic monologue. Poetry in English considers the English-speaking world more widely, including Ireland, the Caribbean and North America, and includes a diversity of voices from Thomas Wyatt and Ben Jonson, to William Butler Yeats, Philip Larkin, Derek Walcott and Thom Gunn.

Assessment methods: Essay and exam.

Research and Criticism (EN1RC) aims to induct students into the structure of undergraduate studies in literature, and to provide a secure foundation in the skills and knowledge you need to succeed. It combines practical training in reading, research, and writing with an introduction to complex critical debates around ‘author’, ‘reader’, and ‘text’. Delivery of the module is through lectures, seminars, and online screencasts. You will complete a series of short formative tasks to develop your research and writing techniques, and the module is assessed by two essays.

Assessment methods: Essay and portfolio of written assignments.

Optional modules

Your choice of optional modules will depend on your programme of study. Single honours English Literature students may take up to 5 English Literature modules in all (the three core modules and two optional modules). Most joint honours students will take three English Literature modules, some will have the option to take a fourth: it will partly depend on how many modules you need to take for your other subject. You will receive lots of information and advice about your module choices after the exam results in August and during Welcome Week.

Introduction to Creative Writing (EN1CW) helps students to develop their skills in creative writing across a range of genres. In autumn term there are two introductory lectures, but most of the teaching takes place in spring. A series of weekly lectures covers a range of issues relevant to particular creative forms: poetry, the short story, and dramatic dialogue. Students write their own examples of these forms, and these are discussed in weekly workshops. At the end of the module, students submit a portfolio consisting of several pieces of creative writing and an accompanying essay on a topic suggested in the lecture course.

Assessment methods: Essay and portfolio of Creative Writing exercises.

Twentieth-Century American Literature (EN1TCL) presents a challenging range of works and spans a number of key modes, from the retrospective pastoralism of Laura Ingalls Wilder to the alternative visions of the 'beats', Ginsberg and Kerouac. The content is given added cohesion by being organised into two parts: the autumn-term lectures emphasise formalist considerations under the heading of 'The Experimental Nation,' while the spring term lectures open out more fully to social questions, under the heading, 'Conformism and Counter-Culture.'

Assessment methods: Essay and exam.

Shelf Life (EN1SL) is an introduction to English literature's material dimension, and to the library as a symbol. Literary study usually involves the interpretation of poems, novels or plays. This module complements this ordinary kind of reading by investigating books and other archival documents as physical objects. One half of the teaching on the module is seminar-based: you will use set texts to find out how writers have imagined libraries and archives in the past and present. The other half of the module is practice-based: you will go behind the scenes at the University of Reading's Special Collections department, and get to know a working rare books library.

Assessment methods: Essay and portfolio of written assignments.

What is Comparative Literature? (EN1COMP) introduces some of the major critical and theoretical issues in the study of comparative literature - that is, literature that crosses linguistic, national and disciplinary boundaries. We will read a cluster of texts from different cultural and historical traditions, and reflect on the practices and consequences of reading transnationally.

Assessment methods: Essay and exam.

Thinking Translation: History and Theory (EN1TRANS) explores historical and contemporary theories of translation. Through carefully selected case studies, we will assess the relationship between practice and theory, and will place this relationship within particular historical, cultural, intellectual and political contexts.

Assessment methods: Essays and reflective report.

PART TWO

By the end of Part 1, you will have extended your knowledge of the different periods and genres that you will examine in more detail at Part 2.

In the second year, you can choose modules (six for single-honours students; three for joint-honours students) from a range of options.

Most Part 2 modules are organised by historical period (the Renaissance, or Modernism) or by literary genre (poetry, or drama), or according to a unifying theme or subject (American literature, or writing and gender). Most of these modules are taught by lectures and seminars and are assessed by essay and exam.

The following module options were available in 2021-22; a slightly different choice may be on offer when you reach Part 2:

Critical issues: This module investigates some of the most important concepts in modern literary study, through an examination of theoretical and critical debates.

Introduction to Old English: In this module you will encounter texts from over one thousand years ago that somehow still feel relevant as they grapple with the big ideas: life and death, faith and belief, and what it means to be human.

Chaucer and medieval narrative: This module aims to provide students with knowledge of a wide and representative selection of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Renaissance texts and cultures: This module gives students an understanding of texts written during the English Renaissance, together with an awareness of

the relationships between those texts and their literary, cultural, and intellectual influences and contexts.

Shakespeare: The module is organised chronologically in order to focus attention on different stages, genres, and periods of Shakespeare's career as a dramatist.

Literature, language and education: Pursuing a placement in education, students will enhance their understanding of the usage of language and/or literature in a professional workplace environment.

The Romantic period: This module explores the varied literary culture of the Romantic period in Britain by examining a diverse group of texts written between 1750 and 1850.

Victorian literature: This module explores the diversity of Victorian writing. During this period authors began to think about people's place in a world without God; the workings of the mind; and the role of class and gender in the construction of identity.

Modernism in poetry and fiction: This module examines the concepts of modernity and modernism, and relates them to the history of early twentieth-century poetry and fiction.

Contemporary literature: This module highlights the formal, thematic and cultural diversity of global Anglophone fiction produced from the 1980s to the present day.

Writing America: The module is concerned with literary constructions of American identity in American literature, focusing on some of the ways in which imaginative writers have perceived and defined the New World in relation to the Old and helped to shape or contest the nation's sense of cultural distinctiveness.

The business of books: This module aims to equip students with an understanding of the history and future of the book as a form of technology.

Writing, gender and identity: This module introduces students to a range of texts on, and critical approaches to, issues of feminism, gender and sexuality.

PART THREE

Dissertation

You can tailor your degree to meet your personal interests through your dissertation. This is an individually supervised research project in your third year that enables you to produce a work of significance and originality. It is a 'double-weighted module' (worth twice as much as a regular Part 3 module) and is taught by workshops, lectures, and one-to-one supervisions.

Some of the dissertations written by our students in recent years include:

- Perspectives on Shakespeare in the German Democratic Republic
- The development of Sweeney Todd from the 'penny dreadful' novel to the Tim Burton musical film
- The adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier texts into films by Alfred Hitchcock
- Italian Cultural and Literary Influences on Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*
- Women's voice and the representation of women in War Poetry
- Second World War Poetry in relation to the thirties poets, Auden and MacNiece
- Robert Frost and freedom of interpretation
- The Beat Generation and the birth of American Counter culture in the mid-twentieth century
- 19th Century Literature and its impact on contemporary African and diasporic literary representations of Africa
- Victorian Detective Novels - Dickens and Wilkie Collins
- Misogyny disguised as medicine- Recurrent theme of madness and consumption in Female Writing and Theory
- Grief and loss in the later poems of Thomas Hardy
- Interpreting Oscar Wilde
- Decadence and Symbolism: Tainted London
- Gender perspectives on African American slave narratives Jean Rhys's *Good Morning Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark*

Research-led modules

At Part 3, students choose from up to 40 research-led modules (four modules for single-honours students; two for joint-honours students).

Part 3 modules are taught intensively in small seminar groups. They reflect the research specialisms of our staff, so you will be taught by world-class experts in your chosen field. We use a variety of different assessment methods: coursework essays, projects, learning journals and oral presentations, depending on the learning outcomes for each module.

Some of the Part 3 modules available in recent years have included:

Modern American poetry

Children's literature

Contemporary American fiction

Decadence and degeneration: The literature of the fin de siècle

Bibliotherapy: Writing and Health

Family romances: Genealogy, identity and imposture in the nineteenth-century novel

Fiction and ethnicity in post-war Britain and America

The bloody stage: revenge and death in Renaissance drama

American graphic novels

James Joyce

Margaret Atwood

Class matters

Publishing Cultures: Writers, Publics, Archives

Shakespeare on film

Environment, Ecology and Literature

The writer's workshop: studying manuscripts

Alfred Hitchcock

Black British fiction

Utopia and dystopia in English and American literature

Dickens

Medieval otherworlds

Holocaust testimony: memory, trauma and representation

Global Literatures: Translation as Theme and Theory

Modern and contemporary British poetry

Oscar Wilde and the World of Art

Psychoanalysis and text
Samuel Beckett

Literature and Mental Health

From romance to fantasy

Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury

Novels and paintings: 1850-1930

Writing Women: nineteenth-century poetry

Nigerian prose literature: from Achebe to Adichie

CREATIVE WRITING

There are two ways to explore creative writing at Reading: you can enrol directly onto one of our creative writing joint degree programmes, such as:

- **BA English Literature and Creative Writing,**
- **BA Creative Writing and Film,**
- **BA Creative Writing and Theatre,**
- **BA Creative Writing and Film and Theatre, and**
- **BA Art and Creative Writing**

You can also take a Creative Writing module as part of your English Literature degree programme. Whichever route you choose, you will learn from prize-winning authors who will read and give you bespoke advice on your work.

Creative writing modules

On your creative writing modules, you will be introduced to all the major forms, including fiction, drama, poetry and creative-non-fiction.

At Part 1, you may choose to study **Introduction to creative writing** and **Shelf Life**.

Current Part 2 options in creative writing include **Creative Non-Fiction and Long-Form Journalism, Poetry, and The Short Story**.

At Part 3 you can take our two creative writing masterclass modules in **Prose** and **Poetry**. These are advanced modules where you will read and discuss very recently published texts, identify and write about the themes that are currently popular and fresh, and be encouraged to pursue publication yourself as part of the module assessment. You'll also have the opportunity to write a **creative writing dissertation** - a long creative piece in a genre of your choice and a reflective essay.

How you'll learn

We are committed to teaching through the workshop model. These small group sessions are the heart of Reading's writing community: guided by one of our lecturers, you and your fellow students will gain confidence as you share your writing and help each other improve.

You will also have the opportunity to publish your work - and gain experience in editing and publishing - by participating in our annual Creative Writing Anthology, *The Canvas*, which is available here:

<https://thecanvasartsmagazine.com/>

Disclaimer:

This information was issued in March 2022 and describes in outline the courses and services offered by the University starting in 2022. The University makes every effort to ensure that the information provided is accurate and up-to-date at the time of going to press. However, it may be necessary for the University to make some changes to the information presented in this publication.

Sample modules are provided as a taster of some of the modules that may be available at the University. The sample modules listed may be compulsory (core) or optional modules. Information is correct at the time of going to press but the University cannot guarantee that a module appearing in this will definitely run or that all optional modules will be available to all students who wish to take them.

The University takes all reasonable steps to provide the services (including the courses) described in this information, it does not however, guarantee the provision of such services.

To make an informed and up-to-date decision, we recommend that you check <http://www.reading.ac.uk/Ready-to-Study.aspx> for up-to-date information.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information about studying English Literature at the University of Reading, visit our website: www.reading.ac.uk/english-literature, and follow the links to the 'Undergraduate' pages.

If you have any questions about our courses, or about applying to study with us, you can email us at: english-literature@reading.ac.uk